

St Thomas the Apostle – 3 July



Thomas, one of Jesus' 12 apostles, was an impulsive, confused, honest sceptic. Jesus could understand and work with such a man. Thomas' impulsiveness was evident when Jesus prepared to visit Lazarus in Bethany. It was a dangerous trip to make, because of the Jews, but Thomas urged his fellow disciples: "Let us also go, that we may die with him." (Jn 11.16) Instead, Jesus brought Lazarus back to life.

Thomas' confusion is shown in later talks with Jesus. He was not really sure where Jesus was going long-term (Jn 14.5). But Jesus accepted this confused commitment, and began to untangle it, patiently explaining "I am going to my father", and "No one comes unto the Father but by me."

Finally, Thomas' honest scepticism is revealed after the Resurrection, which he flatly refused to believe - unless he could touch the wounds of the risen Jesus. Sure enough, Jesus appears - but instead of scolding him, shows him the wounds. Thomas responds: "My Lord and my God" (Jn 20.26ff).

Thus Doubting Thomas' honest doubts, turned to honest faith, have become a reassurance for thousands of men and women across the centuries, who also want to follow Jesus, but who require some proof of this amazing event - the Resurrection. In Doubting Thomas' complete affirmation of faith, after meeting the risen, crucified Christ, they can find support for their own faith.

Ancient legends tell how Thomas went on to India as a missionary. There are rumours that Thomas even built a palace for a king's daughter in India, and thus he is the patron saint of architects. It is believed that he was martyred by a spear on 3 July, 72 AD in Mylapore, near Madras. 46 ancient churches in England were dedicated to him.

St Mary Magdalene – 22 July

It is easy to understand the popularity of Mary Magdalene over the centuries: she is the patron saint both of repentant sinners and of the contemplative life.

Jesus drove seven demons from Mary, who came from near Tiberias in Galilee. She became his follower to the bitter end. She followed him to Jerusalem and was present during the crucifixion, standing heart-broken at the foot of the cross. Her love for Jesus did not end there, for she went to the tomb to anoint his body on the Sunday morning.

Such faithful, humble devotion was richly repaid: it gave her a unique privilege among all mankind: she was the first person to whom the Risen Lord appeared on Easter Sunday morning. She thought He was the gardener at first.

Mary Magdalene has sometimes been identified with the woman who anointed Christ's feet in the house of Simon (Lk 7.37). Over the centuries many artists have painted this scene. Mary Magdalene's feast has been kept in the West since the 8th century. England has 187 ancient churches dedicated to her, as well as a College in both Oxford and Cambridge.