

Thomas Sunday – Good Unbelief

"My Lord and my God!"

It didn't take long for Thomas to utter these heartfelt words of faith when he touched the Saviour's wounds. It is even possible that he didn't touch them before he cried out, as he had declared he must a week earlier. For Thomas had a deep and firm faith. When Lazarus was sick, and our Saviour said they should return to Judea, Thomas was the one who said, "Let us also go that we may die with him" (It was a dangerous region where earlier the Lord had been stoned). Thomas's faith was so strong that he was willing to give his life for his Saviour.

So why didn't Thomas believe when the other Apostles told him they had seen the Lord? Let us consider some of the profound thoughts that we hear in Vespers and Matins for this Sunday:

"By dispensation, Thomas was not to be found among them." It was, then, from God that Thomas had been absent when the Apostles met right after the Resurrection. When the others told him that they had seen the Lord, was he perhaps a little hurt that he had missed out?

"He doubted what was told him, thus by unbelief confirming his belief." He believed so strongly that he wanted to be absolutely sure it was the Lord rather than endure a huge disappointment. With regard to faith, there is good doubt and there is bad doubt. Some people refuse to believe because they are stubborn, and they know that believing will require them to change things in their lives. On the other hand, we shouldn't believe things lightly. After all, the antichrist will try to deceive people, so we must check what we are told against the Scriptures and the teachings of the Church. When St. Paul preached Christianity, he explained things in detail to his listeners as a fulfillment of the Scriptures. Our Saviour Himself did the same thing when, after His Resurrection, He explained the fulfillment of the Scriptures in Himself to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus. So Thomas's doubt was reasonable, and he was a careful person whom God chose to be the one who had been absent for other reasons as well.

"Grace was given to Thomas that he might touch...." "Thomas touched fire and was not burned." As the God-man was like fire contained in the Virgin's womb, and she was not burned because of her purity and because of grace, so only through grace could a human being touch the wounds of the Godhead. Our Saviour would not let Mary Magdalene touch Him. After all, His wounds are the very marks of His unimaginable sacrifice for us, and from His side flowed blood and water—the very Blood of which we partake in the Holy Mysteries. But Thomas was found worthy to touch and not be burned.

Thomas changed the "obstinacy of his soul into fervent faith." "...when he touched the side of Christ, he spake with divine authority." At this moment Thomas's weak stubbornness vanished, and he became a theologian. God revealed to his heart the very truth. This is reminiscent of the time when, on first seeing Nathaniel, our Saviour told him that He had seen him under the fig tree, and Nathaniel responded by crying out, "Thou art the Son of God." This was a divine illumination given to the guileless one, for how could Nathaniel have known anything about the Lord, since he had just seen Him for the first time? Later, our Saviour asked St. Peter, "Who do you say that I am?" and Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Again, this was divine revelation to Peter, as our Saviour Himself said. *"...he perceived Thy twofold nature." "Thomas felt in the Saviour's side the twofold power of the two natures united and unmingled in Him"* In some mystical way it was revealed to Thomas that our Saviour was simultaneously both God and man. And Thomas proclaimed this to the other Apostles and to the world.

The Lord showed them His wounds, "thereby dispelling the despondency that came from their faintheartedness." Thomas was not the only one who had doubts and was confused. The Apostles had seen the One they loved put to death, and although they rejoiced in the empty tomb, our Saviour's body was different and hard to recognize, and all of them were reassured by seeing the wounds that attested to His suffering and to the fact that this Person was really the Lord and not an apparition.

"O good unbelief of Thomas, which hath led the hearts of the faithful to knowledge." Thomas alone was bold, and "by his unbelieving belief hath brought us benefactions," and "by his believing unbelief doth dispel gloomy ignorance from all the ends of the earth." "Because thou hast disbelieved, all have learned of My Passion and Resurrection." Through Thomas's doubt and

subsequent declaration, the doubts of all of us have been assuaged. His unbelief was good, for as a result, it was made known to the whole world that our Saviour is truly God, Who sacrificed Himself for us and rose from the dead.

A Sermon for Thomas Sunday by Archbishop Andrei

But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said unto them, "Except I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe" (St. John 20:24-5).

What does this mean, his "I will not believe"? Is it possible he could not believe the other eleven Apostles, his brothers? Is it possible they could lie to him? The whole evangelical life of Christ, all His miracles, Golgotha, the death on the Cross, they had experienced together. And now this joy, which they all had experienced they wanted to share with him. No, it was not a lie.

But He, Whom they had seen, was He really the same Christ? Was this not a vision or some other Christ? Was it not a mistake? Thomas was afraid to lose what he had. And what did he have? Just this: during the years of fellowship with Christ, he had absorbed His teaching, the entire makeup of His life; and by now he was incapable of living any other way. It was painful for him not to have personal fellowship anymore with Christ; but by this time he understood that Christ came to earth in order to teach us the main commandment of God: love for God and neighbor, to perform it Himself, and to give us the strength to fulfill it.

In Paradise the first man fulfilled the commandment of God. The strength to fulfill this commandment of God he drew from eating the fruits of the Tree of Life. But then came the Fall. Paradise was lost, the Tree of Life was lost, and together with it, the strength for a godly life. And Christ came in order to give us the New Testament Tree of Life—His Body and Blood. "This do in remembrance of Me," He said at the Last Supper (St. Luke 22:19).

Thomas knew the commandments of Christ, and he knew where to draw the strength to fulfill them. He lived this. Although he lived without the human presence of Christ, he lived in Christ. He was afraid to make a mistake. What if another Christ had appeared to the disciples, and not the One in Whom he lived and continued to live? This is what "I will not believe" meant. And on the eighth day after His Resurrection, the Lord again appeared to His disciples, while Thomas was also in the house, and allowed him to touch His wounds. And here resounded Thomas's triumphant cry, which even now stirs our hearts: "My Lord and my God!" (St. John. 20:28).

And here are the words of Christ, which relate to you and me, opening a new era of faith which will remain until the end of the world: "Because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed. *Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.* . . . But these are written," adds the Apostle John the Divine, "that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name" (St. John. 20:29, 31).

On Thomas Sunday from *Thoughts for
Every Day of the Year*
By Saint Theophan the Recluse

"My Lord and my God!" cried the holy Apostle Thomas. Do you sense the force with which he grasped hold of the Lord and how strongly he held on to Him? A drowning man doesn't hold more tightly than this to the board that he hopes will save him from drowning. And let us add that anyone who doesn't possess the Lord in this way and doesn't have a relationship to the Lord as strong as this, still doesn't believe in the Lord as he ought. We say, "Lord and Saviour," meaning that He is the Saviour of all; but Saint Thomas says, "My Lord and Saviour." A person who says, "My Saviour," is aware that his salvation comes from the Lord. But the awareness of one's salvation is closely connected with the awareness of the destruction, from which the Saviour has rescued the one being saved. For a person who by nature loves life and who knows that he cannot save himself, the awareness that he is perishing and on the brink of destruction forces him to seek a Saviour. When

he finds Him and becomes aware of the power of salvation, which comes forth from Him, he takes a firm grasp on Him and doesn't want to be separated from Him, even if he were to be deprived of life itself. Events of this sort in a Christian's spiritual life are not expressed with the mind alone, but are experienced in action. Then, both his faith and his union with Christ become as strong as life or death. Only such a one sincerely cries out, "Who can separate me from Him?" [This is how St. Thomas felt when he exclaimed, "My Lord and my God!"]