

“A GOOD DISBELIEF” (John 20:19-31)



Reflections on Thomas Sunday

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Introduction

On the first Sunday after the feast of the Resurrection, the Coptic Church celebrates Thomas Sunday, one of the Seven Minor Feasts of our Lord. On this day, we commemorate the Lord’s appearance to Saint Thomas and the rest of the disciples.

Illusionism

If there is one event in Biblical history at which disbelief hurls its fire, it is the Resurrection of our Lord. “The Resurrection was not an actual event,” some may say. “It is the product of excited minds and the gullible believed it to be real.”

But who are these gullible and imaginative people? The myrrh-bearing women? The disciples? When Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early Sunday morning, she had no thought in her mind concerning a resurrection. She only came early to anoint the body of our Lord. Her only concern was removing the heavy stone which blocked the entrance to the tomb. When she saw that the stone was rolled away and that it was empty, she had no thought of a resurrection, but she wept for she suspected that the body was stolen and simply questioned where He lay. When she saw Jesus, she did not recognize Him, but perceived Him to be the gardener. So, where is the overactive imagination in Mary Magdalene? She was in the midst of events that pointed to the Lord’s Resurrection, but she still dwelled on her pessimistic ideas that Jesus’ body had been stolen. When the disciples heard the good news, they likewise remained in a state of disbelief. It took the

Lord’s appearance in their midst to bring them out of this state.

Thomas Was Not There

When we come to the story of Thomas, the idea that the Resurrection is a product of gullible and imaginative minds remains unsupported.

When the Lord first appeared to the disciples, Thomas was not there. It is not by chance that he was not there, but we believe that it was God’s plan; so that we may all learn a lesson from this event. An ancient Church writer wrote, “This was also a work of divine economy, that the absence of the disciple became a cause of full assurance and certainty. For if Thomas were present, he would not have doubted; and if he had not doubted, he would not have curiously sought; and if he had not sought, he would not have touched; and if he had not touched, he would not have proclaimed Him Lord and God; and if he had not called Christ Lord and God, we would not have been taught to hymn Him so.”

Thomas’ Incredulity

Thomas was not present, but when he met the disciples, they told him the details of the Lord’s appearance and proclaimed, “We have seen the Lord!”

The disciples were Thomas’ companions, friends, and brothers. These witnesses to the Lord’s resurrection were no strangers to him, yet he said, “Unless I see...I will not believe”. He only trusted in his own senses. How disappointed the disciples must have been! “What kind of man is this?” they must have asked, “for the

word of God says that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established’” (Deut. 19:15).

The Lord’s Condescension

And the Lord? In His infinite love and humility, He would not allow Thomas to remain in this state of unbelief. Therefore, He appeared in the same manner to Thomas and the disciples as He had done the first time.

The Lord invited Thomas to look and touch His hands, and to reach his hand into His side. What could Thomas say here? We do not know if Thomas actually touched the Lord. The Orthodox interpreters generally say that he did not touch the Lord. The vision of the Lord, as well as the words heard from His mouth, made every trace of doubt vanish from Thomas’ heart. He would have no need to touch Him but immediately cried out, “My Lord and my God!”

Many also try to examine Christ in a great amount of detail to remove any doubts from their hearts; that is, they wish to touch Him like Thomas wished to touch Him. But as soon as these begin their investigation out of their good intentions, they find themselves wrapped in wonder and belief and no longer need to interpret any further. They cry out with Thomas saying, “My Lord and my God!”

For One Man!

There are two lessons (among many) that we can take home with us after reading about the Lord’s appearance to Saint Thomas and the rest of the disciples.

First, our Lord sought out one man: Thomas. One disciple had been absent from the gathering. One sheep was missing from the fold. Was the Lord indifferent? No. In a parable, He gave us the image of the good shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine in the fold and seeks out the lost sheep, and finding it, rejoices and calls his friends to feast. He went many miles on foot to find and save one sinful soul, the Samaritan woman. How could He let Thomas wander in the wilderness of incredulity, allowing this chosen sheep to become the prey of wild animals?

Let us likewise seek out the lost sheep. There is no toil and no sacrifice too great in seeking out a person who is created in the image of God. Let us not be indifferent, just as the Lord was not indifferent. Let us reach out to those who are seriously seeking the Lord and bring them under the shadow of His protection; into His loving embrace. Let us offer a personal touch to others, so that they may personally experience and glorify the Lord.

A believer’s unjustifiable absence from church on Sundays and great feasts is not without harm. Those who are “too busy” to meet the Lord in His house will find themselves with a void in their lives. If Thomas were absent from the holy gathering the second time, he would have been deprived of the greatest gift and would have quickly fallen to the depths of disbelief and catastrophe.

Our Faith Does not Fear Investigation

Here is our second lesson. The Lord’s worker rejoices to see that there are souls who so believe even though they live in this faithless and corrupt world. They have a simple faith. *“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed”* (John 20:29).

But we ought to be patient with those who, although they attend sermons and meetings, have doubts and seek proof. We should not reject them. Amid their doubts and a “good disbelief”, they may have good intentions, and through our good behavior, patience, and gentleness, we can win them to Christ.

Our faith does not fear investigation, for Christ is Truth with a capital “T.” The more it is investigated, the more it shines forth. Let us simply invite people to the Lord, as Christ did to Thomas. Reach your finger here. Come near. Examine every side. Enter its depths. Breathe its fresh air. Drink of its fountains. Explore this immovable mountain.

We ought to do the same in our own faith. We must renew ourselves constantly and make the conscious decision to carry our cross daily and follow the Savior. Let us not have a superficial, merely intellectual understanding of God. Let us worship Him in spirit and truth and give Him our hearts. When we open our hearts in sincerity, and desire to know who the Lord Jesus is, He will make Himself known to us. Then we will cry out, “My Lord and My God!”