

We always want proof. And for good reason. We get lied to all the time. Who hasn't bought a product and found that it does not live up to the picture in the advertisement?

For really big claims, like resurrection from the dead, we want really big proof. In last week's gospel reading we read about the disciple Thomas requiring proof before he will believe. And though he often gets mocked as a doubter, he speaks for all of us.

In this week's gospel reading we have more of the same. It is likely that this week's gospel and the first half of last week's gospel are two independent accounts of the same event. It is the evening of the resurrection. Rumors of Jesus' resurrection are flying around among the handful of Jesus' followers that are left. What is to be believed?! The truth of resurrection is an absurdity. Yet what else could there be? There's no reason for the tomb to be robbed. Jesus wasn't buried with anything of value and he was a condemned criminal after all. No one wanted him. So why the empty tomb?

Just like we read from a different source last week we have Jesus presenting himself within the locked room and saying, "Peace to you." The text tells us that they were startled and terrified. They thought they were seeing a ghost. Even living flesh and blood proof wasn't enough to ease their doubts. So Jesus shows them more clearly his body, and ultimately he eats some fish - something no illusion could do.

Great for the disciples! But what about us? We're asked to believe the same claim without the same proof. It doesn't seem fair. And sooner or later we ask the question, "Why?"

Answering why is a dangerous question because it requires a lot of speculation with very little proof; but I do have some ideas. Those ideas we'll shaped by other things.

God knows we want more. We want proof. Simply believing something in our minds doesn't cut it. You might as well tell an abused slave that he should imagine a brighter future and be happy. But if reality is full of real pain, no imagined fairy tale will change things. There has to be something real.

Perhaps God doesn't give us proof, but God does give us something real. We're doing something rare today - having both

communion and a baptism. We usually don't do both in the same service because it takes a long time and people start pulling out their phones and checking the time. But they are the answer to something real.

Those who just went through the communion education class with Mrs. Shuler can answer this question. What makes a sacrament a sacrament? Baptism and communion are things we do because Jesus told us to. Both make use of common things, and are used to convey God's promises.

In baptism we use water - a very common thing. We drink water. We bathe in it. We wash our clothes in it. We swim in it, boat in it, and rain waters all of the earth. Water is necessary for life. Most of the weight of our bodies is nothing but water.

Bread is common. We use it for sandwiches, toast it, eat it plain, and maybe even wipe our plates with it. Here in the Finger Lakes we know all about wine - again a very common thing.

Water, bread, wine - ordinary every day stuff. These are the elements God tells us to use for the sacraments. These are

the elements, the objects God wants us to use to convey his grace.

It is the ordinariness that is important. We don't use holy water. We use tap water. We don't use special unique homemade blessed bread. Most of the time the bread comes from a grocery store. The wine comes from the local liquor store. Yet through these things God invites us to experience him: to see, to touch, to smell, to taste, and even to hear. All of our senses are engaged.

Perhaps they aren't proof, but they are real; for faith is not just a thought. It is to be real. God knows we need real things.

Why doesn't God give us more proof... some miracles to inspire our faith? Because God likes to work with the ordinary. Crashes and bangs and signs and spectacular miracles aren't God's way. And God's way - working with the ordinary - is very important.

The Gospel of John actually explains all this. I won't get into all the details here, but basically it is this: by God working primarily with the ordinary God gives us dignity. God

did not create us to be little puppies whose faith is based on miracles so that we look to him with silly puppy love and shallow appreciation. God seeks to mature us into strong and capable partners. You see, God thinks you're worth investing in. God thinks you've got what it takes to do real and important work.

In the same way that the sacraments are to be God's grace in a way you can touch and see and taste and smell, so are we ourselves to be God's grace in the world. In many places the Bible says that those who gather in faith are the body of Christ in the world - a sacrament of sorts.

Last month I attended the Bishop's Convocation in Syracuse. The focus was connecting with people who have no religious affiliation whatsoever. They are the vast majority of people around us - something like 4 out of 5 New Yorkers have no faith affiliation whatsoever. As a part of the convocation some guests who have no religious affiliation were invited to talk and we could ask questions.

One of my colleagues, who incidentally annoys me to no end, got up and asked a question of the one guest who has no faith background, but has incorporated some Buddhist practices into

her daily life. His question was typical of his annoying self, but I'm glad he asked it because it proves a point. He said, "What if I told you that God loves you?" She replied, "Prove it." He said more forcefully, "But God just does love you." And she replied just as forcefully, "Prove it." Before the whole thing spiraled into a pointless argument the bishop called a stop to it, but I think she made a good point.

If we as Christians believe that God is loving then we need to embody it. If the sacraments of baptism and communion convey God's grace in the ordinary, then we need to be sacraments - conveying God's grace and love in the ordinary too. We can't just say God loves you. We have to embody it. And we don't just embody it in spectacular acts that win us praise or are newsmakers or anything like that. It is love embodied in the ordinary - love that is just as tangible as water, bread and wine.

All of us can love - can work for the benefit of others. You don't need any standardized test score or IQ or resume to be good at it. You just can. That is God's way of giving you value and dignity - making you truly worth something.

Be the living proof other people need of the power of God's love - love so powerful not even death can stop it. Amen