

Sermon for the Feast of St Thomas – 03/07/2106

So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens but you are citizens with the saints, and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the corner stone. (Ephesians 2, 19-20).

As my first name is Thomas, I am very privileged to have St. Thomas the apostle as my patron saint. He is wonderfully and engagingly imperfect. He is rash, impetuous, passionate, stubborn and is secretly a bit of a coward. He did say to the other disciples when Jesus was on the road to Bethany, that he and they should go and die with Jesus. Later he shows that he was not sure where Jesus was really or how to get there. Like the other disciples he was conspicuously absent at the Crucifixion. After the resurrection he may have been grieving on his own, and perhaps reviewing his future, and so missed Jesus' first appearance to the disciples. But later when Jesus appeared again and invited Thomas to touch him, he more than amply redeemed himself with a fulsome confession of faith. Tradition has it that he witnessed to Christ as far away as India where he founded the Syrian Malabar Church, and was martyred in the year 72, and buried in mylapore.

As I said to the Wednesday congregation, our God certainly has a sense of humour and a different perspective on things. Look at Peter and Paul, as well as Thomas; Peter a rough fisherman, unlettered, sent to the Jews ; an ardent nationalist, commissioned to bring in Gentiles to the faith and witness to their receiving the Holy Spirit. Paul, an erudite Pharisee, tasked with the mission to the Gentiles. Both had very different takes on Jesus and had great difficulty getting on with one another. Both had their group of followers, as Paul's letters to the Corinthians shows. Jesus did appoint Peter as head of this group of apostles, but the acts and tradition shows the apostles going off on their own to evangelise and create very different churches. The Malabar Churches in the far east, founded by St. Thomas bear little resemblance to the strictly controlled churches of Jerusalem or Rome and Corinth.

God chose and chooses very ordinary flawed people to establish his kingdom. University degrees and good breeding are not essential, nor good looks; viz Mother Teresa, St. Francis, Archbishop Ramsey! God also seems able to tolerate differences in the way he/she is seen or worshipped, asking only for a humble and contrite heart.

So Thomas is for us a wonderful inspiration, flawed but faithful in the end. He would never be able to forget the words of Jesus! Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have come to believe. So many of us are in that category; we struggle with life's crises and pains but somehow hang on to the

assurance of God that we are loved. Fear not, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name; you are mine.

So let us sit for a few moments in silence, knowing that we are in the presence of One who is in our suffering with us, and will strengthen and console us.