

Wonder

Volume: 1 Number: 3 Theme: **Faith and Doubt**

Title: **“O Blessed Doubt”** Author: **Hierodeacon Philip**

“Since you behold my side and the wounds of the nails, why do you not believe in my Resurrection?” said the Lord, risen from the tomb, as he ineffably showed himself to the Apostles. And Thomas Didymus was convinced and cried to the Creator: “My God and my Lord!”

—Matins of Thomas Sunday, Third Sessional Hymn, Tone One

“Why do you not believe in my Resurrection?” In the nearly two millennia since the day of Christ’s glorious Resurrection from the dead, many people have walked the earth to whom our Savior could address these words. Let us leave aside unanswerable questions about others who do not believe, and get to the point: are you one of those people? If our Lord said to you, “Why do you not believe in my Resurrection?” what would be your answer? And if you do believe, how would you answer if He asked you, “Why do you believe in my Resurrection?” These are far from unimportant questions.

Indeed, is anything more important? Can we not easily look around upon the mass of suffering humanity inhabiting this globe and see the kingdom of Death? We see people addicted and enslaved to passions which, for a brief moment, help them forget the inevitability of death, passions which yield less and less pleasure the longer they are practiced. We also see people who have discovered the bankruptcy of the passions but, turning away from them, turn not to God but to despair—one of the darkest passions—and even to a longing for death. We see some dying from starvation while others stuff themselves to obesity. And in abortion we see the great holocaust offering at the altar of sex, where passionate pleasure for the strong means violent death for the weak. So Death is everywhere. But where is the Resurrection?

For if Christ is risen, if He in His person has overcome death, has reversed it, trampled it down, annihilated it, then the great spectral shadow of death looming over our whole race must take on an utterly, inconceivably different meaning. Death is no longer King but is shown to be dying. Its hold over us is only as strong as we allow it to be. Yes, we will all die (except those of us still alive when Christ returns in glory), but now that means that we will be “united to Christ in a death like his,” so that we may rise with him when He comes again (cf. Romans 6:5).

And this in turn has huge implications for our day-to-day pattern of living. If death is not the end, but “the beginning of another life which eternal” (Canon of Pascha, Ode 7), then the two responses to death mentioned above—drowning oneself in pleasure or drowning oneself in despair—simply won’t work. If death is not the end, then we can turn neither to fleeting pleasures nor to death itself as the remedy for our plight. We can turn only to Christ, knowing full well that this means turning to the cross that He will inevitably hold out to us, so that we may die with Him and live with Him.

All this and more is involved in our answer to the question, “Do you believe in my Resurrection?” Whether your answer is “yes,” or “no,” you must be prepared to explain yourself. And you cannot afford to get this wrong.

“Not in vain did Thomas doubt thy Rising, O Christ: not in vain did he argue about it, but he went in eager haste to reveal it as an indisputable fact to all the nations. Therefore, having come to believe through incredulity, he taught all men to say: Thou art the Lord!” (Matins of Thomas Sunday, Canon, Ode 7)

An indisputable fact? For Thomas, yes. But for you and me? Have we had the opportunity to scrutinize Christ’s nail wounds to verify that this living Man is indeed the same one who was executed by crucifixion? No. Yet to us Christ offers these words of consolation: “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe” (John 20:29).

If we are in the camp of such blessed believers, we are in very good company. We place ourselves with Saint John the Theologian, who believed immediately upon seeing the empty tomb (where others thought only of a theft), even before knowing the Scriptures that said that Christ would rise (John 20:9). And we place ourselves with the Mother of God, who, the Church tells us, believed when the Archangel Gabriel greeted her, “Rejoice! And again, I say, Rejoice: your Son is risen from his three days in the tomb!” Not only that, we place ourselves in the company of countless thousands and, after the 20th century, millions of martyrs who have chosen to shed their own blood, even in prolonged torture, rather than to deny a fact which they never saw and which everyone knows is impossible.

Blessed indeed are those who belong to this company of believers! But what of those who doubt? They are blessed too if their doubt is like that of Thomas; a doubt which leads them to God, and not away from Him; a doubt which involves God and does not ignore Him; a doubt which is open to belief. Ask God, and you might be abundantly rewarded – and surprised – by what He shows you. You will probably not have the uniquely physical experience granted to Thomas, but something uniquely yours, and just as convincing, will be revealed, if you really want it and are patient.

In fact, however, we do share something of Thomas’s unique experience, and more so. His hand entered the wounds on Christ’s risen Body, but that entire risen Body enters our mouths at Holy Communion and, with His life-giving Blood, passes throughout our entire mortal bodies purifying and renewing them. Yet here also, faith is required, and faith that is made strong through a life worthy of what we believe.

Thomas had another unique experience which gave us yet another proof of the Resurrection. By God’s Providence he was not present at the death of the Mother of God—all the other Apostles were miraculously gathered together for this event. He arrived three days later and asked that her tomb might be opened for him to venerate that holy and pure Body which for nine blessed months had been the dwelling-place of God. When they opened the tomb it was empty, for our Lady the Theotokos had risen and joined her Son—soul and body—in the Kingdom. She receives the gift of Resurrection that is in store for every single human being that has ever lived. Do you believe that you also will rise?

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Discussion Questions:

Why do you believe in Christ's Resurrection?

Is it hard to maintain faith in Jesus Christ in our world filled with injustice, suffering, and death?

Is your doubt still open to belief?

Do you believe you will also rise? Does this belief impact your daily life in any way?