

Author Fr. Jack McArdle wrote about a pilgrimage he led to the Holy Land. One of the young men in the group was quite mentally limited, although his grasp of God, of Jesus, and the events of the gospel were uncanny.

After arriving at the tomb of the Basilica, they encountered a lady who had just come out of the tomb and was obviously deeply touched by the experience of her visit to such a sacred spot. She sat down outside the entrance, took out a tissue, and began wiping her tears.

His special friend, who was back in the line, spotted what was happening, and responded instantly. He ran straight up to her, put his hand on her shoulder and said, "Don't be crying, it's OK. He's alive; don't you know that?" "Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed", though it was not so obvious for Thomas.

Today's gospel says that the apostle Thomas was called "Didymus." "Didymus" is Greek for "twin." The apostle Thomas may have had a twin sister or brother. Twins run in families. Twins run in the Christian family of faith. Most of us, in some ways, are twins of the apostle Thomas, the Doubting Thomas.

If you find it unflattering to be a twin of the doubting Thomas, it will be helpful to know more about this apostle who has been a victim of bad press. The only thing that most know about Thomas is the story of today's gospel. Thomas is remembered as the doubter among the other faithful apostles, the stubborn hold-out, who demanded tangible proof.

Even our secular culture refers to a skeptic as "A Doubting Thomas." In fairness, Christians ought to know more about the apostle Thomas.

\*What if the only thing we knew of St. Peter was that he denied Christ three times?

\*What if the only information given about Mary Magdalene was her sins? We also need a complete picture of the apostle Thomas.

In addition to today's well-known passage, there are two other gospel stories involving Thomas.

The first occurs when Christ says that he is going back to Bethany to comfort the grieving family of Lazarus. The apostles had just come from Bethany where a mob had tried to kill Jesus. All the other apostles protested that returning to Bethany would endanger them.

Only Thomas spoke up and said, “Let us go along to die with him.” Those are not the words of a skeptic, but of a loyal friend. This time Thomas is again the odd man out, not in doubt, but in loyalty.

The other gospel story involving Thomas occurs when Jesus explained that he must return to the Father. Christ said, “I am going to prepare a place for you... Where I am going you know the way.” Thomas replied, “Master we do not even know where you are going; how can we know the way?” That is not a lack of faith. That is an honest faith. Who of us has said to the Lord, “I’m not sure where my life is going? How can I know the way?”

Thomas admits he does not understand, but he wants to understand his faith. If we piece together all the accounts of Thomas in the gospels, we have not only the well-known doubting Thomas, but also the loyal Thomas, and the honest Thomas. Honest, loyal, yet questioning. Those are not the qualities of a skeptical doubter. Those are the qualities of a sincere believer.

Saint Gregory wrote, “Our faith owes more to the doubts of Thomas than to the faith of all the other apostles,” meaning that our doubts must be faced if our faith is to grow. An unexamined faith is not an authentic faith. Thomas is a model for modern Christians who raise honest questions, from the perspective of a sincere faith.

The faith of Thomas should also give hope to weary Christians. Too often we focus on the limitations of our faith. Occasional failures convince some that they are not worthy Christians. The faith of Thomas reminds us that our consistent faith is more important than our occasional doubts, our loyalty more important than a few lapses, our strengths more important than our weaknesses.

Nor should we brand others for a single failure. A child, for example, can be overwhelmed by one temptation to dishonesty and be reminded ever after that he is a liar.

\*A spouse forgets one anniversary and is branded as thoughtless. Or in my case, my mother’s birthday!

\*An employee makes one unfortunate mistake and is marked as unreliable.

It is not right to let one failure overshadow consistent goodness. Any informed Christian would be honored to be a twin of the Apostle Thomas. Thomas doubted, but he was not a cynical unbeliever. From his honest doubts, we have the greatest expression of our faith, “My Lord and my God.”

+Scholar William Barclay pointed out that Thomas did make one mistake. He withdrew from the Christian fellowship. Things can happen to us within the Church which will not happen when we are alone. He sought loneliness rather than togetherness. And because he was not there with his fellow Christians, he missed the first coming of Jesus.

When sadness envelops us, we often tend to shut ourselves up and refuse to meet others. That is the very time when, in spite of our sorrow, we should seek the communion of one another, for it is there that we are likeliest of all to meet him face to face and he embrace us with his words of mercy: "Peace be with you."

Tradition says that Thomas died in India as a martyr for his faith when an Indian king, angry that he couldn't get Thomas to worship an idol, ordered his high priest to stab Thomas with a spear. I suspect his last words were, "MY Lord and my God."