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## In Defense of Doubt(ing Thomas)

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ABSTRACT:

Here is a fresh (somewhat satirical and sarcastic, New Yorker Shouts and Murmurs-inspired) interpretation about the importance of Thomas's doubt and a defense of having doubt in light of faith.



## In Defense of Doubt(ing Thomas)

by Meghan Stretar

### TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

I am writing to nominate and recommend my disciple Thomas, sometimes called Didymus, for the prestigious and highly competitive “Apostle of the Year” award. It gives me great pleasure to make this recommendation, and do not make this choice lightly. I served as Thomas’ direct supervisor for three years. In our public ministry and mission, we aimed to teach and live out the importance of being witnesses to the faith, needs, and experiences of our diverse community, even in the face of intense grief, betrayal, death, fear, confusion, anger, and doubt. I will confess working with me was/is not the easiest task. Sometimes my actions and words were/are ambiguous. Yet Thomas displayed, in the time before my *own* death, an immense amount of courage—even expressing at one point a willingness to die alongside me and our friend Lazarus who had just died<sup>1</sup> (and this he did selflessly and seemingly without fear, much to the shock and amazement of my other disciples!). *This* is what I would like him to be known for.

<sup>1</sup> Reference to John 11:16b

Thomas is a relentless seeker of Truth. Even the meaning of his name suggests this characteristic. What many people do not realize is that “Didymus” is not just some cool nickname—it actually is an insight into what Thomas is like *deep down* at the very core of his being. You see, his name means “abyss.” Think about it: an abyss has both depth *and* darkness.<sup>2</sup> I had, quite literally *died* eight days before, and decided to see how Thomas might react to my having been resurrected. Would he come to see that Truth and be brought into the light? When my other disciples told him of the *other time* I appeared when Thomas was not with them (no one is really sure where he was), he did not quite seem to believe them. He doubted this reality, and rightly so, as this is part of the mystery of my being. But picture this: I appear and say, “Peace be with you,” with all the compassion I have in my being. This calls to the depths of Thomas’ soul, and he’s not quite sure what to do. A perfectly human reaction. This is a profound area of growth for Thomas.

His name also means “twin,” which also feels appropriate to point out here in this recommendation. Someone who is *certain* only considers one option. But someone who *doubts*, like Thomas so obviously did when he wanted to touch the wounds in my side and hands, keeps in the back of their head the possibility and fear of and faith in the reality of Truth.<sup>3</sup> The risk in believing that I was *really* resurrected and physically there, wounds and all, in the midst of my disciples (who kept their door *locked*)? Just the chance that his entire world would be turned upside down and he would experience personal transformation. Thomas was not afraid to be bold and ask these questions. This ability and willingness to take such a risk—and be transformed—is impressive and a sign of his incredible leadership ability.

By asking these questions, he demonstrated quite clearly to me his willingness to live in the kind of ambiguity that is required to really have faith; he demonstrated deep understanding that doubt and faith can be—and are—non-competitive. He, in my humble opinion, made the most profound expression of faith I’d ever heard before, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20: 28).

<sup>2</sup> Definition of and analysis on “Thomas” pulled from: Thomas Aquinas, Fabian Larcher, James A. Weishepel, Daniel Keating, and Matthew Levering, “Chapter 20,” in *Commentary on the Gospel of John: Chapters 13-21* (Washington, D.C., Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 274.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

What Thomas demonstrated well to my other followers and others who hope to follow in his example is this: faith does not exclude doubt and questions. Asking them should be encouraged. We are asked to believe in the midst of uncertainty. Thomas also showed how this kind of profound, life-changing faith must be rooted in our own experiences of God (me). We cannot just believe because others do. Everything Thomas has done in the last three years—and *especially* in the last few days—has demonstrated what this radical act of trust and commitment looks like in a profound way.

While he can be/was pessimistic at times, the negative connotation of doubt he's received is unfair. He was simply attempting to find God in the midst of his circumstances. Everyone would benefit by following in his example. Don't we all have times in our lives when we just want tangible evidence that God is real and present? Thomas' doubt was/is human and *real*. Thomas might be the best receiver of constructive criticism of any person with whom I have ever worked! He takes compliments, suggestions and feedback so well. "Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed" (John 20: 29).

Thomas is truly one to watch.

With that, I am absolutely delighted, again, to make this recommendation.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jesus

*Son of God, Light of the World, Good Shepherd, Bread of Life, Truth, etc.*

