

My Lord and My God!

“*Do not disbelieve/doubt, but believe.*” That’s pretty cut-and-dry, don’t you think? In fact, it’s even clearer (and uglier) in the original Greek, where we hear Jesus tell Thomas, “*Do not be unbelieving, rather believe.*” Now I know we can all pile on Thomas for doubting the Good News of the resurrection (***and we often do***). We hear the words of our Lord after He gave Thomas the proof he was demanding, “*Blessed are they who don’t see, and yet believe,*” and our ***inner-Pharisee*** can’t help but pat ourselves on the back and say, “*That’s me! Thank God I’m not like Thomas, who needed to see before he would believe. Thank God I’m not ‘Doubting Thomas.’*” Let’s face it: This is how he’ll forever be known too. Not repentant Thomas. Not St. Thomas. Not apostle Thomas. Not faithful missionary and holy martyr Thomas (all of which are absolutely true). Nope. “Doubting Thomas.” Still... to say that he was “unbelieving Thomas” seems like it goes ***a bit too far***, doesn’t it? It’s so judgmental and harsh. (Never mind the fact that this is exactly what Jesus is saying here!) “***Unbelieving Thomas just doesn’t sit well with us.*** Perhaps this is why we soften up the English translation to say, “stop disbelieving/doubting.” “Disbelief/doubt” doesn’t sound as harsh and judgmental as “unbelieving.” It calls attention to a problematic issue without making it a big ugly sinful unbelieving thing.

And I say all this for good reason. Deep-down we all have a bit of a soft-spot for Thomas. After all, we can relate. Deep-down, we understand his doubts and protestations. We understand his desire; his ***insistence*** for proof. Things just don’t work the way he’s being told. Jesus was crucified! He was declared dead by Roman soldiers, ***and they don’t mistakes.*** When it comes to putting people to death, these guys were the professionals. Holes in His hands. Holes in His feet. A gaping wound in His side. He died. He was buried. We know where the tomb is! People don’t just rise from the dead. ***This isn’t how things work! Nobody is going to make a fool of me!*** “*Unless I see..., I will never believe.*” I don’t think any of us are foolish enough to say that we ***condone*** such doubt and unbelief, but we certainly understand it. We’re sympathetic to it. Besides, if we’re going to define Thomas’ resistance to believe and insistence for proof as “unbelief,” ***then what does that mean for us?*** We’d have to say the same exact thing about ourselves, our doubts, our protestations... our unbelief. Unbelief? Me?! Never! How dare anyone make that accusation against me!

You know what though? Rather than pick on Thomas (which will either cause us to make excuses for his unbelief and our unbelief, or—worse yet—get us looking down our pietistic noses at him, as if we’re better than him or holier than him), ***let us consider his great confession of faith.*** We’re not going to pick on Doubting/Unbelieving Thomas. We’re going to praise faithful, repentant, St. Thomas.

“*My Lord and my God!*” These are the ***first and only*** words out of Thomas’ mouth when he is confronted with the Truth of the Lord of Life. Thomas doesn’t try to offer up excuses or explanations for his unbelief. “*My Lord and my God!*” That’s it. This is one of the simplest, yet most profound and greatest confessions of faith in all of Holy Scripture. ***What does it mean? Have you ever given it any thought?*** Probably not, because we’re usually too busy measuring ourselves up against Thomas’ doubts and unbelief. We’re too busy patting ourselves on the back because “*thank God we’re not like Thomas. We don’t see and yet we believe.*” Remember what your Lord has already said about such holier-than-thou attitude! “*With the judgment you pronounce [against others] you will be judged. The measure you use [to judge/condemn others] will be measured to you.*” Before you start measuring the holiness, faithfulness, and reverence of Thomas (or anyone else, for that matter), hold that measuring stick up to yourself. Better yet, try seeing how you measure up against God’s perfect and holy measuring stick. You ***will*** come up short, for ALL have fallen short of the glory of God.

“*My Lord and my God!*” “Lord” bespeaks authority/superiority. To say that Jesus is your Lord is to also say that you belong to Him. ***He is your Master. He is your owner. You are His humble slave.*** Don’t go all 21st century stupid on me by thinking only in terms of the reprehensible institution that was 19th century slavery. **That’s not what this word means!** To be a slave of God is a ***good*** thing. To be independent is not a good thing. For one thing, independence is an illusion. ***No one is truly independent or autonomous.*** As St. Paul says in Romans, we are either slaves to sin or slaves to righteousness. Either sin, death, and the grave are our masters, or the Lord of Life and His perfect righteousness is our Master. In terms of ownership, again, St. Paul speaks very clearly of the fact that we have been bought with a price, purchased from the bonds of sin, death, and the grave, that redeeming price being the blood of God’s only-begotten Son. Because of Christ, we have been set free from being slaves to sin; not free to do whatever we want, but set free to become slaves of righteousness. By virtue of our baptism into Christ, there is a wonderful transfer of ownership. We now belong to God. He is our owner, our Master, our Lord and Savior. ***This is Thomas’ confession.***

“*My Lord and my God!*” To call Jesus, not just “God,” but “***MY God,***” is no small thing! Again, Thomas is confessing the fact that Jesus is the Almighty in the flesh. He is the Alpha, the Omega, the First and Last, the Beginning and the End. “*You shall have no other gods. What does this mean? You should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.*” Luther would go on to explain that ***anything*** that is the most important to you is essentially your god. Thomas is confessing that Jesus is his God. There is **nothing** more important than the living and victorious Lord of Life. “*My Lord and my God!*” With these simple, yet profound words, Thomas is confessing how his reason, his intellect, his wants and desires and likes and dislikes ***have ALL been taken captive and subjugated to his Lord and his God.*** They have all been relegated to a distant second-place. “*My Lord and my*

God! Nothing comes first! Not even close!” And as history/tradition tells us, Thomas would live out the remainder of his life putting this very confession into practice, travelling to India as a missionary, and dying the martyr’s death in service to his Lord and his God. ***Nothing would come before Jesus... not even his own life or well-being.***

Now comes the big question: **What about you?** As I said, we’re very good at piling on “Doubting Thomas,” but can his confession honestly be said to be your confession? Think before you speak! Is Jesus your Lord... ***or do other things have mastery over you?*** Is Jesus your God, or do other [false] gods and idols come before Him? Are they on the receiving end of your worship and allegiance? ***You are known by the fruits you bear!*** We won’t even speak about the false gods of money, materialism, lust, or sensuality. Those are easy to pick on (and yet we still deny their mastery over us.) What about pride? What about the opposite of sinful pride? What about humility, meekness, lowliness... you know... like your Lord and your God? ***The slave is not above the Master, right?*** You know what your Lord and God has said about loving Him and loving your neighbor (which includes EVERYONE, not just the people you like.) You know what your Lord and God has said about loving others just as you’ve been loved and forgiving others just as you’ve been forgiven. Are your emotions, desires, and oh-so-precious-feelings ***taken captive and subjugated*** to this Divine Word of mercy and grace, or do you still come first, and you’ll just ask for forgiveness later... or maybe not at all? After all, why would you ask for forgiveness if you’re not wrong?! Yeah... do we need to break out God’s measuring stick here?

Look to this cross of your Lord, your God, your Savior and Redeemer. What has this almighty Word of God already said? ***“IT IS FINISHED!”*** The price for your redemption; the wage for your sin has been paid in full by Him, once and for all time. It is finished! Folks: This is the same Word of God in resurrected flesh, who bids Thomas to ***touch and see and believe***, and it is this same Word of God in the flesh who comes to us today in, with, and under the ***mere and unassuming means of Word, water, bread and wine.***

It is strange to think about. It even seems a little contradictory. Jesus Himself declares, ***“Blessed are those who believe and yet have not seen,”*** and yet He still comes to us in very real and tangible forms; things we can see, touch, taste, and feel. **What do you know? We’re no different than Thomas!** Like Thomas, ***our Lord comes to us in our pride, our arrogance, our weaknesses, our doubts and despairs, bidding us to come and taste and see that He is our very present Lord and God.*** Look no further than this altar...and listen to His Word and Promise. ***“As often as you do this, remember what I have said. This is My Body/Blood, given and shed for the forgiveness of all your sin.”***

And how does the faith, which purely by God’s grace and the working of the Holy Spirit, has been taken captive by His Word, subjugated to Him who died and

rose again and reigns victorious in our very midst respond to all this? How does the faith, which the Lord of Life Himself praises as “blessed,” respond to all this? *“My Lord and my God!”* May this powerful and beautiful confession be your confession, now and always. May it not be just empty words, but may this confession be ***living and active***, witnessed in all that you say and do as you, in repentant joy and thanksgiving, bear good and God-pleasing fruits to His praise and glory. Love as you’ve been loved. Forgive as you’ve been forgiven. *“My Lord and My God”*

AMEN