

Reflection on St Thomas. St Thomas' Day, 3 July 2024

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, 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 the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

²⁶ A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, 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. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt 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 come to believe."
John 20. 24-29

Poor Thomas! What a bind to go down in history as 'doubting Thomas', because he would not believe the testimony of the other disciples who, in Thomas' absence, had seen the risen Lord on the first Easter Sunday. On that occasion, Jesus breathed on those apostles and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'. But Thomas missed out, both on the sight of Jesus and his exhaling of the Spirit upon the rest of the apostles. 'Unless I see the marks of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the marks of the nails, and my hand into his side, I will not believe'. But you know, there are many examples in the Scriptures about God keeping the truth from people until the *right* time when their eyes are opened. Or, think of how God allowed St Paul savagely to persecute the infant Church until, in God's good time, Paul himself saw the risen Lord on the road to Damascus. As today's collect reminds us: 'Almighty and eternal God, who, for the firmer foundation of our faith, *allowed* your holy apostle St Thomas to doubt the resurrection of your Son'. Thomas' absence, Thomas's doubting, were part of God's greater purposes, and it was for *our sake*. Everyone who embarks on vocational discernment encounters doubt – What me? Am I up to it, worthy of it, cut out for it, can I hack it? And that is why discernment is corporate – it's never just an individual's own sense of calling but also the Church's confirming of a calling.

But seven days later, on Sunday, the first day of the week, when the disciples were together and Thomas was with them, Jesus came again. I wonder, did he first breathe on Thomas? Did he bestow on him the Spirit of life? And consider Thomas' response. There is no reference to him touching Jesus' tender, as yet unhealed, hands, or placing his hand into the gaping wound in his side. Rather, Thomas said something absolutely remarkable: 'My Lord and my God'. Remember how John's Gospel begins – 'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was God and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.' Throughout John's Gospel, people are challenged to decide who Jesus is – A madman? A mere human being? A prophet? Or something more? Jesus on many occasions uses the great Divine name *I am* – the

very name of God revealed to Moses at the burning bush – *I am* - the bread of life, the light of the world, the Good Shepherd, the resurrection and the life, the way, the truth and the life. Jesus said these things of himself, but it was Thomas who was the first disciple, the first human being who saw the risen Christ and responded to who Jesus is in absolute clarity – ‘My Lord and my God!’ These are words of utter worship and the deepest reverence. Only the Holy Spirit could inspire Thomas to make this wonderful profession. And that same profession we make by faith – you see, if Jesus came into St Andrew’s this morning and stood before us, it might put an end to any doubting, for all of us have doubts from time to time, but it would also take away the possibility of faith, the leap of faith, the beauty of faith. So, rather than ‘doubting Thomas’, let’s say ‘believing Thomas’, Spirit-filled Thomas. Thomas, who tradition tells us became the Apostle to India and gave up his life as a martyr. And for you who believe – well, listen to what Jesus says – ‘Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed’. Today, my brothers and sisters, you are truly blest.