

Understanding Thomas

By Father Lawrence Farley

Saint Thomas, it seems, can never catch a break, at least in popular culture. Our culture knows him as “doubting Thomas,” and one single and uncharacteristic lapse has forever labelled him as a doubter and made him the patron saint of skeptics. He is regarded as suffering from an innate tendency to doubt and to faithlessness, as if he somehow loved his Lord less than the other apostles. A quick look through the other pages of John’s Gospel reveals it is not so. If anything, Thomas loved Jesus more.

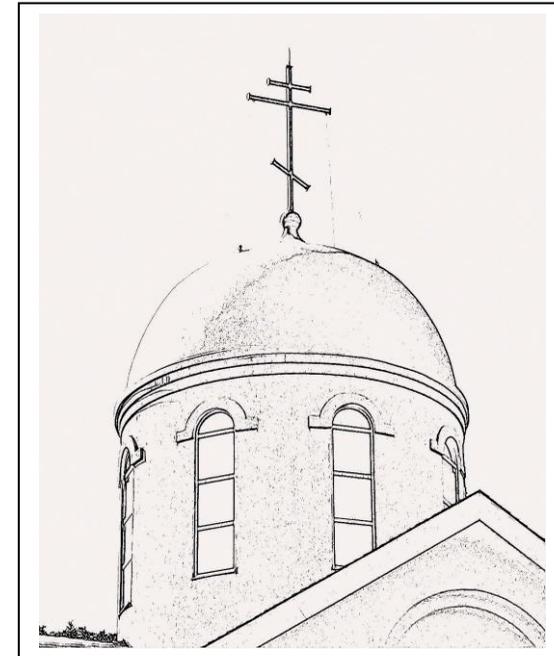
Remember how a few short days before the catastrophic events of Christ’s arrest, trial, and crucifixion all the other disciples hung back in fear when their Master spoke of leaving the safety of their place across the Jordan to return to Bethany in Judea to visit Lazarus? Jesus told them plainly that Lazarus was dead, and then said, “let us go to Him.” The apostles all thought that He meant visiting Lazarus’ bereaved family in Judea and being stoned to death for it, as He almost was before (John 11:7-8, 14-15). They all hung back, aghast at their Master’s determined plan. It was Thomas who refused to let Him go and die alone: “Let us also go,” he told them, “that we may die with Him” (v. 16).

Thomas’ famous lapse therefore did not spring from a cold heart, nor from a deficit of love. When the other apostles told him after the Resurrection that they had seen the Lord, and when Thomas responded, “Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in His side, I will not believe” (John 20:25), this was not the voice of skepticism. If Thomas were a despairing sceptic, he would not then have been with the other apostles at all. He would have said, “I’m done,” and returned to Galilee. No, this was not the voice of skepticism. It was the voice of desire.

That is, Thomas desired more than anything in the world to see His Lord alive again. His poor heart had sustained such a pounding and been broken into so many tiny pieces by the events of that last terrible Friday that he could not risk having it broken again. He dared not believe this latest report, for fear that it was wrong. He felt that if he raised his hopes again only to have them dashed, he could not survive. No more risks, no more taking chances. From now on, seeing was believing. But he clearly wanted to see and to believe. When he drew his line in the sand and said he would not believe this report unless Christ appeared to him personally, he wanted more than anything for it to be so. He drew this line, hoping beyond hope that Christ would cross over it. When Christ did, and offered His risen flesh to Thomas for inspection, Thomas sank to his knees, exclaiming, “My Lord and my God!” Here was everything he ever wanted.

Thomas’ desire for Christ challenges us today—and not just to believe in Christ without seeing Him for ourselves. Thomas challenges not just our faith, but our priorities. Thomas wanted Christ more than anything else, and everything else grew dim in the face of that desire. What do we want? What is our deepest desire? Is it for money? For health and happiness? Is it for the health and happiness of our children? Is it for success and recognition in our chosen field? Thomas would cheerfully have sacrificed all these things, if only he could have his Jesus back again. For Thomas, nothing was more important than Jesus. After falling down before Christ with his confession, he turns to us with a question: what is our deepest desire? How important is Jesus to us?

WEEKLY



BULLETIN

Today is the beginning of our salvation, the revelation of the eternal mystery. The Son of God becomes the Son of the Virgin as Gabriel announces the coming of Grace. Together with him let us cry to the Theotokos: Rejoice O Full of Grace, the Lord is with you!

Troparion of the Annunciation to the Theotokos

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Rev. Fr. Michael Pejovic, *Attached Priest*

Matthew Petrides, *Senior Warden*

Matushka Mary Buletza-Breton, *Choir Director*

May 1, 2022
ANTIPASCHA. 2nd SUNDAY OF PASCHA
St. Thomas Sunday

Tone 1. Prophet Jeremiah (6th c. B.C.). Ven. Paphnutius, Abbot of Boróvsk (1478). New Martyrs Euthymius (1814), Ignatius (1814), and Acacius (1816), of Mt. Athos. Hieromartyr Makáry (Macarius), Metropolitan of Kiev (1497). Martyr Bata the Persian (4th c.). Rt. Blv. Tamára, Queen of Georgia (13th c.). Ven. Nikēphóros of Chios (1821). "Unexpected Joy" Icon of the Mother of God (1647).

Today's Readings:

Epistle: Acts 5:12-20

Gospel: John 20:19-31

Upcoming Service Schedule:

Today – **11:00am Vespers of Pascha**

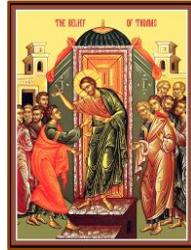
Saturday – **6:00 Great Vespers**

Sunday - **9:00am Divine Liturgy**

Next Sunday's Readings:

Epistle: Acts 6:1-7 and 1 John 1:1-7

Gospel: Mark 15:43-16:8 and John 19:25-27; 21:24-25



St. Thomas Sunday

Please pray for vocations to the Holy Priesthood!

Special Prayers

We pray for **all** our parish family members, but we pray especially for those who are ill and afflicted. Among them are **Fr. Sergius Kuharsky, Zoran Pejovic, Lidia Zemlanicky, Ingrid Kopec, Betty James, Manya Shark, Deryl Tczap, George Stavrou, Rdr. John Economou, Margaret Makara, Dennis & Ann Marie Gahr, Eileen Zamerovsky, and Dorothy Studier.**

We are happy that you have joined us for worship today and hope that you will join us for coffee hour after the service. Please note that **reception of the Holy Eucharist** is only for baptized members of the Orthodox Church who have prepared with prayer, fasting, and periodic confession. You are encouraged to receive the blessed bread that is offered at the end of the service and which may also be offered to you by one of your neighbors during Communion.

Annunciations

TODAY – Church School sessions will be held during Coffee Hour.

TODAY – **Dessert Rolls** in various flavors are available for sale at \$15 each. **Pierogis** (potato & cheese) are also available at \$12/dozen. Please see Cathy Berger or Olga Pasick to make your purchases.

TODAY – Father Gary will be **blessing graves** at St. Vladimir Cemetery in Jackson and Ocean County Memorial Park in Toms River beginning at 12noon.

TODAY – **Parish Calendars** for May are available in the church narthex.

Many thanks to those who helped out with the hosting of Archbishop Michael and the clergy and faithful of the New Jersey Deanery this past Wednesday. Food that was donated and not used for this event will be served at today's Coffee Hour.

Many thanks also to those who contributed for **Pascha flowers**, which were beautiful as always.

Congratulations to **Joel Bridge**, who was baptized and chrismated this past Holy Saturday.

Grocery Gift Cards are available for purchase. Please see Olga Pasick or Cathy Berger to make purchases.

ANTIPASCHA

Since the Resurrection of the Lord is the greatest and most important event and beyond all thought, it is rededicated not only once a year, but also on every "eighth" day. The first rededication of the Resurrection is this present Sunday, for it is truly both the "eighth" day and the "first." It is the eighth day after Pascha, and the first day, because it is the beginning of the other days. Again, it is called the "eighth" day because it prefigures the unending day of the future age to come, which will be truly the "first" day and a day that is not divided by a single night. This is why this Sunday is called the Antipascha, which interpreted means "in the place of Pascha." We should also know that due to the honor given Sunday by the Lord's Resurrection, the Holy Apostles transferred the weekly day of rest from the Jewish Sabbath (Saturday) to this most honored day.

MANY YEARS

Birthdays last week

Tuesday – Miranda Humphrey

Friday – Stephen Chidylo

Today – Olga Kornafel

We continue to pray for peace in Ukraine, for the withdrawal of Russian troops from that land, and for the wellbeing of the Ukrainian people. Lord, have mercy!