**St. Thomas the Twin December 18, 2019 (Midweek 3)**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we conclude our study of the Saints of Advent here in our Midweek Advent Series we come to a man who in some ways can be very surprising. They say that first impressions are very important in life. Our first impression of this particular Saint, Saint Thomas, is usually a negative one. The feast of Saint Thomas is the last feast day before Christmas, it will be celebrated on December 21st. But why a feast day for one who is known for his doubting? Well, for tonight I ask you not to see Thomas as the doubting one, but how he is first introduced in the Gospel of John, from John chapter 11 which was our first reading for tonight. He is introduced as Thomas; the twin.

Few people know what it’s like to actually be a twin. Perhaps you’ve experienced more of what I have with my brother, Daniel as we look and sound alike. Despite being about a year and a half apart sometimes we are mistaken for each other, especially as we went to college together. I was even told back in the day where my brother and I were on a radio show together, that they couldn’t tell when I was talking compared to when Dan was talking, it sounded like the same person talking to themselves. Thomas was known as the twin, and for anyone who has children they know that twins are always a possibility, usually more so in a family that has had twins in the past. Twins don’t come as a surprise much nowadays. Prenatal examinations almost always detect a second baby growing inside a mother during pregnancy. Nowadays, eager parents usually have several months to acquire a second going-home-from-the-hospital outfit, a second crib, a double stroller. But not in the old days. In the old days, once a mother had delivered that little bundle of joy, it would come as a complete surprise, yes, probably a shock, when the doctor said, “There’s one more.” While we know that Jesus himself had siblings none were his twin, but I challenge you tonight to see your life through the lens of Thomas, and also to understand that throughout our lives as Christians we go from enemy of God, to child of God and therefore twin brother of our Savior Jesus Christ.

Most of us know St. Thomas only as *doubting* Thomas, the one who wouldn’t believe the other disciples when they told him that Jesus was raised from the dead. He said the only way he would believe was if he touched the nail marks in Jesus’ hands and put his hand to Jesus’ side, where the spear had pierced him. He just wasn’t going to be hurt further after he had seen his Lord dead by believing what he thought was some desperate tale about a resurrection.

And so we usually think of Thomas only as a skeptic and a doubter. But the fact of the matter is that he could also show great loyalty and devotion. We heard an example of that in today’s first reading. Word had just come to Jesus that one of his friends, Lazarus, was deathly ill in Bethany. In the course of events, Jesus told his disciples that they were going to Bethany to see Lazarus.

 But the disciples didn’t like the sound of that. For Bethany was in Judea, and it had been only a short time earlier that the religious leaders in Judea had tried to stone Jesus and kill him. Jesus had made the claim to them not only that he existed before Abraham, but also that he himself was the Lord God, the great I am. The Jews took this to be blasphemy and desired to stone him. But he hid himself and eluded them. Therefore, to go back to Judea would be to risk life and limb, at the hands of an angry crowd who would kill not just Jesus but anyone who was with him.

But after their discussion, Thomas said these words, “Let us also go, that we may die with him” (Jn 11:16). Despite the risk, Thomas was willing to go with Jesus. Even in the face of death, Thomas did not want to depart from Jesus’ side. Though Thomas later would doubt, and just like the rest of the disciples, would not be so bold, abandoning Jesus and even denying him, his courage and faithfulness here are to be praised.

The name *Thomas* literally means “twin.” In fact, sometimes he was called *Didymus*, which is the Greek word for *twin*. This is a good name for him to have, for it is a fitting description of all who would be disciples of Jesus. Remember, Thomas said, “Let us also go, that we may die *with him*.” This is precisely what Jesus calls us to do, to be like him and to have lives that look just like his, dying *with him* in order that we may live *with him*. Jesus said, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mt 16:24). You carry a cross to die on it. He calls for us to live a life of sacrifice.

 To be a Christian means to be God’s very own child, Jesus’ very own sibling or even we can go so far as to say twin, and therefore to be united with Christ to be crucified with him, which means to drown the old Adam with all sins and evil lusts, to repent. It is to lay down your life for others in your daily callings and to be willing to suffer.

You are called to be the twin of Jesus Christ our Lord, not only in his death, but also in his resurrection. For through your Baptism into his body and your faith in his name, you now share in his risen identity. You are little Christs before the throne of heaven, brothers and sisters of Christ, bearing his very image before the Father. You are, by his grace, as pure and holy as Jesus himself. Sharing his identity and image, you also share in his life. Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die” (Jn 11:25–26). Jesus is the firstborn twin who leads the way for you second-born twins out of the womb of death into new and everlasting life.

This is what Thomas was asking about in our second reading. “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” He asks, setting up Jesus to give an answer, that we still hear today and that gives us hope despite our own doubts and fears in a changing world. “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (Jn 14:6). Jesus has prepared a place for you in the Father’s house by his cross and empty tomb. And Jesus alone is the doorway into that house. United to his death on the cross and his eternal life through the empty tomb, counting yourself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus, you are given entry to your heavenly home.

Thomas would certainly participate in Jesus’ cross. According to tradition, Thomas went on a missionary journey to preach the Gospel in India. There is to this day a Christian community in India that claims descent from Christians first converted by the preaching of Thomas.

Like many other Saint symbols that you can find on our altar here at Trinity, Thomas’s symbol is in reference to his death. Thomas did not die of natural causes. Tradition states that Thomas was speared to death for what he preached. It is remarkable that the man who wouldn’t believe until he had touched the spear mark in Jesus’ side, was said to have been killed by a spear for believing in Jesus Christ. Because of his faith in Christ, the very symbol now identified with Thomas in the Church is a spear. You can find it upstairs, a spear with a builder’s square measure, which spoke of his profession as a builder. He, like us, through the Holy Spirit working in his heart was transformed from God’s enemy to his own sibling, going from being just a twin, to a twin of Jesus Christ. He shared in Christ’s death, and he will also share in Christ’s resurrection, even as his soul now dwells with Christ his Savior in heaven.

So is it also for you. like Thomas, you have been marked as Christ’s twin. You have received the sign of the holy cross on both your forehead and your heart to mark you as one redeemed by Christ the crucified. Wearing the sign of his death, you shall also wear the crown of life that he has won for you.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.