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## **Archbishop Elpidophoros of America, Homily for the Sunday of Thomas**



His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America

Homily for the Sunday of Thomas

Saint Thomas Greek Orthodox Church

Cherry Hill, New Jersey

May 9, 2020

Brothers and Sisters in the Risen Christ,

Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη! [and in response: Ἀληθῶς Ἀνέστη!]

Christ is Risen! [and in response: Truly He is Risen!]

I am so very pleased to be with you, the faithful of Saint Thomas in Cherry Hill, on this your Feast Day of Thomas the Twin.

Thomas is the mystic of the Eighth Day – for the day on which he encountered the

Risen Lord was eight days after the Resurrection.

He is the Disciple, who at the death of Lazarus, proclaimed his willingness to die with Jesus.[\*]

And then, he is the Disciple who required proof of the Resurrection. But when the moment came to touch the reality of the Risen Lord, he fell to his knees and cried aloud: "My Lord and my God!" [†] He is Δίδυμος - the Twin; for his mind is of two aspects. On the one hand, he is enthusiastic to die with the Lord, but on the other, he doubts the testimony of His Rising from the Tomb.

You see, Thomas was not present with the other Disciples on the evening of Pascha, which we commemorate with the Agape Vespers. He did not have the witness of the community, when the Lord appeared to the rest of them miraculously, though the doors were sealed shut - καὶ τῶν θυρῶν κεκλεισμένων.

We cannot underestimate the testimony of those with whom we share the fellowship of the faith. To be with others, and to experience the wondrous truth of God with them, is a powerful spiritual force.

Thomas had spent three years with his fellow Disciples, but he was not with them when the Lord appeared on the evening of Holy Pascha.

We do not know where he was. Was he in hiding, afraid for his own life? Ashamed that he had not stood his ground when his Lord was arrested? Or was it just too painful for him to accept the horrors of the crucifixion?

But when the others told him of the Resurrection of their Lord and Master, Thomas said:

"Unless I see in His hands the mark of the nails, and unless I put my finger into the wound of the nails, and unless I stick my hand into His side, I will never believe!"[‡]

Thomas is so contrary, so defiant, and I think, full of pain. In Greek the expression, "I will never believe!" is very strong: οὐ μὴ πιστεύσω. And so, Thomas sets up a seemingly impossible challenge to defy the hopes and faith of his fellow Disciples.

But this stubbornness melted like butter before the presence of the Loving Lord. It was this very Sunday, or as the Scripture says:

After eight days, the Disciples were again assembled inside, and this time, Thomas was with them. Though the doors were sealed shut, Jesus came and stood in their

midst and said, "Peace be unto you."

Then Jesus addressed Thomas, "Bring your finger here and probe My hands. And take your hand and put it into My side. And doubt no more, but believe!"[§]

We never read whether Thomas actually touched the Risen Body of the Lord. In the icons of this moment – in the icon of your Feast – his finger approaches, but it remains unclear whether it meets its mark.

What is clear, though, is that the Lord offered him this extraordinary proof. Even in His triumphant Resurrection, our Lord Jesus Christ condescends to our human frailty. There is no depth to which our God will descend, nor height to which He will climb in order to bring us with Himself to eternal salvation.

And Thomas cried out to Him, "My Lord and my God!" [\*\*]

He is brought to His knees by His Master's patience and sublime forbearance. And these very same mercies will always abound for us as well, just as they did for Thomas.

My beloved Christians,

Today, on your feast of the Eighth Day of the Resurrection – when you commemorate this transformation of pain to joy, and of doubt to faith – let us give thanks for Thomas. His absence from the community was only temporary. His defiance was the occasion of a most marvelous mercy. And his confession of faith is the truth of Orthodoxy. Jesus is, indeed, both Lord and God!

By the holy prayers of Saint Thomas, may we be found worthy to make the same confession, this day, and at the Appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who although was dead, is alive forevermore![††]

Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη! [Ἀληθῶς Ἀνέστη!]

[\*] John 11:16.

[†] John 20:28.

[‡] John 20:25.

[§] John 20:26-27.

[\*\*] John 20:28.

[††] Revelation 1:18.

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