

I sure got a big bang out of the news this week. Did you see this picture? Seriously, I find this a most exciting photo. Scientists say this is a picture of the universe, showing bits of matter connecting to the galaxy by waves. These waves that are still visible could have originated from a single explosion of matter, a big bang, at the creation of the universe. These scientists practically affirm that matter was created by someone who existed before a single moment in time. These waves could well be the footprints of God.

The press has called this a marriage of science and religion; if God is real, science will affirm God's existence.

Will this photograph send unbelievers running to churches for mercy? I doubt it. The results are too easy to disbelieve, but for those who already have faith, this photo can be wonderfully exciting.

Faith and science can always meet, but where they part is that faith is a gift. I don't think we'll ever devise a mathematical equation to convince people there is a God, or convince them to live a moral life. Science hands us data and faith gives us a means for interpreting it. If you don't have that means, if you don't have faith, all the data in the world won't convince.

Today's Scriptures give us two examples. Thomas wanted data to believe the resurrection; he wanted to touch Jesus. So Jesus gave him data aplenty: he appeared before Thomas' eyes; his voice rang in Thomas' ears; his flesh yielded to Thomas' touch. And Jesus says blessed are those who have no data, blessed are those who have not seen but believe. The proof unleashed Thomas' faith, but Jesus says you can believe without it.

The other story is from Acts of the Apostles. Right after Pentecost when the apostles began to preach, they baptized people in huge numbers. Some then brought the sick forward; they thought just Peter's shadow would cure them. Later on they try to get Paul's handkerchief, and you remember that in the Gospel one woman was healed by touching the hem of Jesus' garment.

Luke tells us of Peter's shadow after he says the number of believers was increasing. You see, I don't think the believers increased because of the healings; I think the healings increased because of the believers. In the data of health people saw Christ because they already believed he is the source of every cure. Just as in the data of the universe people will see God because they already believe he is source of all creation.

One reason the church gets wary of weeping statues and alleged apparitions of Mary is that many people approach them backwards. They say, "My faith is weak; I need this proof to build my faith." It's better to say, "My faith is strong; I don't need to see God in the unusual and the bizarre, because with faith I see God in the ordinary every day." That's why Jesus criticized Thomas. Thomas wanted a mysterious apparition of the body of Christ, but he could see the body of Christ all around him if he would only open his eyes of faith.