





## From a Sermon by Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh St Thomas Sunday, 30<sup>th</sup> April 1995

To-day we are keeping the day of St Thomas the Apostle. Too often we remember him only as a doubter; indeed he is the one who questioned the message which the other Apostles brought to him when they said: Christ is risen! We have seen Him alive!

But he is not one who doubted throughout his life or who remained unfaithful to the fullness of the divine revelation of Christ. We must remember that when the Apostles and the Lord heard of the illness of Lazarus, Christ said to them: Let us return to Jerusalem. To which the others said: But the Jews wanted to kill you there. Why should we return? Only Thomas the Apostle answered: Let us go with Him and die with Him. He was prepared not only to be His disciple in words, not only to follow Him as one follows a teacher, but to die with Him as one dies with a friend and, if necessary, for a friend. So, let us remember his greatness, his faithfulness, his wholeness.

But what happened then when after the Resurrection of Christ, the Apostles said to the one who had not seen Christ risen, that they had actually seen the risen Christ? Why did he not accept their message? Why did he doubt? Why did he say that he must have proofs, material proofs? Because when he looked at them, he saw them rejoicing in what they had seen, rejoicing that Christ was not dead, rejoicing that Christ was alive, rejoicing that victory had been won. Yet, when he looked at them he saw no difference in them. These were the same men, only full of joy instead of fear. And Thomas said: Unless I see, unless I probe the Resurrection, I cannot believe you.

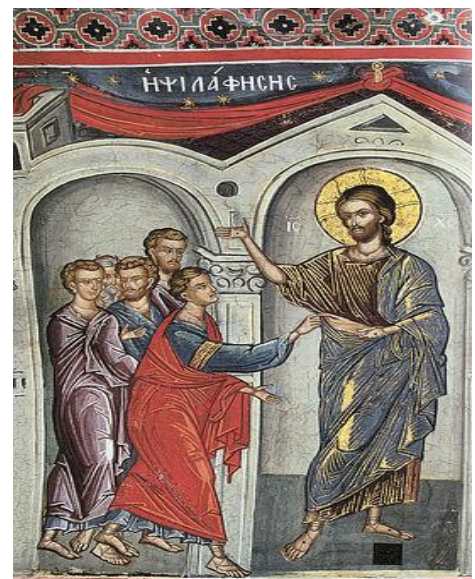
Is it not the same thing that anyone can say to us who meets us?

We proclaimed the Resurrection of Christ, passionately, sincerely, truthfully, a few days ago. We believe in it with all our being; and yet, when people meet us in our homes, in the street, in our place of work, anywhere, do they look at us and say: Who are these people? What has happened to them?

The Apostles had seen Christ risen, but the Resurrection had not become part of their own experience. They had not come out of death into eternal life. So it is also with us; except with the saints, when they see them, they know that their message is true.

What is it in our message that is not heard? Because we speak, but are not. We should be as different from people who have no experience of the living Christ, risen, who has shared His life with us, who sent the Holy Spirit to us as, in the words of C.S. Lewis, a living person is different from a statue. A statue may be beautiful, magnificent, glorious, but it is stone. A human being can be much less moving in his outer presence, yet he is alive, he is a testimony of life. So let us examine ourselves. Let us ask ourselves where we are. Why is it that people who meet us never notice that we are limbs of the risen Christ, temples of the Holy Spirit? Why?

Each of us has got to give his own reply to this question. Let us, each of us, examine ourselves and be ready to answer before our own conscience and do what is necessary to change our lives in such a way that people meeting us may look at us and say: Such people we have never seen. There is something about them that we have never seen in anyone. What is it? And we could answer: It is the life of Christ abroad in us. We are His limbs. This is the life of the Spirit in us. We are His temple. Amen.



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O, the world is so empty if one thinks only of mountains, and rivers, and cities, but to know that here and there is someone who thinks and feels with us and who, though distant, is close to us in spirit, this makes the world for us an inhabited garden.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

## Lock-down Liturgy – A worm’s eye view

It was one of the early ‘virtual Liturgies’ on a bright but chill March morning. To fill full the cup of joy, the boiler had packed up at the start of the weekend; so I set up my icons and lamp in the east-facing conservatory, being the only warm place in the house. And as happens, at some point my eyes wandered beyond the book-rest that serves as an icon-stand to the garden beyond, attracted by the movement of a blackbird that hastened to and fro across the lawn. I didn’t actually see it pulling any worms from their burrows, but its quest was clear enough.

An odd backdrop, perhaps, to the great Anaphora Prayer of the Liturgy of St Basil. But then I started to see the two shockingly incommensurate dramas unfolding in remarkable counterpoint. ‘For all things are Thy servants’, St Basil says. The prayer reminds us of the prophets and saints and angels in whom God has not ceased to ‘visit [man] in various ways’; but even the hunting blackbird reveals in a sort of fractal relationship the great pattern of the Divine Economy, inscribed in the basic laws of created nature. ‘This world’ is one where not even physical life is received except at the cost of death. That is the essence of a world of corruption, now revealed as the key to how corruption is transformed.

At the pre-animate level, there is no choice and no tragedy in this death as the price of life. There is no suffering in the ‘death’ of a star so that its elements can be recycled into other creatures. In the animal kingdom, progressively there is suffering and fear, but there is nothing voluntary in the sacrifice of the worm to feed the bird or the bird to feed the fox. Humans can be involuntary prey, whether to a carnivore, a virus or accidental circumstances; but they can also make their vulnerability to death a choice, to lay down their lives for others. Yet all this together forms the pattern that points us towards the only way in which the ultimate gift of life can be bestowed: when the One who is ‘a stranger to corruption’ breaks the cycle of corruption and gives His life in a wholly voluntary act for the life of the world.

It was at a later, warmer service in my conservatory that I would be reminded that ‘the winding-sheet and tomb point, O Word, to the mystery that is within Thee’ – having an inkling already that the mystery in the Word is encrypted also in all things made through Him. Wherever we turn, we see the same pattern. It is not only the heroic sacrifice of the health worker or ‘key worker’ infected with coronavirus that points us to the work of Christ, but even, dare I say it, the fate of the worm with which our own participation in that work has been inextricably bound up. No worms – no fertile soil – no crops – no eucharistic bread.

When in happier times we stand in church, we are surrounded by icons that bring back our eyes and minds when they wander. But when we stand at home with an icon-stand and a computer, and beyond them the world of creatures that are ‘all God’s servants’, it turns out that icons are not lacking there either.

Elizabeth Theokritoff

### Library Corner – some ideas from Joanna

Some of these titles have been on my bookshelf for years unread. I’ve just finished *Stoner* by John Williams (American, 1965, set mostly in 1920s and 30s), beautifully written and very moving, as it says in the blurb it ‘reclaims the significance of an individual (unrecorded) life.’

I’ve just started George Sand - *The Devil’s Pool* (in translation, I hasten to add), funnily enough a similar theme, though totally different setting – rural France, around 1850.

Last summer I read (in French, with aid of dictionary), a beautiful little book by French-Canadian writer Gabrielle Roy - *Cet été qui chantait*; (I think the English title is *The Enchanted Summer*, but I don’t know if it’s available here); set in rural Quebec – simple stories and observations about people, pets, nature, the river, by a visitor from the city – beautifully told.

### Memory Eternal

Martin Ralchevski’s father, Atanas, died recently. Please pray for him and his family Martin, Mariella, Adam, Dalia and Mia. Our sympathies to them all.

### Sunday School on Zoom

Our Diocese is inviting 6-10 year olds to Sunday School at 11am starting on 26<sup>th</sup> April. To join, please email [youth@thyateira.org.uk](mailto:youth@thyateira.org.uk)

