

A Year of the Lord: Volume 4 (Easter to Pentecost)

Author: Theodore Stylianopoulos
Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America Department of Religious Education

Permission granted to reproduce.
You may also order printed copies of this series at OrthodoxMarketplace.com

Chapter 2: Sunday of Thomas

Prayer

Sing: Christos Anesti (Christ is Risen)

Sunday of Thomas Dismissal Hymn

*Christ our God, while the tomb was sealed You rose from the grave as Life.
While the doors were closed You came among Your disciples as the resurrection of all.
And through the disciples You inaugurated a new Spirit among us.
How great is Your steadfast love, O Lord!*

Sing: Christos Anesti (Christ is Risen)

The Great Commission

The second Sunday of Easter, the Sunday of Thomas, is known as the Afterfeast of Pascha (*Antipascha*) The Epistle reading for the Sunday of Thomas is Acts 5:12-20 and the Gospel reading is John 20:19-29. Throughout the Paschal season the readings are taken from the Gospel of John and from Acts.

On the Sunday of Thomas a new cycle of the morning Gospel readings (*Eothina*) appointed for Sunday Matins begins. This cycle consists of eleven Gospel readings, all having to do with the resurrection of Christ. They are read sequentially on Sundays throughout the entire year. Each Sunday is the Lord's Day (*Kyriake*). Each Sunday we celebrate Christ's resurrection. The first morning Gospel of the eleven, the one we hear on the Sunday of Thomas, is Matthew 28:16-20.

Three themes stand out in the biblical readings for the Sunday of Thomas: the theme of mission, the theme of peace, and the theme of faith and doubt.

Read Mt. 28:16-20 (p. 45), a passage which has been called The Great Commission.

How did the eleven disciples react when they saw the risen Christ (vs. 17)?

They _____, but some _____.”

“Go _____.”

“Make _____.”

“Baptize _____.”

“Teach _____.”

What did Christ promise to the disciples (vs. 20b)? _____

Read Acts 5:12-20 (p. 164). What did the apostles perform among the people through the power of the resurrection (vs. 12)?

What was happening to the first group of Christian believers despite the threat of persecution (vs. 14)? _____

What was the angel’s charge to the apostles (vs. 20)?

Go and _____ and tell the people _____.”

By what power were they to conduct their mission (vs. 22)?

1. Do you need peace in your own life at this time? Explain.

2. What specific steps can you take by faith in Christ to have peace with God and to experience God’s peace?

3. As Christians we have been given “the task of making others God’s friends also” (2 Cor. 5:18). What does a Christian need in order to be a real peacemaker between people and God; and between people themselves?

Mediation

Mediate on the following verses from St. Paul’s Epistles:

To be controlled by human nature results in death; to be controlled by the Spirit results in life and peace (Rom. 8:6).

God’s kingdom is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of the righteousness, peace and joy which the Holy Spirit gives (Rom. 14-17).

The peace of Christ gives is to guide you in the decisions you make (Col. 3:15a).

Christ came and preached the Good News of peace to all (Eph. 2:17).

May God, the source of hope, fill you with all joy and peace by means of your faith in Him (Rom. 15:13).

Thomas' Doubt

The apostle Thomas was known as the "twin." In Hebrew and Aramaic the name Thomas means "twin," but we do not know who Thomas' twin was. From the little information the Gospels provide, Thomas seems to have been a man of simple absolutes. He assessed things by what was obvious. He was also capable of tremendous courage and loyalty. In the face of the hostility building up in Jerusalem against Jesus, Thomas had thought it foolish to go there. Yet he was willing to sacrifice his life along with Jesus. He was the one who said to the other disciples: "Let us all go along with the Teacher so that we may die with him" (Jn 11:16)! After the resurrection, according to tradition, St. Thomas preached in India. The Church of St. Thomas in India, one of the Oriental Orthodox Churches, claims St. Thomas as its founder.

Thomas responded in character when the other apostles told him about Christ's resurrection. Read John 20:24-29 (pp. 154-155), which is the second part of the Gospel reading for the Sunday of Thomas.

What did the disciples tell Thomas (vs. 25a)?

" _____ !"

What demand did Thomas make before he was willing to believe in Christ's resurrection (vs. 25b)? " _____

_____ "

What did the risen Christ, showing His hands and side to Thomas, say (vs. 27b)?

"Stop _____ "

What did Jesus say in reply to Thomas' powerful confession of faith (vs. 29)?

" _____

_____ "

To what was in fact one of the first expressions of "Christos Anesti" Thomas, a disciple, replied: "I don't believe it!" Nevertheless we would do Thomas an injustice if we were not to appreciate his complete change of mind once the evidence was before him. For when he saw the risen Christ he did not actually try to touch Him, but he immediately declared, "My Lord and my God!" These resounding words, addressing the risen Jesus with the divine titles of God, express the clear Christian teaching of the full deity of Christ. It was this conviction, sealed by Christ's resurrection, that empowered Thomas and the other apostles to bring the triumphant message of Christ to lands near and far.

1. There are different kinds of degrees of doubt, constructive and destructive. There is honest doubt which is genuinely open to faith, learning, and growth. There is a wavering doubt arising from inner emotional weakness and inability to make a commitment. There is a rebellious doubt which comes from the selfishness and pride and which denies God's existence and eternal moral values. There is also the doubt implicit in the "practical atheism" of those who believe and yet act as if they do not believe, or what has been called the apostasy of the masses. Solzhenitsyn wrote "Men have forgotten God." Which of these was Thomas' doubt? Explain. _____

2. What are your doubts? How do you deal with them?

3. Why do you think Christ pronounced the blessing: "How happy (or blessed) are those who believe without seeing me: (Jn 20:29b)? What are some different ways of "seeing" Jesus?

4. How can we help people overcome destructive kinds of doubt?

Mediation

While I was reading the beginning of St. Mark's Gospel, before I reached the third chapter, I suddenly became aware that on the other side of my desk there was a presence, and certainty was so strong that it was Christ standing there that it has never left me. This was the real turning point. Because Christ was alive and I had been in His presence I could say with certainty that what the Gospel said about the crucifixion of the prophet of Galilee was true, and the centurion was right when he said: "Truly he is the Son of God."

Archbishop Anthony Bloom

Prayer

Sing: Christos Anesti (Christ is Risen)

*Almighty Jesus our God, when the doors were closed You suddenly came among Your disciples.
Standing in their midst You granted them peace and filled them with the Holy Spirit.*

*Lord, come also in our midst. Grant us Your peace which the world cannot give, and fill our hearts with grace of the Holy Spirit.
For you are our light, resurrection, and peace and to You we give glory forever. Amen.*

Adapted Vesper Hymn
Sunday of Thomas

Sing: Christ is Risen (Christos Anesti)