

SOBORNOST

St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

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American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE

SERVICES

Saturday: Vespers 5 PM

Sunday: Matins 8:45 AM

Sunday School 9:30 AM

Divine Liturgy 10 AM

May 1, 2022 – St. Thomas Sunday | ~Christ is Risen!~

St. Isaac describes doubt as being caused by demons and therefore no amount of knowledge and swiftness of mind is enough to withstand these enemies of God and man who wish to drag each one of us into Hell, little by little.

Today we are instructed about doubt through Thomas' example in the Gospel passage that was just read. Thomas is one of the twelve Apostles who had heard, was taught, struggled, and endured all things with the other Apostles. With the other Apostles, he also had the power to heal sicknesses and cast out devils (Mk. 3:15). When Jesus left for Judea after being informed that his friend Lazarus was dead, it was Thomas who said to the other disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (John 11:16ff) for the people of Judea had previously attempted to stone Christ.

When Christ says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," it is in response to Thomas' question, "Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" (John 14:5). In this intimate environment of Christ's Apostles is where Thomas lived and although they all had seen the dead raised, the leper's cleansed, and the blind given sight, still he doubted the words of his friends when they told him that Christ had risen from the dead.



The Gospel tells us that Thomas was not with the other disciples on the day when Christ rose from the dead and appeared to them. Therefore, when the disciples saw Thomas, they announced to him that they had seen the Lord Jesus Christ, risen from the dead. Thomas replies, saying, “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” (John 20:25).

Now it is eight days after Christ’s resurrection, the disciples are gathered together in a room, and Christ appears to them all and then speaks directly to Thomas. It is to Thomas that he says, “Reach out with your finger, and behold my hands; and reach out your hand, and thrust it into my side: and do not be faithless, but believing.” And Thomas answered and said to him, “My Lord and my God.” Jesus said to him, “Thomas, because you have seen me, you have believed: blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed” (John 20:27-29).

What Christ addresses is Thomas’ doubt, which is quite apparent to us all, but how He does this is what is of concern for us today. Why did Thomas not believe? Instead of light, the announcement by the Apostles only brought darkness to Thomas. He who was willing to go and die with Christ, expected that Christ would come and find him if He had risen, St. Romanos remarks, and yet Christ didn’t.

Worthy of note, though, is that nowhere do we observe Christ rebuking or chastising Thomas because of his doubts. Instead, as it is said of our Savior: “A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench” (Matt. 12:20). Christ comes to Thomas to alleviate him of this poison of doubt, this spiritual obstacle, this stifling of the fullness of joy which Pascha should impart to each one of us. Narrating this moment between Thomas and Christ, St. Romanos writes: “Have compassion on me, Master, as I boldly handle [You], and accept me, Lover of mankind...”

If Christ has come to save sinners, would He not comfort the doubters? If He did not come to call the righteous, would He not alleviate those beset by this darkness? If He came to the lost sheep of Israel, would He not seek out those bewildered by disbelief? If He came to set the prisoners free, would he not unfetter us from the shackles that enslave us with suspicion and distrust? If He came to heal the brokenhearted, would he not mend the skepticism which rends the heart? If He came to give sight to the blind, will He not apply a healing salve to give clarity to the vision of our nous? If He came to give liberty, will He not free those imprisoned by mistrust? If Christ left the ninety and nine to seek out the one who was lost, will He not come find you who is lost and wandering in the darkness of doubtfulness?

Behold, the condescension of God, the Lover of mankind. You, Thomas, made of clay and of the fallen race of men. You reach your finger here and touch my hands, *the hands of Him who made man*. Reach your hand here and touch my side. Touch him who is clothed with majesty, who covers Himself with light as with a garment (Ps. 104.2).

It is because of Thomas' doubt that we commemorate him today. For us who may be full of doubts, despite God's providence which has led us here, despite the work of His saints intervening in our lives and even healing some of us, despite the spiritual rest we might experience at times in this holy habitation. Like Thomas abiding with the Apostles of Christ, we still doubt. Eight days ago we celebrated the Bright Resurrection of Christ with the festal Bright Week services up until now when we consider the topic of doubt.

Today, Christ comes to Thomas and comes to us baring his wounds to heal our unbelieving hearts. Blessed are you when doubts assail you and all is looking dark even though you have not seen Christ, but yet you believed (Cf. John 20:29). "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief" (Mark 9:24). As St. Leo the Great writes:

[Christ] offers to the doubters' eyes the marks of the cross that remained in His hands and feet and invites them to handle him with careful scrutiny. He does this because the traces of the nails and spear had been retained to heal the wounds of unbelieving hearts, so that not with wavering faith but with the most certain conviction they might comprehend that the nature that had been laid in the sepulcher was to sit on God the Father's throne.

"Thomas' unbelief," says St. Gregory the Great, "was of more advantage to our faith than the faith of believing disciples, because when he was led back to faith by touching Jesus, our minds were relieved of all doubt and made firm in faith."

Why did Christ wait eight days? From our own experience, do we not understand this? We are not quickly relieved of most burdens with such speed and instead are waiting for an indefinite period of time, waiting on the Lord to help us in His good time. It was the same for the Apostle Thomas who continued to dwell with the other disciples, hear stories of the risen Christ and thereby prepare himself to finally see Christ as we should also amidst these unsettling times. Therein is patience nurtured in us and therein we learn how God works in our own lives seeing how He responds to us. We are taught that this Christian path is that narrow path, that we will have a cross to bear, we should not be surprised by this despite being surprised by how difficult it is at And yet, as the Apostle Paul tells us, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at

the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4:17-18). As Christ came to Thomas while he was amidst the other Apostles keeping fellowship with them, so Christ will seek us out.

What are we supposed to do amidst these times of doubt? Confess these thoughts to our spiritual father. Why leave this snake in our bosom which will only harm us. There is no way that this can turn out for the best when we keep this to ourselves. Pray – because where else are we to go to be consoled and to find shelter amidst this storm? Love – for when we learn to love God, we shall not grieve at the present troubles but, as St. John Chrysostom said, we will not even appear to see them because of the strength of such a thing as this love. He further describes this saying,

“Those, for instance, who are not at present with us, but being absent we imagine every day, are loved. For mighty is the sovereignty of love (αγάπης), it alienates the soul from all things, and chains to the desired object. If thus we love Christ, all things here will seem to be a shadow, an image, a dream. We too shall say, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress?” (Rom. 8:35)”

And lastly, [be humble.] Returning to the first mention St. Isaac, we recall that he designates *doubt* as being the tool of the demons. In describing doubt in the hour in which it is the most paralyzing and darkest, St. Isaac writes: “All your knowledge will be in turmoil like that of a child. And your mind which was firmly established in God, the accuracy of your knowledge, and your sound thinking will be immersed in an ocean of doubts.” The only thing to vanquish these doubts is humility, which, he says, as soon as you take hold of it, all the power of the demons vanish.

We can never avoid doubts whether their cause is intellectual, physical, relational or through some other means. And yet, Christ has not abandoned us and even seeks us out to assuage our doubt and the sorrow it causes. May we bear this burden with humility like our Savior who is meek and lowly of heart, (Matt. 11:29) for those who are humble are given grace by God and shall be exalted and lifted up and will find rest for their souls.

If we are humble, Christ will seek us out, will come to us, and alleviate us of our doubts as he did for the Apostle Thomas, in that very particular way in which the Apostle needed and in the way that each of us need. Through the prayers of the Apostle Thomas, O Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us. Amen.
(holycross.org)

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

Brethren and Fathers, Pascha is gone by and the feast has been completed; but rejoicing and feasting, should we wish, have by no means gone by, for we are always allowed to rejoice and feast spiritually, in accordance with the saying of Scripture, *Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I will say: Rejoice!* [Phil. 4:4.] But how shall this be? If we always keep fresh the memory of the sufferings of our Savior Christ; that the Lord of glory was crucified for our sake, that he was buried and that he was raised on the third day, raising us with himself and giving us life with himself, *so that being alive we may no longer live for ourselves, but for him who died and was raised for our sake*, [2 Cor. 5:15.] so that we can confidently say with the Apostle, *I live, but no longer I; Christ lives in me. What I now live in the flesh, I live in the faith of the Son of God who loved me and who handed himself over for me.* [Gal. 2:20.] This is the sum of the mystery: to be corpses to the world but alive to God.

And so after Pascha we must be watchful and awake, pray and be stirred to compunction, weep and be illumined, always *bearing in our bodies the death of the Lord Jesus*, [2 Cor. 4:10.] dying each day by choice, always journeying from the body and dwelling with the Lord through leaving the thoughts of the flesh. Do not say, 'It is not Lent now'. It is always Lent for the watchful. Do not say, 'I have spent hours in ascetic activity and it is necessary to rest'. There is no rest here. Do not say, 'I have grown old in virtue and I am not afraid'. There is always fear of reversal; and Satan in one instant has cast into the deep of sin many who had grown old in virtue. *So let the one who thinks they stand beware lest they fall*, [1 Cor. 10:12.] and the one who thinks they have been guarded see to it that they are not off their guard. So let there be guard and attention and moderation with regard to sleep, to food, to drink and to whatever else, so that the body may be kept under control and brought into servitude, [Cf. 1 Cor. 9:27.] lest, like a colt in fine condition which takes the bit between its teeth, it push us down the precipice of sin....

Do not be like dissolute people, but like ones bound by the spirit; not like ones without supervision, but like ones under the supervision of the Lord, who oversees your every movement and action; not ones being driven randomly here and there, but remaining in stillness in your cells, attending to your manual work, your prayers and psalmody; not amassing treasure for yourselves from love of money, but content with what you have now. For he himself said, *I will not abandon you, I will not desert you, so that we may say confidently, The Lord is my helper, and I shall not fear what man will do to me. Remember your brethren, and keeping before you the outcome of their lives imitate their faith.* [Hebrews 13:5-7]

Such was the blessed Dometianos, whom we have praised and whose memorial is with the Saints. How great the business he achieved, how great the life he accomplished by few toils and struggles, inheriting eternal glory, a man of no worth in human terms, but since he chose virtue and loved God, God exalted him, in accordance with what is written, *Because I will glorify those who glorify me, and the one who despises me will be dishonored* [1 Kingd. 2:30.]. It is right to rejoice and be glad in such brothers; but it is of no use unless we also make our own contribution. If we contribute as best we can, we too will have a portion with the Saints in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be the glory and the might with the Father and the holy Spirit now and for ever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.

– St. Theodore the Studite, *Catechesis 2, on St. Thomas Sunday*

Also Commemorated Today: Prophet Jeremiah

The Holy Prophet Jeremiah, one of the four great Old Testament prophets, was son of the priest Helkiah from the city of Anathoth near Jerusalem, and he lived 600 years before the Birth of Christ, under the Israelite king Josiah and four of his successors. He was called to prophetic service at the age of fifteen, when the Lord revealed to him that even before his birth the Lord had chosen him to be a prophet. Jeremiah refused, citing his youth and lack of skill at speaking, but the Lord promised to be always with him and to watch over him.

He touched the mouth of the chosen one and said, “Behold, I have put My words into your mouth. Behold, I have appointed you this day over nations and kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to rebuild, and to plant” (Jer. 1:9-10). From that time Jeremiah prophesied for twenty-three years, denouncing the Jews for abandoning the true God and worshiping idols, predicting sorrows and devastating wars. He stood by the gates of the city, and at the entrance to the Temple, everywhere where the people gathered, and he exhorted them with imprecations and often with tears. The people, however, mocked and abused him, and they even tried to kill him.

Depicting for the Jews their impending enslavement to the king of Babylon, Jeremiah first placed on his own neck a wooden, and then an iron yoke, and thus he went about among the people. Enraged at the dire predictions of the prophet, the Jewish elders threw the Prophet Jeremiah into a pit filled with horrid, slimy creatures, where he almost died. Through the intercession of the God-fearing royal official Habdemelek, the prophet was pulled out of the pit, but he did not cease his prophecies, and for this he was carted off to prison. Under the Jewish king Zedekiah his prophecy was fulfilled.

Nebuchadnezzar came, slaughtered many people, carried off a remnant into captivity, and Jerusalem was pillaged and destroyed. Nebuchadnezzar released the prophet from prison and permitted him to live where he wanted. The prophet remained at the ruins of Jerusalem and bewailed his nation's misfortune. According to Tradition, the Prophet Jeremiah took the Ark of the Covenant with the Tablets of the Law and hid it in one of the caves of Mount Nabath (Nebo), so that the Jews could no longer find it (2 Mac. 2). Afterwards, a new Ark of the Covenant was fashioned, but it lacked the glory of the first.

Among the Jews remaining in their fatherland there soon arose internecine clashes: Hodoliah, Nebuchadnezzar's viceroy, was murdered. The Jews, fearing the wrath of Babylon, decided to flee into Egypt. The Prophet Jeremiah disagreed with their intention, predicting that the punishment which they feared would befall them in Egypt. The Jews would not listen to the prophet, however, and taking him along by force, they went into Egypt and settled in the city of Tathnis. There the prophet lived for four years and was respected by the Egyptians, because by his prayers he killed crocodiles and other creatures infesting these parts. When Jeremiah prophesied that the King of Babylon would invade Egypt and annihilate the Jews living there, the Jews murdered him. In that very same year the saint's prophecy was fulfilled. There is a tradition that 250 years later, Alexander the Great transported the relics of the holy Prophet Jeremiah to Alexandria.

The Prophet Jeremiah wrote his Book of Prophecies and also the Book of Lamentations about the desolation of Jerusalem and the Exile. The times in which he lived and prophesied are described in 4/2 Kings (Ch. 23-25) and in the Second Book of Chronicles (36:12) and in 2 Maccabees (Ch. 2).

In the Gospel of Matthew it is said that the betrayal of Judas was foretold by the Prophet Jeremiah, "And they took thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom the sons of Israel had set a price, and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord directed me" (Mt. 27:9-10). Perhaps Jeremiah 32:6-15 is meant.

Even after his death, the Prophet Jeremiah was regarded as a wonderworker. Dust from his tomb was believed to cure snake-bite, and many Christians pray to him for this purpose. (*from oca.org*)

Saint Walpurga

The daughter of Saint Richard the Pilgrim and sister of Saint Willibald, Saint Walpurga (also known as Saint Walpurgis or Walburga) was born in Devonshire in 710 A.D. An English princess, Saint Walpurga studied medicine and became a Christian missionary to Germany, where she founded an double monastery in Heidenheim. As a result of Saint Walpurga's evangelism in Germany, the people there converted to Christianity from heathenism. In addition, the monastery

became an education center and soon became famous as a center of culture. Saint Walpurga was also known to repel the effects of witchcraft. She perished in 777 and her tomb, to this day, produces holy oil (known as Saint Walburga's oil), which is said to heal sickness; Benedictine nuns distribute this oil in vials to Christian pilgrims who visit Saint Walpurga's tomb. *(from daimonologia.org)*

Social Team for May 8

Team 8 is up next week - Samson, Brady, Wyman, Joseph Frey. Thank you!

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In Your Prayers – Please Remember... His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His Eminence Metropolitan GREGORY, Fr. Joseph & Family, His Grace Bishop Neofitos of Nyeri & Mt. Kenya, Bennett family, Tatyana & Slava Chumak & family, Luke & Marlana Cooper, Roberta Corson, Jon Church, Tina Crull, Mary Diane David, Howl family, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, Anna Meinhold, David & Kathryn Newman, John Reece, Mary Reed, Rose Song, Dcn. Nectarios & Ia, Mother Virginia Marie & the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, the suffering people of Ukraine, and those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)