

## The Sunday of St Thomas. “My Lord and My God.” (John 20:28)

Christ is Risen! المسيح قام! Χριστός ἀνέστη!

Recently, whilst listening to the radio, I heard a most insightful quotation from a contemporary Christian author, “The Gospels do not explain the Resurrection; the Resurrection explains the Gospels.”

Today, we celebrate the Sunday of St Thomas. It is especially appropriate that on the first Sunday after Pascha we should recall that profession of faith which echoes down the centuries and which silences any members of the cults who preach against the divinity of Jesus Christ, the Eternal Word of God.

Thomas, called Didymus, the Twin, has what is perhaps an unfair reputation as a doubter. I would rather think of him as *careful* or *cautious*. He wanted *reasonable* proof – after all, the claims that were being made about the crucified Jesus were to change history and remake the world as he knew it. There is a difference between informed faith and gullibility. In the seemingly distrustful statement of Thomas, “until then I will not believe” there is good advice for those who chase after every “supernatural” phenomenon, “miracle,” “sign” and “wonder” - and which are worked by every phony seer, prophet or prophetess.

His was a sensible position, and that it was so is indicated by the fact that Jesus does not scold him or reprimand him or demand that he repents of doubt. Jesus does not ask Thomas to accept in blind or uncritical faith. Rather, the Lord simply shows Thomas the evidence he required, the wounds in his hand and feet and in his side; and at once Thomas responds, “My Lord and my God.”

Notice the sequence in the Upper Room accounts – the Mystery is spoken about, witnesses give testimony, irrefutable evidence is provided, there is acceptance, and there follows a faith-filled proclamation. This is the process by which, in such places as Catholic Lourdes and Fatima, or Orthodox Tinos, certain sceptical scientists and many cynical individuals have come to faith. Whether secularists like it or not, believe it or not, there are places where heaven and earth meet, and where God can be the only explanation.

And what was the sign that Thomas was not the victim of group hysteria or wish fulfilment? It was that his new-found faith in the Risen Lord drove Thomas to the missionary extremes he embraced. He was the only apostle to leave the borders of the Roman Empire, travelling as far as India where he planted the Cross of Christ and established church communities that survive to this day. As St John Chrysostom, amazed at the travels of Thomas, writes, “Thomas, being once weaker in faith than the other apostles toiled through the grace of God more bravely, more zealously and more tirelessly than them all, so that he went preaching over nearly all the earth, not fearing to proclaim the Word of God to savage nations.” And he would offer his life in martyrdom in India.

Thomas knew that Jesus had overcome death; and he wanted to share this conviction with the entire world. Thomas had found a personal and life-transforming Resurrection faith – and it is the same faith that we proclaim in this second millennium. It is the faith “once delivered to the saints” and which we as Catholic and Orthodox Christians have received intact and unaltered. It is the same faith that changing our earthly lives empowers many to exchange this present, transient life for everlasting life, for the crown of martyrdom.

Countless martyrs throughout the centuries have surrendered their lives rather than deny the Risen Lord; rather than deny their Lord and God. The Glorious New Martyrs in the Middle East died with the Name of Jesus on their lips; and as they died they gave their lives into the hands of a Risen, Living and Death-Conquering Lord.

The All-Holy Tomb in Jerusalem has been empty since the early hours of the first Pascha. Others have claimed to be messiahs, seers and prophets, and they are now but bare bones in their graves – graves that have consumed them. The Place of the Dead could not hold

prisoner the Lord of Life. We are blessed beyond words to be the People of the Cross, the Throne of Glory.

In the Cenacle, the Upper Room, the Risen Lord, spoke to Thomas and renewed the apostle's faith. I wonder how often we recall that in the exchange between Thomas and Jesus, we were mentioned. As Jesus, in his divine foreknowledge, looked down the centuries he could see every single person who would believe in him – and that includes us almost two thousand years later. “Jesus said to Thomas, ‘Have you believed because you have seen me? How happy are they who have not seen and yet believe.’” (Jn 20:29-30)

Others may follow deluded prophets, long dead and gone; however, we know that wherever we are gathered, if but two or three, there is with us a Living Saviour, our Lord and God.

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### **The “Two Easters”?**

Today, millions of Christians, Orthodox and Catholic, will celebrate Easter, the Glorious Pascha of the Lord. It is incorrect to call this “the Orthodox Easter” as millions of Catholics throughout the world will observe Easter together with the Orthodox. In several countries this includes the local Melkite Community. In Greece it includes all Catholics, even the Faithful of the Latin Roman Church. In Ukraine and much of Eastern Europe, millions of Catholics will observe this “second Easter.”

The divided celebration has little to do with the 13 days difference between the Julian and Gregorian calendars; and it certainly has nothing to do with leap years. The divergent dates are caused by a different interpretation of a canon attributed to the Council of Nicaea (I). Unfortunately, space does not permit a full explanation – perhaps, another time.

The important thing is that we remember today is Easter Sunday for many Christians, Orthodox and Catholic, and that we greet them with great joy and fraternal affection.

St Paul reminds the Ephesians that there is “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Eph 4:5)– it is time to work towards the one Easter.

**Archdeacon Anthony Lawrence**