

# Thomas, Again, Rears His Doubtful Head

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter – Year A

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*Acts of the Apostles 6:1-7*  
*Psalm 33:1-2, 4-5, 18-19*

*1 Peter 2:4-9*  
*John 14:1-12*

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Three weeks ago, on the Second Sunday of Easter, the Gospel reading told the story of Thomas the Apostles and his obstinate doubt in Christ's Resurrection. Because of this he has been known through the centuries as "Doubting" Thomas, or "Thomas the Doubter." However, I wonder if we have been a little too hard on the man, overlooking the fruits of Christ's response to the doubts and questions he and other apostles raised while Jesus was with them.

We hear from Thomas again this week along with Philip, whose questions (particularly Philip's) appear to test Jesus' patience – "*I have been with you all this time and still you do not know me?*" This, along with the familiar story of Thomas seems to further enforce the idea of Thomas being a doubter, until one reads further.

In the familiar story of his doubt Thomas raises an important issue – how are we to know that Jesus is truly risen if we have not seen him? Jesus responds in a way that deepens our understanding of our relationship with Him – "blessed are those who have not seen, but still believe." In the Gospel for this 5th Sunday of Easter Thomas again raises a question – "We do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" In response, Jesus gives another of many well-known and beloved sayings – "*I am the way, the truth and the life...*"

In the same way Philip raises a question that appears to annoy Jesus – "show us the Father..." To this, Jesus again gives a familiar response – "*Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.*"

The questions raised by both of these apostles result in a response that further deepens our understanding of Jesus, His relationship with the Father and our belief in His Resurrection. So are these apostles doubters? Are they slow to understand? Or perhaps, are Thomas and Philip among the first Christian theologians, whose questions, and even doubts, lead to a deeper understanding of faith?

This is what theologians have done throughout our Church's history. St. Paul did this throughout his career as Apostle to the Gentiles. The results are the inspired epistles in which Paul and other apostolic writers spell out their deep understanding of the mystery of Christ. This was done by the early Church fathers, whose writings have contributed greatly to the Church's understanding and teaching of our faith. This is what the great Doctors of the Church did as they grappled with questions and sought to articulate our faith so as to teach it more correctly and more clearly. This is what another St. Thomas did, named Aquinas, whose answers fill a seventeen-volume tour-de-force, the *Summa Theologica*.

## St. Thomas the Apostle

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Every now and then I encounter someone who consults me regarding doubts they are having in their faith. While still faithful in the practice of that faith, they are nonetheless uneasy and somewhat discouraged that they are experiencing doubt. Some even worry that such doubt constitutes a sin. To this I answer simply: Doubt leads to questions. Questions lead to answers. Answers lead to a deepening of faith. If it was good enough for Thomas and Philip, for St. Paul, the Church Fathers, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas; if it was even good enough for our Lord's Blessed Mother who "pondered these things in her heart," then it is good enough for us.

So let's give Thomas a break, (and Philip too while we're at it). Perhaps he is not Thomas the Doubter, but Thomas the Theologian. Perhaps Philip is not so slow, but knew how to ask Jesus the right questions, even if they did annoy Jesus a bit. Let us not get too discouraged by doubts we

might have regarding our faith. If these doubts lead us to ask questions (rather than pull us away from the faith), and if we look to the right places for our answers, then our doubts will be a tremendous grace as we come to a deeper understanding of our faith, our Church, our tradition and our relationship with Christ and His Father.

Thomas and Philip got their answers from Christ and it prepared them to be the great apostles they were. The early fathers got their answers from their study and the blessings of inspiration, and it prepared them to be the great Doctors of our Church. We get our answers from the wealth of our predecessors in faith, and it

prepares us for the awesome task of teaching and passing on that faith to yet another generation.

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