

# SOBORNOST

**St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church**

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*American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese*

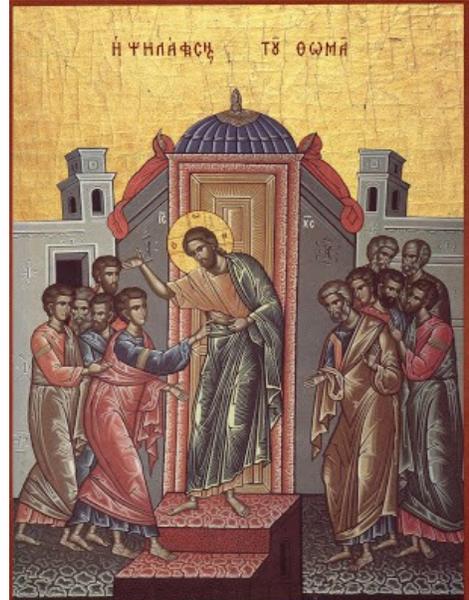
*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE  
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

## SERVICES

**Saturday: Great Vespers 5:00 PM**

**Sunday: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM**

**Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM**



**May 9, 2021 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Pascha | Sunday of St. Thomas  
Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!**

### **Wrestling With God** By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos

The Apostle Thomas, in order to believe in the Resurrection of Christ, asked to see, because he had not yet received the Holy Spirit and had not acquired an inner sense, which would assure him of the Deity of Christ. He wanted to see and feel in order to gain tangible knowledge of God. But the knowledge of God is not an experience of the senses, but of inner information, inner communion with Christ, which is channeled into the body as well. However, the sacred hymn of this Sunday calls the unbelief of Thomas "good", on the one hand because it was well-intentioned, and on the other hand because it became a cause to prove the Resurrection of Christ.

#### Wrestling With God

Reading today's passage regarding the case of the Apostle Thomas, we see man wrestling with God. The Apostle asks to see God. The Lord appears and he exclaims: "My Lord and my God!" He was indeed defeated because none of the saints were able to match up against God. So we can highlight the fact that if there is one common feature throughout time and especially of our time it is the wrestling with God.

All people, each in a different way, wrestle with God. They are basically divided into two categories: To the first belong those who wrestle against God. They question His existence and do everything to prove His non-existence. The terrible thing in this case is that they are fighting someone they never knew, because if they had known Him they would have been captured by His love and His meekness. Usually we passionate people, ignorant of the holy will of God, attribute to Him all our reflections and failures, resulting in our turning against Him. It is tragic to think that man considers a blessing what is a "curse" and considers a "curse" what is a real blessing. That is, the life of sin, life in the present fallen world, which is a "curse", the result of turning away from God, we consider it blessed, the only one worth talking about and to which we dedicate all our capacity, while sorrow, pain, which work on behalf of our salvation, which are a blessing from God, we consider a curse.

To the second category belong the saints who thirst and desire the meeting with God. When they achieve it, a greater, unbearable thirst begins. They fight because they want to give themselves completely to God, to gain a more perfect knowledge of God. Thus all people have God as their center and we wrestle with Him. Others wrestle against Him (and basically against themselves) and others in order to obtain Him, to make Him the property of their heart, a "lovely Bridegroom".

### Three Cases of Atheism

We see great atheism around us and inside us. When we say atheism we do not mean the non-existence of God, since God exists and acts everywhere, but the inability of man to have knowledge of God.

Saint Gregory Palamas mentions three cases of atheism. First, atheists are those who do not believe in the existence of God, "the multifaceted delusion of the Greeks", that is, the delusion of the pagans, some of whom did not believe in God and satisfied their desires of pleasure and others worshiped the elements of nature as gods. Second, atheists are heretics, who deny the divinity of Christ and the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Athanasius the Great says "an atheist is the one who divides the Son from the Father and lowers into a creature the Holy Spirit." Thus atheism is "the multifaceted and multiform deception of heretics." Third, atheists are the Orthodox who do not accept the doctrines of the Church, which are terms of salvation, and they question the value of the words of the Holy Fathers. Because true piety is "not questioning the God-bearing Fathers." And of course when one reaches the point of not acknowledging the doctrines, which are the expression of salvation, or not acknowledging the words of the Holy Fathers, it shows that one has no Grace, no personal knowledge of God. Whoever therefore does not have an inner sense of divine Grace, whoever does not know how divine Grace acts within

him and does not recognize the saints, is no different from those who deny the existence of God.

### The Path to the Knowledge of God

All people seek an encounter with God. And even these atheists reveal this search. Because no one is fighting something they think does not exist. But there is an error in the path towards meeting God. Many seek Him within the bounds of rational processing, others within the bounds of the bodily senses (like Thomas), and most are completely unaware of what God is.

The Holy Fathers have recorded the conditions for the true knowledge of God. First, they emphasize that in God there is a distinction between essence and energy. The essence of God is incomprehensible, while His energy is comprehensible. This means that God is unknown in His essence, but known in His energies. This is very important for Orthodox Theology and is a matter of life and death.

Then the meeting with God is a crisis for man. It constitutes either his eternal life or his eternal condemnation. Just as our presence in court is a critical moment, which implies acquittal or imprisonment, so is man's encounter with God. For the purified, God becomes Light; while for the impure He becomes fire that burns him. This is what happens in Holy Communion. When man communes unworthily, the divine Communion becomes "unto judgment and condemnation", while when he communes after preparation, it becomes Light.

This has eternal implications. In the next life all people (righteous and sinners) will receive the rays of God's love, but to the righteous they will become Light that will illumine them, while to the unrepentant sinners, who will not have spiritual vision, they will become fire that will burn them. So the path towards the knowledge of God is the path of purification, of humility. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God," said the Lord. Indeed, whoever was not afraid to become a "baby" and a "child" is going to enter the Kingdom of God, that is, he is going to have communion with God, which is the necessary element of the knowledge of God and salvation. Because the salvation of man is the knowledge of Christ.

The "good unbelief" of Thomas is proof to get out of the prison of atheism, which oppresses *our* whole existence. "Our" concerns everyone, since we do not have an inner personal experience of deification. Because, as we have mentioned, the simple rational knowledge of God, studies done about God, without the inner life, is a kind of atheism. Not only the case of Thomas, but all the cases of the saints, who experienced God, are proofs of His existence. With his transformed life he confessed "My Lord and my God". There is a lot of evidence around us, as long as we have eyes and ears to see and hear. (*translated by John Sanidopoulos*)

### **Today's Epistle Lesson – The Acts of the Apostles 5:12-20**

In those days, many signs and wonders were done among the people through the hands of the apostles. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch. Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly. And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid *them* on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them. Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

Then the high priest rose up, and all those who *were* with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation, and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison. But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, "Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life."

### **Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint John 20:19-31**

On the same day at evening, being the first *day* of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace *be* with you." When He had said this, He showed them *His* hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on *them*, and said to them, "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."

Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace be unto you!" Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand *here*, and put *it* into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed *are* those who have not seen and *yet* have believed."

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

## A Word From the Holy Fathers

Prayer is food for the soul. Do not starve the soul, it is better to let the body go hungry. Do not judge anyone, forgive everyone. Consider yourself worse than everyone in the world and you will be saved. As much as possible, be more quiet.

If you notice a fault in a close one that you would like to correct, if it destroys your peace of mind and annoys you, then you also are sinning and, consequently, you will not correct a fault by a fault—it is corrected by meekness.

And it's good for us when they jostle us. The tree that the wind sways more is strengthened more at the roots, but the one that lives in the calm falls immediately.

As things come together, that's how we should live, because the circumstances that surround us are not simply accidental, as many of our contemporary, new-fangled know-it-alls think. Everything happens to us by God's Providence, which ever looks after the salvation of our souls.

We ourselves aggravate our sorrows when we begin to complain.

Have what is needful and necessary, but don't collect anything unnecessary. But if you don't have anything and are upset about it, then what is the point? — It's better to follow the middle course.

Contrariness acts in a person more strongly than anything. Sometimes a person will even do something difficult—by his own desire. But just tell him to do something easy, and he immediately gets upset. But we have to do as we are told.

Just as we must not seek out honor, so neither must we refuse it, as we live in society for the good of others. Honor imposed [by others] is also from God.

The very sin that each person thinks is so bad in his neighbor is the one that accuses himself, the accuser.

– St. Joseph of Optina

### **Commemorated Today: Prophet Isaiah**

The Holy Prophet Isaiah lived 700 years before the birth of Christ, and was of royal lineage. Isaiah's father Amos raised his son in the fear of God and in the law of the Lord. Having attained the age of maturity, the Prophet Isaiah entered into marriage with a pious prophetess (Is 8:3) and had a son Jashub (Is 8:18).

Saint Isaiah was called to prophetic service during the reign of Oziah [Uzziah], king of Judea, and he prophesied for 60 years during the reign of kings Joatham, Achaz [Ahaz], Hezekiah and Manasseh. The start of his service was marked by the following vision: he beheld the Lord God, sitting in a majestic heavenly temple upon a high throne. Six-winged Seraphim encircled Him. With two wings they

covered their faces, and with two wings they covered their feet, and with two wings they flew about crying out one to another, “Holy, Holy, Holy Lord Sabaoth, heaven and earth are filled with His glory!” The pillars of the heavenly temple shook from their shouts, and in the temple arose the smoke of incense.

The prophet cried out in terror, “Oh, an accursed man am I, granted to behold the Lord Sabaoth, and having impure lips and living amidst an impure people!” Then was sent him one of the Seraphim, having in hand a red-hot coal, which he took with tongs from the altar of the Lord. He touched it to the mouth of the Prophet Isaiah and said, “Lo, this has touched thy lips, and will take away with thine iniquities, and will cleanse thy sins.” After this Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord, directed towards him, “Whom shall I send, and who will go to this people?” Isaiah answered, “Here am I, send me” (Is 6:1 ff). And the Lord sent him to the Jews to exhort them to turn from the ways of impiety and idol worship, and to offer repentance.

To those that repent and turn to the true God, the Lord promised mercy and forgiveness, but punishment and the judgment of God are appointed for the unrepentant. Then Isaiah asked the Lord, how long would the falling away of the Jewish nation from God continue. The Lord answered, “Until the cities be deserted, by reason of there being no people, and the land shall be made desolate. Just as when a tree be felled and from the stump come forth new shoots, so also from the destruction of the nation a holy remnant will remain, from which will emerge a new tribe.”

Isaiah left behind him a book of prophecy in which he denounces the Jews for their unfaithfulness to the God of their Fathers. He predicted the captivity of the Jews and their return from captivity during the time of the emperor Cyrus, the destruction and renewal of Jerusalem and of the Temple. Together with this he predicts the historical fate also of the other nations bordering the Jews. But what is most important of all for us, the Prophet Isaiah with particular clarity and detail prophesies about the coming of the Messiah, Christ the Savior. The prophet names the Messiah as God and Man, teacher of all the nations, founder of the Kingdom of peace and love.

The prophet foretells the birth of the Messiah from a Virgin, and with particular clarity he describes the Suffering of the Messiah for the sins of the world. He foresees His Resurrection and the universal spreading of His Church. By his clear foretelling of Christ the Savior, the Prophet Isaiah deserves to be called an Old Testament Evangelist. To him belong the words, “He beareth our sins and is smitten for us.... He was wounded for our sins and tortured for our transgressions. The chastisement of our world was upon Him, and by His wounds we were healed....” (Is 53:4-5. Vide Isaiah: 7:14, 11:1, 9:6, 53:4, 60:13, etc.).

The holy Prophet Isaiah had also a gift of wonderworking. And so, when during the time of a siege of Jerusalem by enemies the besieged had become exhausted with thirst, he by his prayer drew out from beneath Mount Sion a spring of water, which was called Siloam, i.e. “sent from God.” It was to this spring afterwards that the Savior sent the man blind from birth to wash, and He restored his sight. By the prayer of the Prophet Isaiah, the Lord prolonged the life of Hezekiah for 15 years.

The Prophet Isaiah died a martyr’s death. By order of the Jewish king Manasseh he was sawn through by a wood-saw. The prophet was buried not far from the Pool of Siloam. The relics of the holy Prophet Isaiah were afterwards transferred by the emperor Theodosius the Younger to Constantinople and installed in the church of Saint Laurence at Blachernae. At the present time part of the head of the Prophet Isaiah is preserved at Athos in the Hilandar monastery.

For the times and the events which occurred during the life of the Prophet Isaiah, see the 4th Book of Kings [alt. 2 Kings] (Ch 16, 17, 19, 20, 23, etc.), and likewise 2 Chr:26-32. (*from oca.org*)

### **Also Commemorated Today: Holy Martyr Christopher**

The Holy Martyr Christopher lived during the third century and suffered about the year 250, during the reign of the emperor Decius (249-251). There are various accounts of his life and miracles, and he is widely venerated throughout the world. Saint Christopher is especially venerated in Italy, where people pray to him in times of contagious diseases.

There are various suggestions about his descent. Some historians believe that he was descended from the Canaanites, while others say from the “Cynoscephalai” [literally “dog-heads”] of Thessaly.

Saint Christopher was a man of great stature and unusual strength. According to tradition, Saint Christopher was very handsome, but wishing to avoid temptation for himself and others, he asked the Lord to give him an unattractive face, which was done. Before Baptism he was named Reprebus [Reprobate] because his disfigured appearance. Even before Baptism, Reprebus confessed his faith in Christ and denounced those who persecuted Christians. Consequently, a certain Bacchus gave him a beating, which he endured with humility.

Because of his renowned strength, 200 soldiers were assigned to bring him before the emperor Decius. Reprebus submitted without resistance. Several miracles occurred along the way; a dry stick blossomed in the saint’s hand, loaves of bread were multiplied through his prayers, and the travellers had no lack thereof. This is similar to the multiplication of loaves in the wilderness by the Savior. The soldiers surrounding Reprebus were astonished at these miracles. They came to believe in

Christ and they were baptized along with Reprebus by Saint Babylus of Antioch (September 4).

Christopher once made a vow to serve the greatest king in the world, so he first offered to serve the local king. Seeing that the king feared the devil, Christopher thought he would leave the king to serve Satan. Learning that the devil feared Christ, Christopher went in search of Him. Saint Babylas of Antioch told him that he could best serve Christ by doing well the task for which he was best suited. Therefore, he became a ferryman, carrying people across a river on his shoulders. One stormy night, Christopher carried a Child Who insisted on being taken across at that very moment. With every step Christopher took, the Child seemed to become heavier. Halfway across the stream, Christopher felt that his strength would give out, and that he and the Child would be drowned in the river. As they reached the other side, the Child told him that he had just carried all the sins of the world on his shoulders. Then He ordered Christopher to plant his walking stick in the ground. As he did so, the stick grew into a giant tree. Then he recognized Christ, the King Whom he had vowed to serve.

Saint Christopher was brought before the emperor, who tried to make him renounce Christ, not by force but by cunning. He summoned two profligate women, Callinika and Aquilina, and commanded them to persuade Christopher to deny Christ, and to offer sacrifice to idols. Instead, the women were converted to Christ by Saint Christopher. When they returned to the emperor, they declared themselves to be Christians. Therefore, they were subjected to fierce beatings, and so they received the crown of martyrdom.

Decius also sentenced to execution the soldiers who had been sent after Saint Christopher, but who now believed in Christ. The emperor ordered that the martyr be thrown into a red-hot metal box. Saint Christopher, however, did not experience any suffering and he remained unharmed. After many fierce torments they finally beheaded the martyr with a sword. This occurred in the year 250 in Lycia. By his miracles the holy Martyr Christopher converted as many as 50,000 pagans to Christ, as Saint Ambrose of Milan testifies. The relics of Saint Christopher were later transferred to Toledo (Spain), and still later to the abbey of Saint Denis in France.

In Greece, many churches place the icon of Saint Christopher at the entrance so that people can see it as they enter and leave the building. There is a rhyming couplet in Greek which says, "When you see Christopher, you can walk in safety." This reflects the belief that whoever gazes upon the icon of Saint Christopher will not meet with sudden or accidental death that day.

The name Christopher means “Christ-bearer.” This can refer to the saint carrying the Savior across the river, and it may also refer to Saint Christopher bearing Christ within himself (Galatians 2:20). (*from oca.org*)

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