

The Incredulity of Saint Thomas by Caravaggio, c.1601

IN THE EYES OF MOST of those who saw Him hanging on His cross that Friday afternoon, Jesus the prophet from Nazareth had utterly failed. The Jewish authorities had exposed Him as a fraud, His closest disciples had forsaken Him, and even God seemed to have abandoned Him. In the eyes of the world, this final tragic act of an otherwise promising performance was hardly a surprise. Could an upstart from the backwaters of Nazareth really have expected to prevail over the powers that be in the great city of Jerusalem? Most of His disciples, who had expected great things from Jesus, now looked on with horror as their hopes and dreams were crucified with Him. In the eyes of both friend and foe, the death of Jesus on a cross could

only mean defeat and a total, irreparable one at that. Yet for us who live after the resurrection of Christ, we know that this was not the moment of His downfall, but actually that of His greatest victory.

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The irony of Good Friday is that Christ’s enemies seem to have had a better memory for His words than did His own disciples. No sooner is our Lord taken down from the cross than we find the chief priests and Pharisees crowding about Pilate saying, “Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise again.’” (Matt 27:63) Meanwhile, the last thing His Apostles seemed to expect was the resurrection of their Friend and Master, the Son of God. With Thomas they might have said, “Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side,

I will not believe.” (John 20:25) Who can blame them? Had Jesus died a peaceful death in bed perhaps they would have been less surprised to see Him alive again a few days later. However, He died a most agonizing and torturous death, covered in wounds from head to toe with a lance thrust into His heart. If raising oneself from the dead seemed unlikely to the average man, rising from *this* kind of death seemed well beyond the imagination of anyone!

There are many strange and seemingly paradoxical things that we believe as Christians. We believe in one God, yet three Persons; we believe that Jesus Christ is fully God and Man; we believe that the things He told us like, “He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matt 10:39) are true,

no matter how counterintuitive they may seem. We believe these things because we believe Him and we believe Him first and foremost because we believe that He truly rose from the dead on the third day after His death on a cross. That this is not simply one truth among many of our Faith, but the central and predominant one on which everything else hangs, is demonstrated by St. Paul who preached Christ and the Resurrection so much that the Athenian philosophers thought that he was talking about two gods (cf. Acts 17:18)! Yet, it is not only our faith that hangs on it, but also our hope. Did not St. Peter say, “By [God’s] great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet 1:3)?

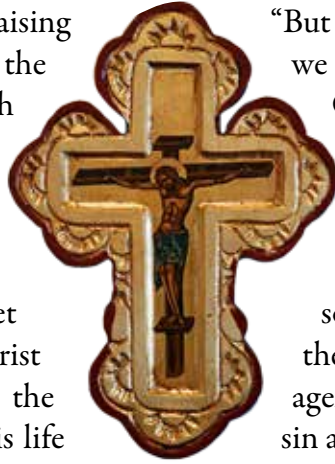
Throughout our Lord’s ministry, whenever He spoke of His Passion and death He nearly always concluded with words on His resurrection. The two are inexorably linked together. St. Thomas Aquinas wrote that it was fitting that Christ should rise from the dead because, among other reasons, His resurrection gives us hope, “since through seeing Christ, who is our head, rise

again, we hope that we likewise shall rise again.” As we know, by baptism Christ lives in each one of us and we are “sacramentally assimilated to Jesus, who in his own baptism anticipates his death and resurrection” (CCC 537). Also St. Paul writes in his letter to the Romans,

“But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. For we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him.” Certainly this is what we profess to believe, but when it comes to our own lives, do we live it? Perhaps we find something of the spirit of the two disciples on their way to Emmaus in us: A spirit of discouragement and doubt in the face of the powers of sin and death (cf. Lk 24:13-ff).

We who live almost two thousand years after the death and resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ, who did not see the marks in His hands and feet, nor put our hands in His side, tend to file away the resurrection as one article of our faith among many. Certainly we believe it, even rejoice in it. Yet do we really see the meaning of the resurrection in our own lives? Do

we understand how life can never be the same when our Lord rose from the dead? Here is the test: How often do we think about the resurrection? Certainly on Easter and maybe (for the liturgically savvy) on Sundays, but what about all the other days of our lives? How about when we are suffering or watching others suffer; when sin and death seem to have the last word? It is at times like these when we must recall that death has already lost its sting. While it is true that we still suffer and die yet that same suffering is given new, redemptive meaning by Christ’s own suffering and death. He has traced out for us the path to eternal life and that path goes right through Golgotha and the Cross. That the resurrection of Christ is an indelible sign and promise of our own resurrection, gives us the



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hope that our stories do not end on Good Friday any more than did His.

Indeed, we all take our turns on the cross, some for shorter, some for longer periods of time. At times such as these, we especially hear the taunts from the world below, as did our Lord: “let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him” (Matt 27:42). Rather than “come down” by finding some way to escape from our cross, we must hold fast to the cross and to Christ, Who always shares our sufferings with us

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or, rather, lets us share in His sufferings, which are always redemptive. And herein lies our hope: as long as we are united to Christ, our sufferings are not in vain.

For, as the Apostle says, “If we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. For we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him” (Rom 6:8-9). Nor does it have dominion over us who belong to Him.

