

## Thomas

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Almighty and eternal God,  
who, for the greater confirmation of the faith,  
did allow your holy apostle Thomas  
to doubt the resurrection of your Son  
till word and sight convinced him,  
grant to us, who have not seen, that also we may believe  
and so confess Christ as our Lord and God.

My text today is from the John's gospel chapter 20 and verse 28, words spoken by St Thomas to and in the presence of Jesus Christ, risen from the dead: 'My Lord and my God.'

Saint Thomas is one of the twelve disciples and as such Thomas is necessarily one of the twelve apostles. He is sometimes called Didymus – the twin – and sometimes he's called Doubting Thomas. His name only appears in the Synoptic Gospels – Matthew, Mark and Luke – in their lists of the disciples where he's placed next to Mathew; and in the Acts of the Apostles where he is placed next to Philip. So it is to John we must turn for each of the four times Thomas is mentioned as part of the action.

The last and least may be found in the early part of chapter 21 when Thomas is named as one of the seven disciples who join Peter on an impromptu fishing trip

on the Sea of Galilee where following the advice of the stranger on the shore, they cast their net to the right of the boat to land a bumper catch of 153 fish !

The first time Thomas speaks is in John 11 v16 when on hearing the news that Lazarus is in fact dead and knowing the growing strength of opposition to Jesus on the part of the Jewish authorities, Thomas encourages his fellow disciples to follow Jesus to Bethany with something which has the ring of heroism: 'Let us also go that we might die with him.'

The second time Thomas speaks is found in John 14, that favourite passage in funeral services where Jesus tells the disciples that he is going to prepare a place for them in his Father's house where there are many mansions and then claims that they do in fact know the way there. 'No way !' thinks Thomas. Unable to contain his confusion, he expresses his problem quite reasonably, 'Lord we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' Don't you love his courage, his common sense, which is rewarded by one of the great statements of spiritual truth by Jesus - 'I am the way, the truth and the life'.

But the third time he speaks, Thomas has the starring role, is centre stage. Jesus has appeared in the Upper Room and the disciples are amazed and overjoyed and want to share their surprise and wonder with Thomas. But why wasn't Thomas there in the first place ? Was he beginning to lose the plot ? Was he beginning to lose his faith in his friend and teacher ? Or is Thomas simply miffed he'd missed so stunning a meeting ? Whatever was going on in the background, Thomas is again up-front with his difficulties. He's having none of it. In the face of his

friends' enthusiasm, he's being a bit of a wet blanket. Thomas applies cold rationality to the claims that Jesus has risen from the dead. "Well if he has, then I want to touch him myself, touch his wounds, put my finger in the mark of the nails, put my hand into his side which the Roman soldier's spear had pierced." Don't you just love him? He is being perfectly rational, perfectly logical, setting out a perfectly pragmatic challenge, a test of faith – prove it and the proof he requires is one of personal experience – of sight and of touch. Thomas will believe if his criteria for truth are met. And of course they were and the rest is history.

But what I'd like you to take from today's passage, which you probably know as well as I do, is the need for personal experience of what we believe. It's all very well for me to get up each Sunday and expound the Christian faith – it is after all what I'm paid to do. But unless belief in Jesus and what he is teaching is real for you too, then its value is marginalised. The great thing about Thomas was not that he doubted but that he was not prepared to accept faith in Jesus as second-hand, something someone else has told him about. Faith had to be real for him too. It was. And he was prepared to die a martyr's death for what he personally knew to be true.

I have spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

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