

## **“Confession of Thomas” John 20:19-31**

**9** On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." **20** When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. **21** Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." **22** And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. **23** If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."

**24** Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. **25** So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." **26** Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." **27** Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." **28** Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" **29** Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (John 20:19-29)

Grace and peace to you all from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

This event is very famous among other Biblical events. It has even produced the metaphor we all know – ‘doubting Thomas’. The one who doesn’t believe unless he sees by his own eyes and touches by his own hands.

There is not much we know about the apostle Thomas, but there are things which we should know and which can help us to see what kind of a man he was.

In the first three gospels Thomas is barely mentioned among the other disciples of Jesus. However in the gospel according John he appears already earlier.

When some time before His last Easter Jesus was arguing with the Jews they were so upset, that they were ready to stone Jesus. The reason was simple – they understood Jesus’ claim that He is the Son of God. Not metaphorically, but truly ... the Son of living God.

When they tried to stone Him, Jesus went away.

Together with His disciples he moved away from Jerusalem and settled in Ephraim. There He received the bad news that His dear friend Lazarus was very sick and really needed His help. Jesus still stayed at the same place for a few more days, and it seemed more than reasonable for His disciples; they knew that the Jews were plotting against Jesus.

When after these few days Jesus said that He was going back to Bethany, it was quite a surprise for His disciples. They were worried: "Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?" (John 11:8)

You know what Thomas said? "Let us also go, that we may die with him." (John 11:16) The disciples clearly realized that going back was a very risky decision. Not just very risky, but - deadly risky.

Do you have many friends who, knowing that you are probably going to meet your death from ferocious religious fanatics, would say: "Let us also go, that we may die with him." These words are a wonderful testimony about what kind of a man Thomas was. Obviously he was faithful to His teacher, faithful to such a degree that He was ready to sacrifice His own life to remain with His master till the very end. I guess we all would appreciate to have more friends like Thomas.

After the last supper with His disciples Jesus said to them: "'Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. 4 And you know the way to where I am going.' 5 Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?'" (John 14:1-5)

We can see that there John portrays another dimension of Thomas. Probably He was quite a straightforward guy. Maybe we could even call Him as little naïve. On the other hand, Jesus were talking about things which are too difficult and too high to comprehend even for us, when we know that He had risen again and had ascended to the Father. The bottom line is that in these situations we don't see a man who wavers in His faith and trust to His Lord.

What then happened this time? Why did Thomas refuse to believe what other disciples were telling him?

We know from the testimony of Matthew that strange things were going on at the time of Jesus death and resurrection. "Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit." When Jesus died, " behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened. And many

bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many.” (Mat 27:50-53)

We don’t know more about it, just this much. But it gives at least a little insight in what was going on in Jerusalem in these days. The bodies of many saints were raised and appeared to many. What to do with it? Did it make easier to believe that Jesus was risen, or it made it harder to believe that the one, whom the apostles saw, really was the same Jesus who was crucified?

We can see that things are not simple as they may appear on the surface. There was a reasonable bases to doubt and question who was this person whom the disciples saw. Of course, we can see in Thomas also a little from the attitude which Jesus rebuked earlier – “show us a sign and then we’ll believe you.”

But we can see that Thomas asked the right question: “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”

He was looking for the right Lord and the right God. Not for a god who can show up in the middle of a room walking through walls or to do other kind of miraculous things. He was looking for the God crucified. Crucified for our sins, risen for our life.

We don’t need to make the apostle Thomas ideal man, or ideal disciple. He was just a human, as we all are. Even if others said that they have seen Jesus, he wanted to make up his own mind, to make his own decision.

Who of us wouldn’t want to make our decisions based on what we have seen and experienced? We know how it works. There could be a mob of people who would tell that they have experienced the presence of Jesus; and how much would it mean for us? Would it persuade us?

Our faith has to be our faith, and not the faith of others. Whatever others believe doesn’t determine fully what we believe. We want to see everything with our eyes, we want to place, so to speak, our hands in Jesus side.

And I’m no talking only about those who are outside of the Church. ‘O, yes, there are *these people* who doubt everything.’ No, I’m talking about us. Each of us can have a moments in our life when our faith and trust wavers and we begin to question – ‘can we believe what other disciples of Christ tell us?’ Do you know the feeling? How can I be sure? Then we may feel guilty that we have doubted, that we have questioned the foundations of our faith.

Thomas was not ideal. He was one of us. He was straightforward thinking man and may be a little naïve. But he was *honest*. "I want to see, I want to touch..." He wasn't ashamed to asked it.

You know what? He received what he was asking for. "Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (John 20:25-29)

Thomas asked, and He received what He asked for. When we ask in our doubts, Jesus hears us. Remember, He hears us. It is important for Him that we are honest. We cannot have deep and committed relations with the Son of God unless we are honest with Him.

Thomas was honest. Jesus heard his request and stood before Him. Jesus didn't rebuke him – 'o, you, doubting Thomas, how did you dare'. No, just caring and gentle words: "Put your finger here and see my hands, put our your hand and place it in my side." "I assure you, you can trust me."

We are not told whether Thomas did what Jesus invited him to do. Perhaps Thomas didn't need to, He was looking to experience the presence of His Lord and he got it. Jesus was risen! Indeed! He stood before His faithful disciple. "Don't worry, it is me."

The words that followed from the lips of Thomas is one of the most beautiful confessions in the New Testament. "My Lord and my God."

We read words "my Lord" and they don't mean for us too much. In the Old Testament God revealed His holy name – Yahweh - to His people Israel. This name appears in the original text of the OT almost in every place where we today read "the Lord". We have more than 5500 occurrences of the holy name in the OT. Fearing to misuse God's holy name (2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment), Greek translation of the OT used "the Lord" instead of Yahweh.

What Thomas was saying – I believe that you, Jesus, that you are Yahweh, the God of all promises, God Creator, God of the covenants, God Redeemer of Israel, that you are my God!

We may think, of course, - what else would he say? It is not that simple. Remember, Thomas is not in a much different position than we are. Who is this whom Thomas sees standing before him? What is this that his eyes see? The same man Jesus, a carpenter from Nazareth, the one with whom Thomas has spent together last three years.

He sees man Jesus, but He confesses that He is God Yahweh Himself. God who became man to be crucified for our sins, for our unbelief. God who become man to be accessible to us. God whom we now can approach without fear.

We also can be sure that Jesus listens to us, especially when we are in doubts. Even if it seems that He is not present. He cherishes our relations. Important for Him is our heart. We don't have to pretend when we are talking with Him.

He knows us anyway; our most secret thoughts, our doubts, our weaknesses. He wants us and not our masks. He want us; who we are in the depth of our hearts. He wants to be our God in the most honest and open relations, forgiving all our sins, cleansing all what is done to us, healing and restoring us.

When we are true to Him, He is faithful; He comes to us and assures that only in this man Jesus we can see our God and our Lord. We don't have to invent a god, true God has come to us, as one of us, and for our sake. This was the experience of Thomas..

There is a little more we know about the fate of Thomas from the testimonies of the Church. After He had boldly confessed His teacher, man Jesus, to be the very God and the Lord, He also obeyed Him till the end.

Church testimonies tell that Thomas went till India and brought the Gospel of His risen Teacher and Lord to the Southern provinces of India. As we read, He was ready to die together with His master, and, indeed, He did it. Today we know only that He confessed His faith till the end and was killed, because of His confession, by furious local religious leaders in India. The Church in India that bears His name is still alive. This is the story of the apostle Thomas.

My professor used to say that only thing he is worried about is martyrdom. He said that He is afraid that there may come a day when he is required to confess his faith under the threat of death penalty. But then He added...that he is sure that on this day the Holy Spirit would give him everything He may need to be faithful till the end.

We normally don't have threats of death when we confess our faith. But still, we often are afraid to share the truth of risen Christ, because society may ridicule us, show disrespect, or treat as the funny people.

Christ died so that we can live. Many of His disciples have shown wonderful and inspiring examples of what Holy Spirit can do through us. May He use the life and testimonies of faithful disciples like Thomas to strengthen us in our faith and in our determination to share the Gospel of Christ and to stand firm till the end, when we are required to confess our faith and to say these words: "Jesus Christ is my Lord and my God." Amen.