**Thomas**
*The disciples were afraid of the Jewish leaders, and on the evening of that same Sunday they locked themselves in a room. Suddenly, Jesus appeared in the middle of the group. He greeted them and showed them his hands and his side. When the disciples saw the Lord, they became very happy.*

*After Jesus had greeted them again, he said, "I am sending you, just as the Father has sent me." Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they will be forgiven. But if you don't forgive their sins, they will not be forgiven."*

Although Thomas the Twin was one of the twelve disciples, he wasn't with the others when Jesus appeared to them. So they told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But Thomas said, "First, I must see the nail scars in his hands and touch them with my finger. I must put my hand where the spear went into his side. I won't believe unless I do this!"

*A week later the disciples were together again. This time, Thomas was with them. Jesus came in while the doors were still locked and stood in the middle of the group. He greeted his disciples and said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and look at my hands! Put your hand into my side. Stop doubting and have faith!"*

*Thomas replied, "You are my Lord and my God!" Jesus said, "Thomas, do you have faith because you have seen me? The people who have faith in me without seeing me are the ones who are really blessed!"*

## John 20:19-29

## Background

On Easter Sunday Jesus appeared to the disciples and proclaimed the good news of the Resurrection. The disciple Thomas was not there. He had to wait a full week before he was able to see Christ for himself. Historically, Thomas has been held up to significant criticism. He’s been called a “doubting Thomas”, a term applied to anyone with questions of faith.

December 21st is the historical festival of St. Thomas. It’s the day of the winter solstice. It’s the year's longest night and shortest day. Thomas is remembered this day because he was the last of the apostles to be convinced of Jesus' resurrection and thereby had the longest night of unbelief and doubt.

Over the years people have associated Thomas with those who were incomplete, needed help, were last, or were all alone. In Germany, the Domesel or Thomasfaulpelz (*the lazy bone or “donkey of St. Thomas Day”*) were names given to the last person to get out of bed or for the last student to appear in class on December 21st.

In historic England, the festival of St Thomas was a day of charity; the poor went a "Thomasing" or begging. Thomas was the patron saint of those in need. Food was cooked and distributed for the poor. The genteel beggars would give their benefactors a sprig of holly. The following verse was sung:

*Christmas is coming; the goose is getting fat,*

*Please put a penny in the old man’s hat.*

*If you haven’t got a penny, Half-a-penny will do.*

*If you haven’t got half-a-penny; God bless you!*

Thomas is mentioned as a disciple in all four Gospels. He was consider neither the most nor the least important of the twelve disciples. The first time we hear from Thomas (in John) is the eleventh chapter. Jesus and the disciples have just been told that Lazarus is dead. To visit the family, they must first go to Jerusalem. Threats have been made and they know Jerusalem is not safe. Thomas doesn’t hesitate and shows courage by saying, "Come along. We might as well die with him" (*John 11*).

During the preparation for the Last Supper, Thomas asked, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him’ (*John 14:5-7*).

The Way that Jesus spoke of is not some geographical location on a map. It is a description of God’s revelation in Jesus. To know “the way" is the same as knowing Jesus himself. Thomas’ question resulted in an important faith message for us all.

Thomas was absent when the Risen Lord appeared to the other apostles on Easter day. He refused to believe that Christ had risen until he saw for himself. When he had seen the Risen Savior he exclaimed, "My Lord and My God" (John 20:19-29).

Actually, Thomas did not ask for any sign that was different from the things the disciples had seen on Easter Sunday. The disciples, themselves, had doubts when Mary Magdalene returned from the tomb and announced that Christ had risen from the dead.

## Reflections

We all have doubts at times. Doubts raise questions and inspire us to seek answers. The only foolish questions are the ones never asked. To criticize Thomas for having doubts or questions is quite inappropriate. Doubt gives way to faith just as darkness gives way to light.

We should criticize Thomas for turning away from the fellowship of believers when he needed them the most. The disciples were afraid and confused. On Good Friday (original name is God’s Friday), they lost their Lord and master. On Easter Sunday, the followers of Christ were filled with fear. They gathered together in the same Upper Room where Jesus had shared the Last Supper. In that special place, the Lord was made known to them, again. Christ had risen. Christ had risen indeed. Alleluia!

Thomas was alone in his grief. He missed hearing and seeing the Good News. Fellowship is a special gift from God. We come together to share our stories, needs, trials, sorrows, help, and joys. The Risen Lord appeared to a fellowship of believers on Easter morning. Today Christ is made known when we gather as his family and care for each other.

Many early church authors indicate St. Thomas eventually preached in "India.” Today we celebrate the life of Thomas for the questions he asked and for showing us the importance of fellowship. His story is known throughout the world.

*But when my hand*

*led by His hand's firm clasp*

*entered the unhealed wound,*

*my fingers encountering*

*rib-bone and pulsing heat,*

*what I felt was not*

*scalding pain, shame for my*

*obstinate need, but light, light streaming*

*into me, over me, filling the room*

*as if I had lived till then*

*in a cold cave, and now*

*coming forth for the first time,*

*the knot that bound me unraveling,*

*I witnessed all things quicken to color, to form,*

*my question, not answered, but given its part*

*in a vast, unfolding design lit*

*by a risen sun.*

from “St. Thomas Didymus*”* by Denise Levertov

**Strength Finders talent: Analytical**

[**https://www.gallup.com/cliftonstrengths/en/252152/analytical-theme.aspx**](https://www.gallup.com/cliftonstrengths/en/252152/analytical-theme.aspx)

This strength encourages you to ask the tough questions. You are open to new ideas and theories, but you want to understand how those concepts are provable. Seeking more information is a way of engaging not rejection.

Thomas earnestly wanted to believe and understand; he just needed more information. That is never a fault. In many ways it can be a blessing because others may have the same concerns and yet do not have the clarity of inquiry.

This strength can also be helpful in uncovering faulty assumptions or claims. The analytical talent helps separate the wheat from the chaff. We all benefit from helpful critical thinking.

**Enneagram connections: Five**

[**https://cpenneagram.com/enneagram-type-five**](https://cpenneagram.com/enneagram-type-five)

Fives often have this understanding of self-sufficiency. Thomas may have been absent from the upper room because he needed time with his thoughts. This would be enhanced if he was a self-preserving five.

Although Thomas appears in all four Gospels, John has a special affinity for telling his story. John as a fellow five would have better understood Thomas’ journey. John was a social five that sought fellowship in time of need, Thomas was not a coward, he had shown courage in his willingness to follow Jesus. Thomas was challenged with believing he was self-sufficient and sought to protect his fragile emotions.

A low level five can retire to their cave of choice and keep their talents and insights to themselves. John was a high level five who followed Jesus to the cross. During Holy Week, Thomas was lower level five. Fortunately, the resurrection on Easter changes the world and helps to transform us.

## Questions

1. St Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) wrote the following prayer. He struggled with doubts during the violent crusades and later found God’s peace. What is the importance of faith? Joy? Love? Pardon? Giving? Peace? Eternal Life?

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love. Where there is injury, pardon.

###### Where there is doubt, faith. Where there is despair, hope.

Where there is darkness, light. Where there is sadness, joy.

Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console,

To be understood as to understand, to be loved, as to love,

For it's in giving that we receive, and it's in pardoning that we are pardoned,

And it's in dying that we are born to eternal life, Amen."

2. Why do some Christians avoid going to church or participating in activities? What are they missing? What can we do to welcome them?

3. The secret of finding meaningful answers is usually asking significant questions. Do you spend sufficient time in search of God’s truth? What more can you do?