

St. Thomas the Apostle

St. Thomas was one of Jesus' original Twelve Apostles. Other than information in the Gospels and a brief mention in Acts of the Apostles, little is known about St. Thomas. Also known by his Greek name "Didymus," Thomas is mentioned by name in the three synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), as well as in the first chapter of Acts of the Apostles. However, it is John's Gospel that features two significant passages providing an idea of Thomas's character.

In the Last Supper Discourses at the beginning of John 14, there is a well-known exchange between Jesus and his disciples in which Thomas figures prominently. Jesus begins:

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be. Where I am going you know the way." Thomas said to him, "Master, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, then you will also know my Father. From now on you know him and have seen him." (Jn 14:1–7)

Later in John's Gospel, there is another well-known passage featuring the Apostle Thomas, who turns out to be the last of the eleven remaining Apostles to witness the resurrected Christ:

Thomas, called Didymus, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples said to him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nail marks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." Now a week later his disciples were again inside and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, although the doors were locked, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe." Thomas answered and said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed." (Jn 20:24–29)

This Gospel passage (always proclaimed on the Second Sunday of Easter) is the source of the term *doubting Thomas*. Thomas serves as an example for us all because, although he had his doubts about the resurrected Lord—even having heard the witness of the other disciples—his iconic words "My Lord and my God" are the same words that all Christians are called to say in response to the Lord's command: "Do not be unbelieving, but believe."

St. Thomas the Apostle is commonly believed to have preached the Gospel as far away as India. Some of the relics of his remains are housed at San Thome Basilica in Chennai, Mylapore, India. His feast day is July 3, and he is the patron saint of architects.

Reading Comprehension

1. How does Jesus reply to Thomas's question in the Last Supper Discourses?
2. How does Thomas eventually overcome his title of "doubting Thomas"?

Writing Task

Thomas had to both see Jesus and touch his wounds before he believed that Jesus had risen from the dead. What doubts do you have about who Jesus is or what he expects of you? How can you experience Jesus without seeing him face-to-face or physically encountering him as St. Thomas was able to do? Provide a response to these questions in a short essay or journal entry.

Explaining the Faith

Why is it important for Catholics to be familiar with the content of Sacred Scripture, especially the New Testament?

Sacred Scripture is the inspired word of God. “God is the author of Sacred Scripture” (CCC, 105). For this reason, it is vitally important for Catholics to be familiar with the content of Sacred Scripture. The New Testament is especially important because the “central object [of the books of the New Testament] is Jesus Christ, God’s incarnate Son: his acts, teaching, Passion and glorification, and his Church’s beginnings under the Spirit’s guidance” (CCC, 124).

A familiarity with Sacred Scripture is necessary for understanding the role of Jesus within salvation history because the Gospels show how Jesus fulfilled the prophecies in the Old Testament. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that “the Gospels are the heart of all Scriptures ‘because they are our principal source for the life and teaching of the Incarnate Word, our Savior’” (CCC, 125, quoting *Dei Verbum*, 18).

In addition to the Gospels, the New Testament also includes Acts of the Apostles, the Pauline letters, the Catholic letters, and Revelation. These inspired books contribute to a Catholic’s understanding of the primary details of the Paschal Mystery. Catholics are encouraged to read the Bible in order to learn more about the life of Jesus and how his earliest followers formed the Christian communities that would spread the Word of God to lands that had not yet heard the Good News.



Further Research

Read paragraphs 101–141 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which can be accessed at www.vatican.va, and answer the following questions:

- According to paragraphs 105–113, what was the role of the Holy Spirit in guiding the authorship of the Sacred Scriptures?
- In paragraph 129, what does it mean that “the New Testament lies hidden in the Old and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New”?
- Looking at paragraphs 125–127 and 139, what role do the Gospels play within the broader scope of Scripture?

Chapter 1 Teacher Resources

Faithful Disciple: St. Thomas the Apostle

Reading Comprehension

1. How does Jesus reply to Thomas’s question in the Last Supper Discourses? *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, then you will also know my Father. From now on you know him and have seen him.”*
2. How does Thomas eventually overcome his title of “doubting Thomas”? *Thomas responds to Jesus’ invitation to touch his wounds with the iconic words “My Lord and my God.”*

Writing Task

Thomas had to both see Jesus and touch his wounds before he realized that Jesus had risen from the dead. What doubts do you have about who Jesus is or what he expects of you? How can you experience Jesus without seeing him face-to-face or physically encountering him as St. Thomas was able to do? Provide a response to these questions in a short essay or journal entry. *Student reflections will vary. They may express doubt about Jesus in relation to all of the different beliefs and religions in the world today, or they might reference the temptations to live as “a basically good person” in a secular society. They might experience Jesus through others, in Scripture, or in the sacraments.*

Additional Background Information

Tradition holds that St. Thomas traveled as far as Tamil Nadu and Kerala in India. This represents a distance of more than four thousand miles from Jerusalem!

There remains to this day a large native population along the Malabar Coast of southwest India who call themselves the “Christians of St. Thomas.”

According to one ancient document, Thomas was the only witness to the Assumption of Mary, and in some accounts his report of the event was doubted by the other Apostles. In a nod to this story, Thomas is depicted with the girdle of Mary in medieval and early Renaissance art.

Thomas’s recognition as patron of architects is connected with a story in which he provided assistance for the building of a cathedral that was opposed by pagan priests.

Explaining the Faith

Why is it important for Catholics to be familiar with the content of Sacred Scripture, especially the New Testament?

Further Research

- According to paragraphs 105–113, what was the role of the Holy Spirit in guiding the authorship of the Sacred Scriptures? *The Holy Spirit inspired authors to write and teach the truth, while using their own*

abilities and faculties. The Holy Spirit continues to inspire the reader of Scripture to understand the truth taught through the words of Sacred Scripture.

- In paragraph 129, what does it mean that “the New Testament lies hidden in the Old and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New”? *We read the Old Testament in light of the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus. We see in the words of the Old Testament the foreshadowing and prophecy of the Paschal Mystery, and we see in the New Testament the fulfillment of these prophecies and the fullness of the revelation of God, intended from the beginning.*
- Looking at paragraphs 125–127 and 139, what role do the Gospels play within the broader scope of Scripture? *The Gospels are the heart of Sacred Scripture because Jesus is their center.*

Additional Background and Resources

The content of the paragraphs of the *Catechism* referenced in the Further Research assignment is synthesized in *Jesus: God’s Revelation to the World*, Chapter 2, Section 3. It presents the spiritual senses of Scripture and walks students through what it means to read the Bible according to the Spirit.

The Church warns against another temptation for modern readers of Scripture: historical reductionism, in which readers, including some non-Catholic Scripture scholars, deny the spiritual aspects of the Gospels and read these central books only as historical records. According to the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, “the Pontifical Biblical Commission lists five unacceptable assumptions found in forms of scriptural interpretation:

1. the denial of a supernatural order;
2. the denial of God’s intervention in the world through revelation;
3. the denial of the possibility and existence of miracles;
4. the incompatibility of faith with historical truth;
5. an almost *a priori* denial of the historical value of the nature of the documents of revelation.”