

REFLECTION

Feast of St. Thomas

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“You believe in me Thomas, because you have seen me.” These are words that I believe Christ spoke to Thomas, and to each of us also. Last week in her reflection, Mary Ellen Sheehan asked “Do you believe you are precious to God? I know at certain points in my life, I wanted to believe that, but somehow couldn’t. A lot of inner work needed to be done.

With time and maturing, I recalled experiences of God, whether through dreams or of people who were extraordinarily caring or kind and loving. I recognized God’s love was personal, loving and caring.

It was only through those experiences **reflected upon**, that I could hear through the scriptures or events or people or everyday happenings that the message of God’s love could be heard.

Today on this feast of St Thomas, the Apostle, we hear again the Easter narrative about Thomas, not present for the first appearance of the Risen Jesus to the Apostles in the upper room. With excitement, the other Apostles and disciples told Thomas what had happened. He could NOT believe, unless it was his own experience. “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nail marks and put my hand into his side I will not believe.”

From that comment, Thomas gained the reputation of “Doubting Thomas”. Was that really the heart of it? Or does what Thomas said, have a deeper meaning?

The following week, when Thomas was with the other Apostles in the Upper Room, the Risen Christ again, stood in their midst. He first greeted all of them.

Then, Christ addressed Thomas directly. He knew well, what was in the heart of Thomas. He did not correct or belittle him for not believing. Instead, the Risen Christ responded to Thomas in a respectful and loving way. For Thomas this was a valid need, his own experience of Christ, and God gave it to him.

“Put your finger here and see my hands and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe.” Undoubtedly, Thomas felt very humble at that point, knowing God had responded to him just as he was, just as he needed.

What did this experience do for Thomas and what can it teach us? For Thomas and others who had the experience of the Risen Christ, as we see in the life of St Paul also, the personal experience of God changes us. We cannot be the same. They had a new strength, no longer afraid, now, not hesitant to go beyond what they could ever imagine.

God knows our hearts when they are filled with zeal, nothing can stop us from proclaiming the Kingdom of God in our lives, in the way we are called to live the Gospel at our particular time of life, still working for justice, making efforts to overcome racism, becoming more aware of our role in caring for the earth, caring for the hungry, the poor, the abused, the lonely, assisting and working to love one another.

Our own needs and desire, uniquely personal, are not to be kept from God. They are heard and responded to, in a way that often humbles us when recognized, and given back to God for the good of others. Our own experiences can make us more aware of others, in their needs, more compassionate, more respecting.

St Thomas went on to proclaim the divinity of the risen Christ. “My Lord and my God.” Thomas was courageous, willing to stand by Jesus in dangerous times. He also, relentlessly sought the truth. Like an inquisitive child, he constantly asked questions. After Pentecost, Thomas was sent to evangelize the Parthians, Medes, and Persians; he ultimately reached India, and carried the Faith to Malabar on the south-western coast of India. He is recognized as the founder of the Church of the Syrian [Malabar Christians](#), or known as Christians of St. Thomas. They lay claim to conversion Thomas himself. Their tradition holds that he built seven churches, was martyred during prayer by a spearing on the “Big Hill” near Madras, and was buried in Mylapore, now known as [Chennai](#) on the south east coast of India. Ultimately, St. Thomas’ remains were transported to Ortona, Italy, where they are today.

Reflecting on St. Thomas can help us treasure our own experiences of God, where, and to what they have led us to do, and be for the good of others, by being true to our best self, loved and treasured by God.