

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

"You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor." "We should fear and love God so that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, slander him, or hurt his reputation, but defend him, speak well of him, and explain everything in the kindest way."

Over the centuries since the early church, St. Thomas has gotten a bit of a bum rap. No longer is he referred to as the Twin, as the Scriptures label him, but as the Doubter—Doubting Thomas. Now, it certainly isn't a lie to say that he doubted; today's text illustrates for you one such time when that was the case, and it is this text which has led the church these days to call him the Doubter. But what does such a label and name make of his reputation? He is now known as the Doubter, and people think the lesser of him compared to the other apostles, and especially in comparison to themselves. His reputation has been hurt, it's borderline slanderous, and as a result, few speak well of him or explain things in the kindest way.

Consequently, you have been more than a little unfair in calling Thomas the Doubter. If you are going to be honest, he was not asking for anything more than the other apostles had already received. Jesus appeared to the 10 of them the evening of the Resurrection. He speaks peace to them who had been shut up in that room with the doors locked for fear of the Jews. It wasn't until He proved to them that He was really Jesus, by showing them His hands and side, that they were glad to see Him.

What were they thinking in those few moments between Jesus appearing and saying, "Peace be with you," and showing them His holy wounds? I suppose they were all thinking, "Is this really Him?" And Jesus, knowing their doubts, showed them His hands and side. The Word is efficacious, to be sure—it does what it says it does—but doubt has a way of removing its effect from you; the Word says one thing, but you don't believe it or believe something else instead. Jesus said, "Peace be with you," and they certainly would have had peace had they not doubted the giver of that peace. So, He shows them His hands and side, and **then** they were glad.

They run off to find Thomas and tell Him what had happened. Jesus came into the room and gave them heavenly peace. He showed them His hands and side. He breathed on them and gave them the Spirit. He gave them authority to forgive and retain sins—the Office of the Keys! He sent them out into the world to exercise this authority. "We have seen the Lord!" What was Thomas supposed to think? I can think of three responses.

1. "Well, I guess that lets me off the hook. I get to stay here and get back to my job while you fellows bring this message of Christ crucified and risen to the rest of the world. Y'all have fun now, ya hear!"
2. "Shoot! I wish I would have been there. Do you think this authority and sending applies to me too since I walked with Him these past three years? Or does something else need to happen to me so that I can see to the task for which I was prepared as you guys were these last three years?"
3. "That's fine and good, but, 'Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.'"

Thomas was asking for nothing more than the 10 had received; the only difference is that he vocally expressed what they were very likely thinking.

And for all of this, you call him the Doubter. The Evangelist St. Matthew wrote the words of Jesus: "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you." (Matthew 7:1-2) Last week, I called you all Peter; this week, the judgment is that you're Thomas!

So, think about it! Do you not also wrestle with moments of doubt. When the going's good, it's easy to acknowledge and believe in God and His Son whom He sent. But when those dark clouds start appearing—disease and illness, death and destruction, even guilt that just won't go away—doubt creeps in and you begin to wonder if God really exists, or if He does, if He really loves you and sent His Son for you. This is all the work of the devil, the world, and your own sinful flesh which seek to drag you away from the grace that Jesus has won for you by His death and resurrection, and doubt is the number one weapon in use. One of two things usually ends up happening: you lock yourself away like the 10, or you go off on your own like Thomas.

Fear caused the 10 to lock themselves away from the rest of the world and the rest of the church. They didn't know what was going on, even though Jesus had told them all things. They doubted what He had said, I imagine because what happened was a lot worse than what they imagined would happen when Jesus told them all things. But Jesus also told them that He would rise again, yet they doubted and locked themselves away.

Similarly, when you begin to doubt, you lock yourself away from your brothers and sisters. Now, I don't mean that you go to a room and lock the door behind you, but that you lock what is bothering you inside and put on the façade of being alright or normal. All the while, what is bothering you nags at you and eats at you from the inside, and the doubt festers. You are physically present for the Word, you hear the absolution, and you receive the Lord's Supper, but your doubt becomes for you a stumbling block actually to receiving everything that these gifts from God are to give you. You have locked yourself away in a world of doubt.

Why Thomas was not with the 10 is not really known, though one possibility is that he was just as frightened as the 10 and ran off to be by himself for a while. Thomas completely removed Himself from where Jesus met the 10, though in his case, he had no reason to know that Jesus was going to appear to them there. However, he also removed Himself from the fellowship of the other 10 and likely also the church of 120 at the time. (cf. Acts 1:15) Things weren't going as he imagined, and he removed himself from the situation, doubting that Jesus would rise again.

Similarly, when you begin to doubt, you remove yourself further and further away from the fellowship of your fellow saints in Christ. First, it's just a Sunday, and you may try to make a return the next week, probably locking what's bothering you inside, but as time goes on, it becomes easier and easier to avoid the gathering. What's more is that you begin to avoid contact with your fellow saints away from this place, skipping down the next aisle at Safeway or Walmart to avoid a confrontation and having to talk to those who otherwise care for you. What happens, though, is that you are no longer in the Word of God, you are not in the place where He meets you with Holy Absolution and the Sacraments, and you lock yourself away in a world of doubt.

What's a doubter to do? How about ask for the same thing that Thomas did? How about ask for the same thing that the father of the demon-possessed son asked for: "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief"? (cf. Mark 9:24) How about meeting Jesus where He says He is for you, confess your doubts to your pastor, and receive Holy Absolution and counsel in the Word of God.

The week following Jesus' appearance in the locked upper room, He does the same thing again. Again the doors were shut and locked, but this time, Thomas is with them. He gets exactly the same treatment that the other 10 got the week before, only this time, Jesus takes Thomas' hand and puts it into the hole in His hands and into His riven side. "Do not be unbelieving, but believing." "My Lord and My God." Thomas got exactly what he needed from Jesus, Law to kill the doubt and Gospel to bring him back to life and faith in Jesus. He may have doubted, but no more than the other 10—or any other disciples of Christ, for that matter—but He was forgiven.

Perhaps it would be better to refer to him as the Twin, as the Scriptures call him. Who his actual twin was, the Scriptures don't say. However, you are like a twin to him, struggling with doubts as he is,

who having expressed those doubts, was granted the joy of confessing Jesus as His Lord and God. Your temporal life in Christ is given as a mirror of his.

Therefore, dear twins of Thomas, cast your cares and fears upon Jesus. Confess your doubt and unbelief. Know that these kill you and bring you back under the wrath of God that Jesus had once before taken for you in full; by them, you rip from Him the sins and wrath which He bore for you. Receive Holy Absolution. The Office of the Keys you see established in today's text is exercised in your midst, even to this day! By this Office, be reminded again and again of your baptism. See yourself in those waters where you were claimed as a son of God, a saint in fellowship with the church of times past and the saints in this place. By this, Jesus strengthens your faith, helping your unbelief.

Also find the medicine against your sins and doubt and unbelief in the Supper. You are called to the table of the Lord whereat you receive from Him His body and bread and His blood and wine. You receive the very body of Jesus wherein Thomas' hand was placed, whereat the blood of Life once flowed for him and for you! In these, you receive the forgiveness of your sins, life, and salvation. And Jesus is present in the Sacrament to strengthen your faith, helping your unbelief.

The 10 saw Jesus and His wounds that first Easter evening and believed. Thomas saw Jesus the next week, even had his hands placed into Jesus' wounds. Just as valid and certain, Jesus is present here now for you and gives you the very same gifts that the 10 and Thomas received. The difference is that you are not able to see Him in His flesh as they did. "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

The thing is, seeing is not believing. Seeing is seeing; believing does not operate by sight. "[W]e walk by faith, not by sight." (2 Corinthians 5:7)

So, dear Thomasses or twins of Thomas, you have the Word of God, the very witness of the Apostles who proclaim to you that they have seen the Lord! "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." You have been given faith in the waters of Holy Baptism. That faith is strengthened again and again in your hearing of the Word, in receiving Holy Absolution, and in the eating and drinking in the Lord's Supper. Therefore, "Do not be unbelieving, but believing." You are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.