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Unbelief or daring?



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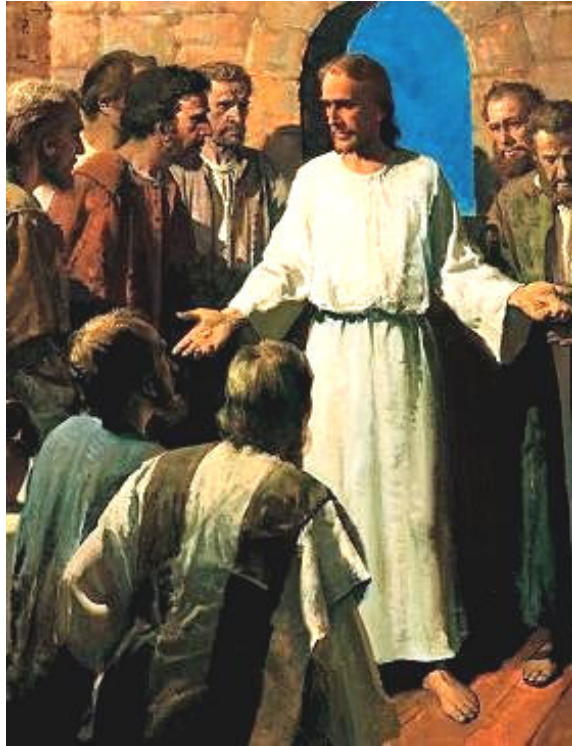
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Thanks to Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith.

This book is dedicated to those who need to understand what faith is and must learn to put it into action until they receive their miracles.

“Do not doubt but believe.” (Jn. 20: 27 b)

Introduction



How is your faith?
 Do you have faith?
 What is faith?

The bible says that faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen (*Heb. 11: 1*).

This book has the intention to take the reader to delve into the depths of God's word and therefore to have a greater understanding of what faith really is, so that by putting it into practice in your life, you can overcome limitations imposed by the human mind and, consequently, also overcome the spiritual world.

By paying attention to the word written in *Heb. 11: 1*, we can conclude that faith is something spiritual, not something created, moved or developed through rationality, but a driving force that comes from spirit, apparently without explanation, so that we can act in accordance with it and obtain the goals we set for ourselves. In other words, it is the fuel so that the word of God in our mouth can reach the target desired for us and call into existence the things that do not exist (*Rom. 4: 16 b- 22*).

Another important observation about faith: it is developed through the practical experiences of our lives, which cause us to climb increasingly levels of spiritual growth and intimacy with God. Therefore, based on past experiences and victories, by putting into practice our faith we can overcome bigger challenges and thus increase it. The bible also says that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God: "So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ" (*Rom. 10: 17*). This means that by His word, the Lord sends His prophets so that the people hear and may believe in Him: "For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'" (*Rom. 10: 13-15*).

The central character of our study will not be Abraham, but Thomas, one of the twelve disciples. Thomas is a biblical character somewhat controversial and interesting at the same time, by the statements he did in some situations experienced by Jesus and His disciples. While Abraham was known as *the father of faith*, Thomas took upon himself the stigma of *unbeliever*, as he was the one in the bible to experience this weakness; this, because he had the boldness, perhaps the lack of shame, to say what he really felt and to want more of the man with whom he had lived intimately for three years. The biblical passages will help us to have a deeper revelation of what was behind the apparent incredulity of Thomas and why Jesus permitted such questioning, not only by him as by the other disciples; perhaps, to give us today the chance to have valuable lessons for our journey as children of God. Each question asked by the Apostles leads us to an important verse concerning the revelation of the person of Jesus and His character as God.

We'll first collect some verses throughout the ministry of Jesus, where different attitudes of disbelief on the part of the disciples were reported; then we'll put them all in a context and examine the reaction taken by Thomas by asking to touch the wounds of the Lord, what ended up to make him receive the title by which everyone knows him.

Was he really an unbeliever?
 Was he the only unbeliever?

Along his three years' journey with Jesus, is it possible that only he had remained in a state of unbelief and hardness of heart, unlike the others?

Was his psychological constitution the type that needs to be more deeply touched to have a true learning, what can be confused with hardness of heart and unbelief?

Could it be, perhaps, that he have gone through some bad experiences before, which did him raise the wall of rationality as a defense to his weak and susceptible emotions?

Could it be that his attitude was giving us an opening to know the Lord better?

Was his behavior so different than Peter's, denying the Master, or than that Philip experienced, by asking Him to show them the Father?

I hope the Holy Spirit accompanies you in your reading and leads you to develop faith in your spirit for you to be one more witness of God's power among men. More than this, may you know yourself better and break your own inner barriers, achieving the land of the promise that God gave you.

I love you in Jesus.

Tânia Cristina

Notes:

- Words or phrases enclosed in brackets [] or parenthesis (), in *italics*, were placed by me, in most cases, to explain the biblical text, although some verses already contain them [not in italics].
- The version used here is the New Revised Standard Version, NRSV – 1989 (1995)
- NIV = New International Version (it will be used in brackets in some verses to facilitate the readers' understanding).

Facts



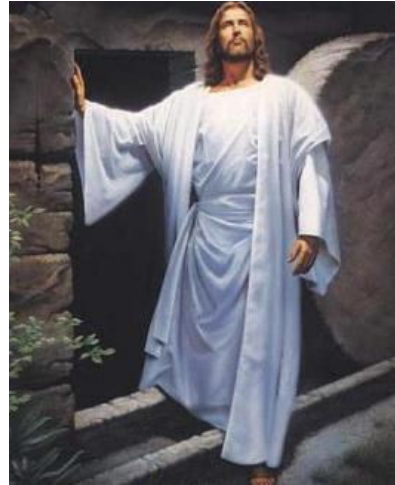
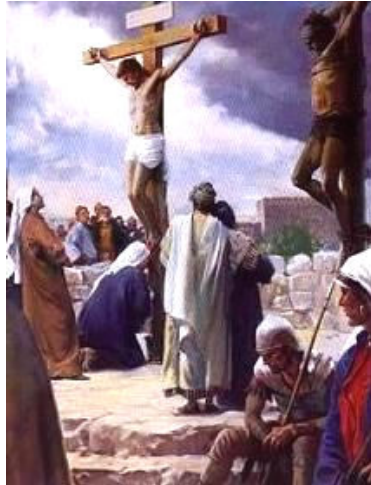
Let's start with *Matt. 8: 23-27 (Jesus calms a storm)*:

“And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. A windstorm arose on the sea, so great that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. And they went and woke him up, saying, ‘Lord, save us! We are perishing!’ And he said to them, ‘*Why are you afraid, you of little faith?*’ Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a dead calm. They were amazed, saying, ‘What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?’”

Matt. 14: 22-33 (Jesus walks on the water): “Immediately [referring to the first multiplication of loaves and fish] he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, ‘It is a ghost!’ And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, ‘Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid’. Peter answered him, ‘Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water’. He said, ‘Come’. So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, ‘*You of little faith, why did you doubt?*’ When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, ‘Truly you are the Son of God.’” In *Mk. 6: 51b-52* there is a complement to the text, “Then he got into the boat with them and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, for *they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.*”

Matt. 17: 14-21 (The healing of a boy possessed by demons): “When they came to the crowd, a man came to him, knelt before him, and said, ‘Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic [NIV, *he has seizures; in Greek, he is lunatic*] and he suffers terribly; he often falls into the fire and often into the water. And I brought him to your disciples, but they could not cure him’. Jesus answered, ‘You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him here to me’. And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him, and the boy was cured instantly. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, ‘Why could we not cast it out?’ He said to them, ‘*Because of your little faith.* For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, Move from here to there, and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.’” [Some manuscripts bring this phrase, ‘But this kind [of thing; the behavior of the flesh, not devil, He meant] does not go out except by prayer and fasting. (NIV, KJV, ASV)].

Mk. 9: 30-32 (Jesus predicts again His death and resurrection): “They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, ‘*The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.*’ But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.”

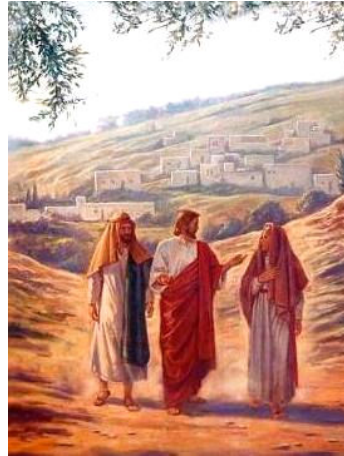
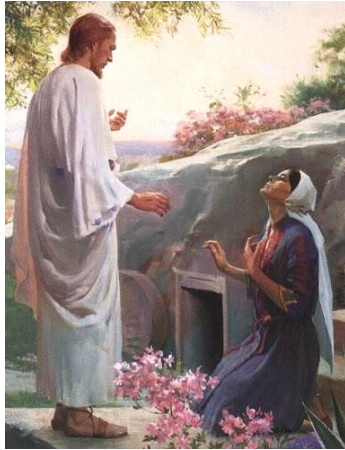


Mk. 10: 32-34 (Jesus predicts even again His death and resurrection): “They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; *they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid.* He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, ‘*See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again.*’” No one knows exactly how much time elapsed between this text and the one above this; at least a few months or one year.

Lk. 9: 44-45: “Let these words sink into your ears: ‘The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into human hands.’ *But they did not understand this saying; its meaning was concealed from them, so that they could not perceive it. And they were afraid to ask him about this saying.*”

Lk. 18: 31-34: “Then he took the twelve aside and said to them, ‘See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be handed over to the Gentiles; and he will be mocked and insulted and spat upon. After they have flogged him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise again’. *But they understood nothing about all these things; in fact, what he said was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.*”

Mark 16: 9-14 (Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene, two of His disciples and meets the eleven): “Now after he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. She went out and told those who had been with him, while they were mourning and weeping. But when *they* heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, *they would not believe it.* After this he appeared in another form to two of them [*the disciples going to Emmaus – Lk. 24: 13-35*], as they were walking into the country. And they went back and told the rest, *but they did not believe them.* Later he appeared to the eleven as they were sitting at the table; *and he upbraided them for their lack of faith and stubbornness, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen.*”



Lk. 24: 1-12 (The resurrection of Jesus): “But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, ‘Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again’. Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. *But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.* But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.”

Lk. 24: 36-49 (Jesus appears to the disciples and explains the Scriptures to them): “While they were talking about this [*It refers to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, who had met with the Lord*], Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, ‘*Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?* Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have’. And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. *While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering,* he said to them, ‘Have you anything here to eat?’ They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence. Then he said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you – that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled’. Then *he opened their minds to understand the scriptures,* and he said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day (*Hos. 6: 2*), and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations (*Jl. 2: 12-13; 28-32*), beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.’”

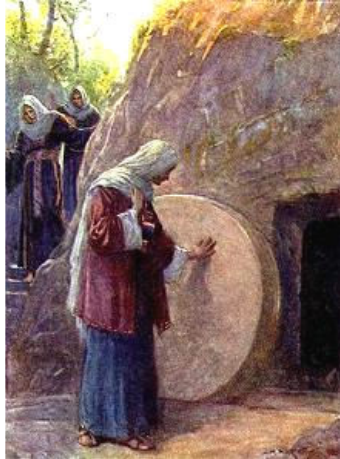
Jn. 11: 1-16 (The resurrection of Lazarus): “Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the

Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus [*who was on the other side of Jordan River, where John the Baptist baptized at first, probably in Bethany (other Bethany than the Bethany of Lazarus) in the region of Perea, ruled by Herod (Jn. 1: 28; Jn. 10: 40) or in Enon (ainōn, from Arabic 'ain = fountains), near Salim, on the western side of the Jordan River, about eight miles to the south of Scythopolis in the region of Decapolis – Jn. 3: 23*] *, ‘Lord, he whom you love is ill’. But when Jesus heard it, he said, ‘This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.’ Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. Then after this he said to the disciples, ‘Let us go to Judea again.’ The disciples said to him, ‘Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?’ Jesus answered, ‘Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.’ After saying this, he told them, ‘Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.’ The disciples said to him, ‘Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.’ Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, ‘Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, *so that you may believe*. But let us go to him.’ *Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, ‘Let us also go, that we may die with him’*” (*Check the locals of baptism of John the Baptist on the map at the end of this section).

Jn. 14: 1-15 (Jesus comforts the disciples [Last Supper]): “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.’ Thomas said to him, ‘Lord, 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, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.’ Philip said to him, ‘Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it. If you love me, you will keep my commandments.’”

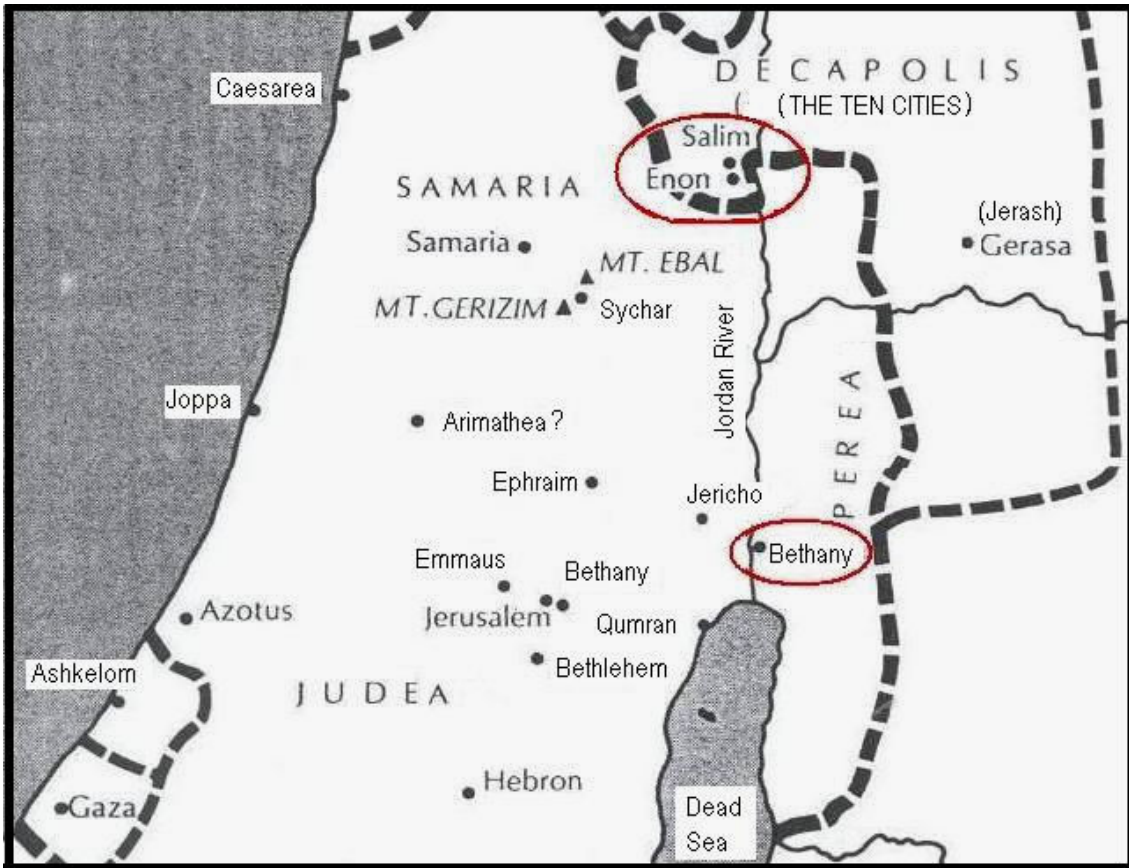
Jn. 20: 1-10 (The resurrection of Jesus): “Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, ‘They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him’. Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into

the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; *for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.*"



Jn. 20: 19-25 (Jesus appears to the disciples / Thomas' unbelief): "When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.' But *Thomas* (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, *was not with them* when Jesus came. So the other disciples told 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 in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'*"

Jn. 20: 26-29 (Jesus appears to His disciples again): "A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you'. Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. *Do not doubt but believe.*' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, '*Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.*'"



PLACES OF BAPTISM OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Conclusion



What we can realize through the biblical texts we've read is that the faith of the disciples at first was too small to be able to believe in the impossible of God. They could believe that Jesus was the Christ (Peter had a revelation directly from the Father when he said, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God' – *Matt. 16: 16*), but had not yet understanding to what He had come to make on earth, despite the miracles He performed before their eyes; much less to understand that was necessary for Jesus to rise from the dead. Jesus encouraged them to develop their faith when He rebuked them for their timidity in the face of certain circumstances, as when He rebuked the storm, when He walked over the waters and when they could not heal the possessed young man. However, in every miracle He performed the faith of the disciples was certainly grounded.

We know little about the personality of the disciples, except by what we can infer of their actions and their manner of writing, such as the Gospels of Matthew and John, for example, which make us realize the particular characteristics of each of them. The disciples who most stand out are: 1) *Peter*, probably a sanguine person, with inflamed emotions, loyal to his friends, sincere, but insecure and needing more self-control; 2) *John*, more peaceful and loving, more sensitive to the essence of things and people, however, with an explosive temper when dealing with more serious situations, by the fact of Jesus has called him, along with his brother *James (3)*, *Boanerges* – *Mk. 3: 17*, which means "sons of thunder." They were Galileans and, probably, the nationalist feeling brought them a behavior somewhat impatient with injustice and oppression; 4) *Judas Iscariot*, logically, should be a more calculating and greedy temperament, with other human weaknesses that could even lead him to think about theft. He was the treasurer of the group and, surely, placed by Jesus Himself to test him and teach him somehow; 5) *Thomas*, until now, has been placed as the unbeliever among of them all, but as we saw this was a basic feature in the whole group, simply because they were ordinary human beings who had the great challenge of living together with the Son of God in order to learn from Him how to overcome limits and accomplish miracles. Thomas was probably a more rational person, who needed more tangible demonstrations of divine power in order to believe, or he probably needed more information to be able to assimilate the experiences; perhaps even his more practical and intellectual attitude was a way of his ego to deal with his emotional difficulties. We can not say that there was something bad with any type of personality described above, for God Himself created each of His children with the appropriate personality to His purpose for them; what we can say is that, like every human being, their character needed to be transformed by Jesus so that they could exercise their ministries on earth more properly. Therefore, let's not look at Thomas's possible rationality in a critical way, because as we will see later, it was helpful to his companions. Another feature that we can deduce from Thomas was obedience and loyalty, because the comment he made in the episode of Lazarus' death makes us think that he took into account the fidelity to Jesus and the sense of group.

Thus, we can take some conclusions from all the verses we saw above. All the disciples certainly were transformed in their close relationship with Jesus for three years, as well as their faith was also exercised after witnessing some miracles. However, their understanding was still veiled to certain spiritual truths, as we can see when Jesus foretold His death (*Mk. 9: 31-32*: "The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again." But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him"; and *Jn. 20: 9*: "for as yet they did not understand the scripture that he must rise from the dead"). Probably, they also did not remember of what Jesus told at the Mount of Transfiguration to Peter,

James and John (*Matt. 17: 9*, “As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, ‘Tell no one about the vision [*of His glorified body that was seen there*] until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead”); *Lk. 9: 44-45*, “Let these words sink into your ears: ‘The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into human hands.’ But they did not understand this saying; its meaning was concealed from them, so that they could not perceive it. And they were afraid to ask him about this saying”; *Lk. 18: 31-34*, “Then he took the twelve aside and said to them, ‘See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be handed over to the Gentiles; and he will be mocked and insulted and spat upon. After they have flogged him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise again.’ But they understood nothing about all these things; in fact, what he said was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said”).

In the same way, after the resurrection, Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene, to the disciples who went to Emmaus, and even then, the eleven did not believe (*Mk. 16: 9-14*, “Now after he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. She went out and told those who had been with him, while they were mourning and weeping. But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, *they would not believe it*. After this he appeared in another form to two of them [*Lk. 24: 13-35*], as they were walking into the country. And they went back and told the rest, *but they did not believe them*. Later he appeared to the eleven as they were sitting at the table; and he upbraided them for their lack of faith and stubbornness, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen”). The unbelief was not only Thomas’, but of all the disciples, because they were on the same spiritual level and the very bible says that *their understanding was still somewhat veiled*, so much that Jesus opened their understanding of the Scriptures (*Lk. 24: 36-49*, “While they were talking about this [*It refers to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, who had met the Lord*], Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, ‘Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.’ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, ‘Have you anything here to eat?’ They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence. Then he said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you – that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.’ *Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures*, and he said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high”). So, we can think of the passage that is in *Jn. 20: 19-25*, when at this first instance, Thomas was not among the others, so his understanding was not open like the others, therefore he did not believe what they told him, likewise the disciples had not believed in the words of Mary Magdalene.

We can ask then, “Who had veiled the understanding of the disciples to the resurrection of the Master?” The answer is, “Jesus Himself”, because only after His resurrection is that they would have the understanding and the true experience of what this meant. Let us explain better. The two disciples who had a cure ‘individualized’ from the others were Peter (at the Sea of Galilee) and Thomas (with the wounds of

Jesus); perhaps, they were who needed most the profound experiences with Him. Anyway, the others would also need to be His witnesses before men in relation to His resurrection. To be reliable witness of something, one must have an experience with the situation so that the testimony is convincing, so they needed to live a period of separation from God, a 'death', the pain of it and the lack of Jesus to remember how life was before they follow Him, and thus, they might understand how people felt without the real presence of God within their souls. After the resurrection, they could feel the joy of eternal life, for they experienced how the spiritual life of Jesus was necessary to the spirit of someone. If they had understood this before, they would not have the chance to go through the experience in a complete way, i.e., with body, soul and spirit involved in the sadness of separation and the joy of reunion. Now that they really understood what eternal life was and the plan of God to all men is that they could be His living witnesses among mankind.

Until now, what I tried to explain is that all disciples were unbelievers as to the resurrection of Jesus, for not having understood the earlier prophecies about Him (through the prophets and His own mouth).

Now let's talk a little about the attitudes of Thomas. The *first* time he made a comment was when Jesus received the news about the death of Lazarus. He said, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." This answer showed, as I mentioned before, loyalty and obedience to Jesus since He was the Master, had been with them during all those years and in that moment, threatened of being stoned by the Jews, He could not be forsaken by His disciples. While the others were probably delivered to the musings and fear, the rational and practical attitude of Thomas was useful and decisive. He may have demonstrated not only *loyalty and obedience*, but also a *sense of unity (group)*, *daring* and, why not, *faith*? Walking with Jesus for so long and remembering His miracles of healing and resurrection (the daughter of Jairus, the widow's son at Nain), perhaps he might be sure to see another of them that was Lazarus', since Jesus told them that the disease would glorify His name, therefore, His friend would not remain dead. And who had the ability to resurrect the dead, could resurrect any of them who eventually came to perish at the hands of the Jews. Just as others, Thomas didn't really understand yet that Jesus was the Messiah, who would be killed and resurrect on the third day, according to the Scriptures and He Himself had declared. However, based on the experiences lived with the Master, he might believe indeed in His power to raise other people, including him, Thomas.

The *second* comment he made was during the Last Supper, when he asked Jesus where He was going and what the path he should follow. This shows once again that none of them had truly understood what would happen within few hours with their Master. However, Thomas dared to ask a question and Jesus allowed it so that it was recorded for all who came to believe in Him: "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Also Philip did not understand what Jesus was saying, but also dared to ask him: "'Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.' Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves.'"

The *third* reaction of Thomas was interesting because he made it very clear the difference in the way of thinking between him and the others. I'm talking about the moment when Jesus first appeared to the disciples. What was Thomas doing in the street

when they were all hidden there, probably for three days, crying and suffering anguish for the death of Lord and afraid of being killed too? We can think again that his practical way of being should be driven him to do something useful, for example, to search for information about how things were going, if there was danger for them or not, to confirm what the women had said and even to seek more food (they gave to Jesus a piece of broiled fish and honey – *Lk. 24: 36-49*; how did they get it? Could have been through Thomas?), since the others seemed to be delivered to their emotions. In other words, he did not behave like a coward, but in a bold way; and the daring often goes together with faith, not with unbelief. It may have been an ‘unconscious’ faith, since he thought about the death of Jesus as all his companions, however, something *inside his spirit* probably made him feel safe to come out of hiding and seek answers, even if it was only the faith in love and protection of God (the God of Abraham); anyway, it was faith.

Thomas may have felt neglected or excluded from the blessing of seeing the Lord after His resurrection, so he may have taken a more drastic attitude (the *fourth* one of Thomas) such as, for example, to overcome unbelief (since he had not experienced yet the understanding like the others) with a challenge to Jesus. If Thomas was part in the group, he was also entitled to his share in the blessings. The interior boldness made him ask for more of the Lord, probably *a bold attitude of spirit in comparison with the incredulity of the flesh* (Jesus had said in Gethsemane: “the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” – *Mk. 14: 38*. This was not only for Peter, James and John, but for everyone; for Thomas too). Thus, he dared to ask for more of God. The interesting thing is that Jesus knew he would not be there in His first visit and allowed everything to happen once again, so that we, today, could learn from a brother and be edified. When the Lord appeared and distinguished him of the group, calling him in private, most likely the reaction of Thomas was of a great fear, because Jesus knew all things and knew what was going on in his heart. His rebuke was at the same time a way to encourage boldness and faith placed in the spirit of the disciple as if saying, “*That’s what I wish all my children to do: that they make their decision and take a stand, expelling their unbelief, seeking me in a deeper way, even asking to touch my wounds as a way of being powerfully treated in their own flesh.*” Thomas had lived with Jesus for the same time that the other disciples, however, he still depended on the physical presence of the Master there with him so that he felt able to remain following His doctrine. Perhaps this is what he needed: to be touched more strongly, in order to be freed from the shackles of insecurity and unbelief and fly high, according to the project of the Father for him. He had gotten the answer to his challenge. He experienced for himself the power of Jesus. Faith was now rooted in the soul, as a reward for the boldness of the spirit. The Lord told him, “Do not doubt but believe... Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” This could be translated as, “*Touch my being and I’ll touch you. Do not be afraid to ask for more of me, do not be like the unbelievers who hear about me, believe that I can do all things, but are afraid to touch me and experience me deeply in their own bodies. Do not be faithless, but believer, for the true believer and worshiper has no fear of being touched deeply by my Spirit. You still need tangible proofs to know that I exist, that I love you and I’m fighting on your side. But let me tell you today that blessed are those who didn’t see and believed in me; happy are those who didn’t see me in person as you saw me, but even so believed in me through my word.*” This last part concerns to us, believers of this century. Thomas was honored to be particularly healed by the Lord, as Peter was later, by meeting with Him in Galilee before His ascension. Thus, what Thomas teaches us is to believe in the promises of the Lord, but when it

seems impossible to us, we can use our daring and ask to be touched more deeply by Him in our flesh, so that faith does not die; on the contrary, be rooted through a real experience. Many experience Jesus in a superficial way, for they choose to walk hitchhiking on others' faith or are content to be healed externally, without seeking a greater intimacy with Him, because this exposes them to pain and shame in front of other people. Jesus said, "And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free... So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (*Jn. 8: 32; 36*). Each of us must know his own truth, that is, the cause of suffering in his life and God's solution.

Thomas is an Aramaic name (*Te'ômã'*), which the Greeks called *Didymus*, *twin*. Although there is no confirmation about Thomas having a twin brother or not (*twin* may be only the meaning of his name), we can extrapolate this argument saying that, as Thomas has been changed through his intimate contact with Jesus and became like the Master, being "*Thomas*" means to be "*twin brothers*" of the Lord, that is, *to become like Him*, being changed every moment of our lives through our personal trials, gaining more faith every day; as the bible says, *being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another* (*2 Cor. 3: 18*). Many attitudes of Thomas were considered as unbelief, disrespect or imbalance of the flesh, but if we look for the purpose hidden in the bottom of each one, we will see that he was not afraid to dare and ask for more of God. Therefore, a disciple may even be misunderstood in his attitude; however, he should never be afraid of wanting more of the Lord. What may seem, roughly speaking, an irreverence before Him may be a cry for help from the soul and spirit, asking for strength to overcome hardships and reach another level of faith. Thomas experienced Pentecost, grew spiritually, fulfilled his ministry and died in India, pierced by spears, talking of Jesus to the Gentiles.

Jesus began His ministry with twelve carnal and sick men, emotionally and spiritually, but ended it with eleven disciples ready to receive power from the Father and be able to start His project for all of us.



“Son, don’t be afraid to enter my altar through the unconditional surrender of your heart. Let me now touch your most deep wounds, for they make you slip and bind you to the ties of the enemy. What I put in your heart is my truth and do not let discouraging and defeatist words steal your faith in me anymore or in the gifts that I put in you. Touch me and I will touch you. Do not be afraid to ask more of me; however, take your stand before the universe and you will no longer hobble. Your exterior will reflect the truth, the strength and firmness of your interior. Do not be like the unbelievers who hear about me, believe that I can do all things but are afraid to touch me and to experience me deeply in their own bodies. Do not be unbelieving, but a believer, for the true believer and worshiper has no fear of being touched deeply by my Spirit. You still need tangible proofs to know that I exist, that I love you and I’m fighting on your side in the same way that Thomas needed my physical presence with him to follow me fully as a disciple. However, let me tell you today that blessed are those who didn’t see me and believed in me; happy are those who didn’t see me personally as Thomas saw me, but even so, believed in me through my word. You may consider yourself a blessed one, because you were not with me at that time; however, you have within you my constant presence that encourages you to believe that I live in your heart and give you strength to overcome the barriers of the impossible, in order to bring my miracles to light. Receive my blessing upon your life, the blessing of faith that overcomes all unbelief and uncertainty and makes you steady and strong in my ways.”