
St. Thomas Sunday 2020

Acts 5:12-20 & John 20:19-31

On Good Friday we remembered the death of our Lord Who is the Source of life. Then throughout Bright Week we lived in the joy that Jesus rose from the dead, and a new life with Christ emerged beyond all comprehension! At first, even the Apostles were skeptical when the Myrrh-bearing women informed them.

But soon after Jesus was resurrected, He appeared to His apostles and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained". (John 20:23) What a great thing happened that day! The Apostles were given the authority and power to forgive sins. This authority they could pass on to the Apostles from generation to generation. This happened while one of the Apostles, Thomas, was missing.

It wasn't until eight days after Jesus appeared to His disciples, Thomas finally shows up and meets the risen Lord. But where was Thomas when Jesus first appeared to the others and gave them that authority? Maybe he was one of the few among them who were not afraid and was out with the very courageous women disciples. They went from the Empty Tomb to Upper Room witnessing to the Resurrection. Perhaps God planned it that way. Unfortunately, we don't know.

The Bible tells us that right from early morning on the day of the resurrection the good news of the resurrection was carried throughout creation. The angels from heaven (Mark 16:6) the holy myrrh bearers on earth (Luke 24:9) and even the guards at the Sanhedrin (Matthew 28:11) had told of the miracle. But the apostles were still in a state of fear and doubt, hiding behind locked doors "for the fear of the Jews" (John 20:19). It's not surprising that the apostles doubted, for they had witnessed the greatest miracle in the history of creation: humans killed God, and then they were confronted with the story that He rose from the dead and saved the dying human race from hell. Obviously, the disciples of Christ had forgotten all His prophecies about the future. So, at first they did not believe the miraculous story of the holy myrrh bearers (Mark 16:11, Luke 24:11), and even while talking to the Risen Lord face to face, they hesitated to trust their own hearts (Luke 24:25) which were burning and trembling in the presence of God (Luke 24:32). This marvelous unbelief (Luke 24:41), this human weakness, was incapable of grasping the magnitude of the miracle that took place. This is shown by the famous words of the Apostle Thomas: "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it." (John 20:25)

Before we blame Thomas for his doubt, was he any different than the other? How many disciples in the New Testament did not doubt the Lord's resurrection? That is why Jesus appeared to several in the first part of today's Gospel and felt it necessary, it seems, to show them the wounds in his hands and side. Just like he does for Thomas. Many, if not most, of them were filled with confusion and doubt, not just Thomas.

But Thomas was different in at least two ways. First, he was honest and open about his doubt. And second: he wanted proof not only by sight, but by touch. Not just to see, but Dare to touch, because it is so intimate.

Jesus honored Thomas' doubt and granted his request. He allowed Thomas to touch his wounds and instead of chastising him, the Lord blessed him. The comment, "blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe" is not a criticism of Thomas, but a moment of truth. In this singular moment Thomas said what Jesus wanted everyone to hear, the truth. His confession, "You are my Lord and my God," rings throughout the centuries! Jesus is speaking not only to Thomas, but to the whole gathered congregation who also did not believe before they had seen.

C.S. Lewis wrote, "You never know how much you really believe anything until its truth or falsehood becomes a matter of life and death. It is easy to say you believe a rope to be strong as long as you are merely using it to cord a box. But suppose you had to hang by that rope over a precipice. Wouldn't you then first discover how much you really trusted it?"

The doubts of the Apostles and especially that of Thomas is greatly beneficial, if not vital, for all of Christianity. Sound discretion and good judgement are vital for spiritual matters, and the resurrection of our Lord is no exception.

For if we are to grow, we must explore all our questions about God, including those things we believe and why we believe them. It is why the Apostles had to be 100% certain that Jesus rose from the dead to proclaim the full truth. For, when there is no doubt many will know that "Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing, may have life in His name". So, we may be blessed, by having a faith which comes from the heart, and e soul, not purely from our human senses.

Amen!