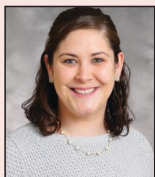


MISSION MESSAGE

'From the Upper Room to the Ends of the Earth'

By Shannon Ruiz
Diocesan Director,
of Pontifical Mission Societies



Every year on the Second Sunday of Easter — Divine Mercy Sunday — we hear the story of “Doubting Thomas” in the Gospel of John.

You know the scene. The risen Christ appeared to the disciples on Easter evening, but Thomas happened to be somewhere else. When his friends told him the news, he wasn't buying it. “Unless I see the mark of nails in his hands and put my finger into the nailmarks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

A week later, Jesus appeared again, and this time Thomas was in the room. Rather than scolding him, Christ simply offered His wounds and said, “*Do not be unbelieving, but believe.*”

Thomas dropped to his knees and responded with one of the most powerful lines in all of Scripture: “*My Lord and my God!*”

I've always had a soft spot for Thomas because I think his response is one that most people would have had.

Think about it. Put yourself in that room. Your closest friend, the man you believed was the Messiah, has just been arrested, tortured, and executed. You're grieving, you're frightened, and

you're hiding behind locked doors. Then your friends come to you saying that they've seen Him alive. That He walked through the walls. That He showed them His hands and His side. What would you have said?

I probably would have said exactly what Thomas said. “I'm sorry, but I need to see this for myself.” That's not a failure of faith. That's a completely human response to an extraordinary claim.

If anything, I think Thomas deserves a little credit for his honesty.

Now here's the part of his story I wish we talked about far more than the doubting. After that encounter in the upper room, Thomas went further than almost any of the other Apostles making his way to India, planting the seeds of faith along the Malabar Coast in what is now Kerala.

The Christians there trace their heritage directly to his preaching and have called themselves the “St. Thomas Christians” for nearly two thousand years. They are among the oldest continuously existing Christian communities on earth.

The man who demanded proof with his own hands ended

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up crossing thousands of miles of unknown territory to tell strangers about a risen Savior. He was eventually martyred near present-day Chennai around 72 A.D., and the Basilica of St. Thomas stands over what tradition holds to be his tomb — one of only two apostolic tombs outside of Europe.

I'd like to propose a rehabilitation of St. Thomas' reputation. Not as the weak link among the Apostles, but as one of the greatest missionaries the Church has ever known. Thomas showed us that honest doubt, brought to Christ with an open heart, can be transformed into something extraordinary.

And if Thomas can go from that locked room to the shores of India, I think there's hope for the rest of us too.

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