



HOLY TRINITY

ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH



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CHURCH BULLETIN

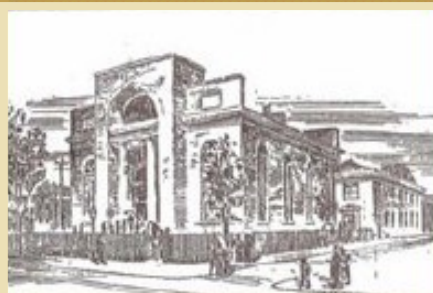
Vol. 13 No. 18 * Sunday April 26, 2020 * Editor: V. Rev. Fr. Nicolai Buga

Sunday of Saint Thomas

Gospel Reading **John 20: 19 – 31**

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.' But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the

other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.' A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'



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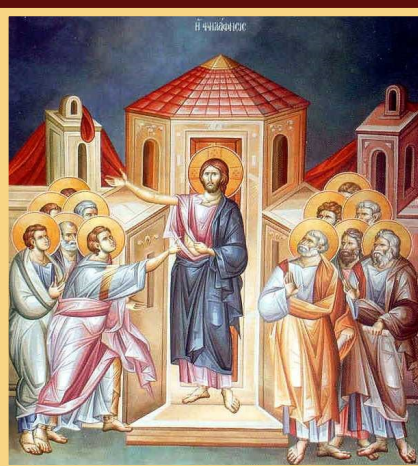
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Apostle Reading **Acts of the Apostles 5:12-20**

Now many signs and wonders were done among the people through the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. None of the rest dared to join them, but the people held them in high esteem. Yet more than ever believers were added to the Lord, great numbers of both men and women, so that they even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on cots and mats, in order that Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he came by. A great number of people would

also gather from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all cured. Then the high priest took action; he and all who were with him (that is, the sect of the Sadducees), being filled with jealousy, arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors, brought them out, and said, 'Go, stand in the temple and tell the people the whole message about this life.'

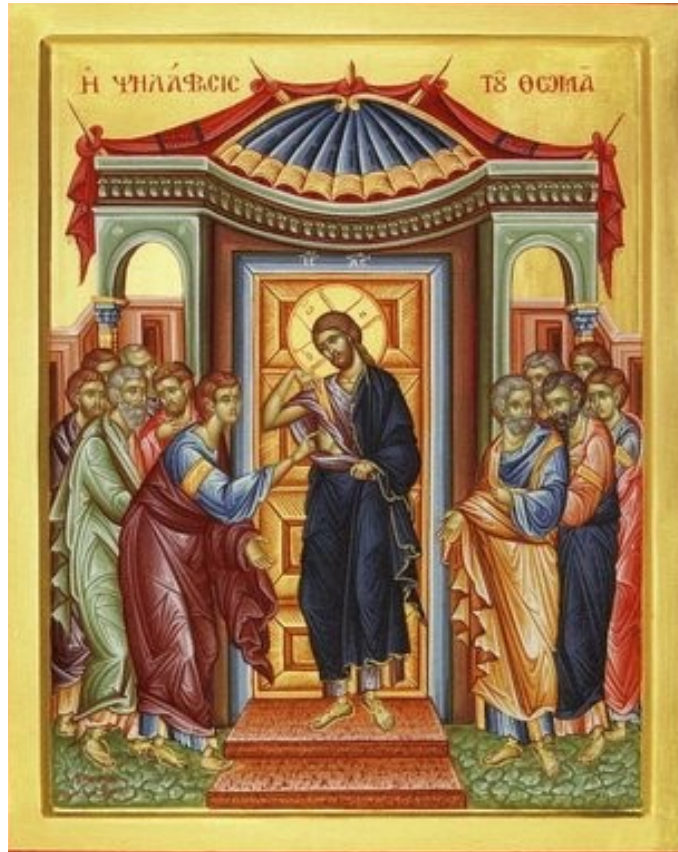
Synaxarion. Sunday April 26, 2020 - Sunday of Saint Thomas (the 2nd after Pascha): Holy Hieromartyr Basil, Bishop of Amasia; Saint Glaphira; Holy Martyrs Cyril, Kindeas and Tasius of Axiopolis (Cernavodă, Romania)

Homily for Thomas Sunday

Christ is Risen!

We have only begun our celebration of Pascha, of our Lord's victory over death in His glorious resurrection on the third day. Perhaps one of the reasons that Pascha is a season of forty days is that it takes us a good while to let the good news sink in. For not only is Christ raised from the dead, we are too. Now not even the tomb is not a shadowy place of separation from God, but an entry way to the Kingdom of Heaven where the departed are in the presence of the One Who has conquered death. And the Risen Lord calls every human being to life eternal, including you and me. For Jesus Christ is raised with His Body as a whole, complete human being who is also God. We share in His resurrection already through our participation in His Body, the Church. We are nourished with His glorified, risen Body and Blood each Divine Liturgy in the Holy Eucharist. Our mortal bodies receive the medicine of immortality when we are nourished by the One Who has conquered the grave. We put on His Body through baptism, are filled with the Holy Spirit in Chrismation, and in all the other sacraments and ministries of the Church we share ever more fully in the new life that Pascha has brought to the world. "Pascha" means Passover; Jesus Christ is our Passover from death to life; and our entire life in His Risen Body, the Church, is an ongoing participation in the new day of the Kingdom that He has begun, which should transform every dimension of our lives, seven days a week.

A confused, weak, and often divided group that included fishermen, a tax-collector, and a zealot; which collectively ran away in fear at the crucifixion; and the leader of which denied the Lord three times, is now a powerhouse of miraculous healings and bold preaching. What has happened to them?



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The answer is clear: Christ has conquered sin and death in their lives. He has filled them with the Holy Spirit. He has empowered them to manifest His new life and ministry. "Peace be to you. As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." The salvation which Lord came to bring now lives in them. He lives in them. Christ is the vine, and they are the branches. They are members of the Body of which He is the Head. His victory over sin, the grave, and all human corruption is now theirs. And you can see the change in their lives.

And even as we live and breathe and go through our routines at work, school, home, and in this parish, the same is true of us. Christ's victory over sin and corruption are ours, too. We probably find that hard to believe. We have not seen the Risen Jesus as the apostles did, but remember what Jesus said to St. Thomas, "Because you

have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

Just as doubting and fearful disciples became faithful, bold preachers and wonderworkers, we are also called to know the power the Lord’s resurrection in our lives. We may want to excuse ourselves from this high calling, however. In contrast with the brilliant light of Pascha, we may see the darkness and brokenness in our lives all too well. Christ has conquered sin and death, but we all still bear their wounds; and sometimes we wonder if this glorious news of life eternal really applies to us with all our struggles, pains, and weaknesses.

But didn’t you notice that when the risen Lord appears to His disciples, His glorified body still bears His wounds? Christ was not raised as a ghost or a spirit, but as a whole human being with a body. His horrible wounds were part of Who He freely chose to become as a human being for our sakes, and He arises victorious with them. He has taken these wounds upon Himself purely out of love for us and has used them to defeat evil and death.

Of course, we must not deny the truth about lives; we should not pretend that all is well when it is not. Our growth in holiness is an eternal journey, and we certainly have not yet arrived. But we must recognize that Christ rose again to bring the dead to life, to heal our wounds and transform all who are created in His image and likeness; and, yes, that includes all of us. The good news of Pascha is that we are no longer held captive by sin and death. Sin only has the power in our lives that we allow it to have; the same is true of the fear of death, violence, suffering, and all the other works of darkness that can so easily dominate us.

When the Risen Lord breathes on His apostles and says, “Receive the Holy Spirit,” we are reminded of the creation of Adam in Genesis. The divine breath gave us life to begin with, but with our sin and corruption we have rejected that life and preferred death instead. Now the same Lord Who created us has conquered death on our behalf. The Second Adam breathes on humanity again, bringing life once more to the first Adam and restoring us to our original dignity. And this time He gives us an ongoing remedy for our sins: the ministry of forgiveness



through His Body, the Church. “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

This apostolic ministry continues in the Church through the Sacrament of Confession. Even though we fall away time and time again from the new life in Christ, He extends the joy of His resurrection to us by forgiving us, restoring us to the life of the Kingdom, healing our spiritual diseases, and helping us grow ever more like Him. No, Confession is not negative, for it is the good news of the Savior’s victory over death applied to us personally, to the wounds and scars of our lives that we rarely expose to anyone else. Through our humble confession, Christ conquers the evil in us and empowers us to life with the joy and confident hope of those who have passed over the slavery of sin to the glorious freedom of the children of God. No, Confession is not only for Lent, and we should all make regular and conscientious use

of this Sacrament—not out of legalism or excessive guilt, but as a therapy to help us enter more fully into the joy of the Lord.

No matter how difficult our struggles are or how weak we feel before them, let us rejoice today in the resurrection of Christ. No matter how far short we have fallen from faithfulness in any way, let us embrace the new life brought to the world by the empty tomb. For Christ’s resurrection is good news for people just like us. Though His Body, the Church, and His Body and Blood in Holy Communion, and the ministry of forgiveness, we are all to pass over from death to life. The light really has overcome the darkness. Now the challenge is for each of us to live in the joy of Christ’s resurrection, to make His victory ours, and to recognize that nothing separates us from Him other than our own stubborn refusal to share in His great triumph. So I challenge you—and myself—to celebrate Pascha by not only saying “Christ is Risen,” but by living the new life that His empty tomb has brought to the world and to each of us.

Christ is Risen!

Fr. Philip LeMasters

Holy Apostle Thomas

The second Sunday after Pascha is dedicated to Saint Thomas, one of the the Twelve Glorious and All-Praiseworthy Apostles of Christ. Called directly by Our Lord and Savior (Matthew 10, 3), Thomas is also commemorated on October 6 (Julian calendar) and on June 30 with the Synaxis of the Holy Apostles. In Aramaic (the language spoken in Palestine by the time of Jesus) and in Syriac, his name means „twin“. St Thomas' name occurs in Matthew (10:3), Mark (3:18), Luke (6) and Acts of the Apostles (1:13), but in the Gospel of John he plays a particularly distinctive part. The Gospel according to St. John mentions this meaning in Judea—a few miles from Jerusalem and dangerously close for someone as unpopular as He —, Thomas said to his fellow disciples: "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (John 11:16).



Then, when the worried disciples wanted to keep Jesus from going for fear He would be stoned, Thomas, in a moment of bravery not often expressed by the Apostles before Pentecost, rallied the others to stay by their Master come what may. Like an inquisitive child, he constantly asked questions. In the *Acts of Thomas* (1.1) and in the *Legend of Abgar* he is mentioned under the name of Judas Thomas, while in John 14:22 he is called "Judas (not Iscariot)". In the *Gospel of Thomas*, we meet him under the name "Didymus Judas Thomas".

Little is known about the life of St. Thomas. He was probably born in the Galileian city of Pansada to a humble Jewish family. There is no indication that he was a fisherman, like other Apostles, but rather a carpenter, like St. Joseph. According to the Holy Tradition, he was considered the patron of the builders. Indeed, the old iconography depicts him with a carpenter's square in his hand.

The four Gospels give no account of how he became an apostle to Our Lord Jesus Christ. We can only presume that hearing the good tidings of Christ, he left all and followed after Him like all other disciples. Nevertheless,

thanks to the fourth Gospel his personality is clearer to us than some of the other Twelve. Thus, it was St. Thomas again who during Jesus' discourse before the Last Supper dared to express his lack of understanding of what He said, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus then said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you have known Me, you would have known my Father also" (John 14: 5-7).

But more especially St. Thomas is remembered (and often condemned) for questioning Jesus' resurrection after death. When the rest of the Apostles

announced him that they had seen the the Risen Lord who had appeared to them, he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe" (John 20:25). Indeed, a week later, the resurrected Lord appeared a second time in order to convince Thomas. The Lord asked him to touch His hands and His side, "Do not doubt but believe." And Thomas replied, "*My Lord and my God!*" (John 20:27-28). Although Jesus rebuked him gently, when saying, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe" (John 20:29), the Lord must have been impressed by Thomas' firm profession of faith. We have to keep in mind that this wonderful profession of St. Thomas is the clearest declaration of Jesus' divinity in Holy Scripture. Thus, his incredulity has proved to be providential, for – as Saint Nikolai Velimirovich says -- "through his doubt in the Resurrection of Christ the Lord, a new proof was given of that wonderful and saving event."

"Thomas, being once weaker in faith than the other apostles," says St John Chrysostom, toiled through the

grace of God more bravely, more zealously and tirelessly than them all, so that he went preaching over nearly all the earth, not fearing to proclaim the Word of God to savage nations."

In his brief account of the life of St. Thomas (October 6), published in *The Prologue from Ohrid*, the same holy Bishop Nikolai Velimirovich writes:

"After the descent of the Holy Spirit, when the apostles cast lots to see where they would each go to preach, the lot fell to Thomas to go to India. He was a little saddened that he had to go so far away, but the Lord appeared to him and encouraged him. In India, St. Thomas converted many, both aristocrats and poor, to the Christian Faith, and established the Church there, appointing priests and bishops. Among others, Thomas converted two sisters to the Faith—Tertiana and Migdonia—both wives of Indian princes. Because of their faith, both sisters were ill-treated by their husbands, with whom they no longer wanted to live after their baptism. Eventually, they were allowed to go. Being freed of marriage, they lived God-pleasing lives until their repose. Dionysius and Pelagia were betrothed, but when they heard the apostolic preaching they did not marry, but devoted themselves to the ascetic life. Pelagia ended her life as a martyr for the Faith, and Dionysius was ordained a bishop by the apostle. Prince Mazdai, Tertiana's husband, whose son, Azan, was also baptized by Thomas, condemned the apostle to death. Mazdai sent five soldiers to kill Thomas. They ran him through with their five spears, and thus the Holy Apostle Thomas rendered his soul into the hands of Christ. Before his death, he and the other apostles were miraculously brought to Jerusalem for the burial of the Most-holy Theotokos. Arriving too late, he wept bitterly, and the tomb of the Holy Most-pure One was opened at his request. The Theotokos' body was not found in the tomb: the Lord had taken His Mother to His heavenly habitation. Thus, in his tardiness St. Thomas revealed to us the wondrous glorification of the Mother of God, just as he had once confirmed faith in the Resurrection of the Lord by his unbelief."



Preaching the Gospel earned him a martyr's death. For having converted the wife and son of the prefect of the Indian city of Meliapur (Melipur), St. Thomas was locked up in prison, suffered torture, and finally, pierced with five spears on the "Big Hill, near Madras, he departed to the Lord in A.D. c.72. He was buried in Mylapore, on the east coast of India. Most of the remaining relics of Saint Thomas were transported to Edessa in the 4th century, later moved to various places and then brought to Abruzzo, in Ortona, Italy in 1258, where they are presently kept in the Church of Saint Thomas as the Apostle. Part of the relics of the holy Apostle Thomas are in India, in Hungary and on Mt. Athos.

To this day, Saint Thomas is venerated as the Apostle of India. In fact, there exists a population of Christians along the Malabar Coast, on the western coast of India, who lay claim to conversion by St. Thomas. The name *Thomas* remains quite popular

among them. Their tradition holds that he built there seven churches.

According to the apocryphal *Acts of Thomas*, originally composed in Syriac, he allegedly visited the court of an Indo-Parthian king, whose name was Gondophernes/Gundafor. Gundafor put him in charge of building a royal palace.

The legend has been summarized by Saint Nikolai Velimirovich as follows: "The Indian King Gundafor decided to build himself a magnificent palace, unlike any other on earth. When Abban, his envoy, sought a skilled craftsman to build the king's palace, he met the Apostle Thomas by God's providence. St. Thomas told him that he was a craftsman, and that no one else could build what the king wanted. Thomas therefore received much gold from the king for the building of this palace. As soon as he departed from the king, he distributed all the gold to the poor. The palace site was some distance from the king's capital, and after two years the king sent servants to ask Thomas if the palace was completed. Thomas replied: "Everything is ready except the roof," and he sought more money from the king; and the king gave it to

him. Again, Thomas distributed it all to the poor, and went throughout the kingdom doing his work, preaching the Gospel. The king, learning that Thomas had not even begun to build the palace, seized him and threw him into prison. That night, the king's brother died, and the king fell into great sorrow. An angel took the soul of the deceased and, leading him through Paradise, showed him a magnificent palace, such as the mind of man could not imagine. The soul of the deceased wished to enter that palace, but the angel told him that he could not, for it was his brother's palace, which the Apostle Thomas had built with his alms. Then the angel returned the brother's soul to his body. When he came to himself, he said to the king: Swear to me that you will give me anything I ask." And the king swore. Then the brother said: "Give me the palace that you have in the heavens." The king was amazed that he had a palace in the heavens. When the brother described everything in detail, the king believed and immediately released Thomas from prison. Then, when he heard the apostle's preaching of salvation and eternal life, the king and his brother were baptized. King Gundafor undertook new works of charity, and built an even more magnificent palace in the heavens for himself."

Fr. Nicolai Buga



HOLY TRINITY'S Liturgical Schedule from April 26 to May 3, 2020

**Sunday April 26:
(St. Thomas Sunday;
Holy Great Martyr
George)**

9:00 am - Matins

10:00 am - Holy Liturgy

**Sunday May 3:
(Sunday of the Myrrh-
Bearing Women):**

9:00 am - Matins

10:00 am - Holy Liturgy

