



Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue
in the City of New York

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www.SaintThomasChurch.org

Sunday, April 7, 2002
The Second Sunday of Easter

Festal Eucharist
at 11am

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A Sermon by
The Reverend Andrew C. Mead, Rector
on
Saint John 20:19-31
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SAINT PUDDLEGLUM

[Thomas] said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe."

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.

C. S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* is the classic seven-book epic of the pilgrimage of a family of four school children, two brothers and two sisters, through magical lands and enchanted adventures. There are tests of soul and struggles of good against evil. There is one character in particular, a lion named Aslan, who suffers and dies and rises again, and who leads the children through great perils and to amazing victories over a great serpent who takes the beguiling form of a seductive and cruel witch. There is even a great Last Battle, which ends with the children entering and reigning with Aslan in his Kingdom.

In the middle of this epic there appears one striking little creature named Puddleglum. Puddleglum is a marsh-wiggle. He lives in a great flat plain cut by countless channels of water into little low islands covered with coarse grass and bordered by reeds and rushes. He has green-grey hair, dark skin with a muddy complexion, webbed feet and sunken cheeks. He wears a perpetually solemn expression on his long and thin and tight-lipped face. Even the smoke from Puddleglum's pipe trickles out of the bowl and downward, drifting along the ground like a mist.

Puddleglum is one of the heroes of Lewis's great story, first impressions notwithstanding. He has a pessimistic yet winning turn of mind, with expressions such as these: "Good morning. I don't mean it won't turn to rain or fog or even snow and thunder." Or: "I see you're making the best of a bad job. You've been well brought up, you have. Learned to put a good face on things." Or: "Puddleglum's my name. It doesn't matter if you forget it; I can always tell you again."

But Puddleglum is a staunch friend, the kind of person you want next to you in a fight. Quietly deciding to help the children on their journey, he says: “I don’t know that anyone can exactly *help*... What with enemies, and mountains and rivers to cross, and losing our way, and next to nothing to eat, and sore feet, at least we’ll hardly notice the [bad] weather... So don’t lose heart.” When he goes into a terrifying battle, he says: “Well, the cause is probably lost, but we might as well make a good end of it.” (C. S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Silver Chair*, pp. 54-66)

My brothers and sisters in Christ, meet Saint Thomas the Apostle, the patron saint of our beloved church!

Saint Thomas is on the reredos and the facade of this church, just over the door behind his great statue, where his life is spelled out in small panels. They are called 1) the Despair of Saint Thomas, 2) the Doubt of Saint Thomas, 3) the Confession of Saint Thomas, and 4) the Mission of Saint Thomas. Let’s look at each of these briefly.

1) The Despair of Saint Thomas comes in two episodes in Saint John’s Gospel. The first is when Jesus, against the advice of his friends, decides to return to Judea (where his enemies are concentrated) to visit Bethany – to visit the sisters Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus (whom he will raise from the dead). Everyone is frightened. Then Thomas says, “Let us go, that we may die with him.” (Jn 11:16) You can read these words on the narthex floor at the entrance to the Chantry Chapel: “Let us go, that we may die with him.”

Later, when gloom gathers around Jesus in his approaching passion, the Lord tells the apostles, “I go to prepare a place for you, and you know the way where I am going.” Thomas says what everyone is thinking but is afraid to say: “Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?” To which Jesus replies, “I am the way...”

2) The Despair of Thomas nevertheless contains honorable pluck, and by this time it doesn’t surprise that, after Jesus’ death, when Thomas misses his resurrection appearance to the apostles in the upper room on the first Easter evening, he says this as he is told by the others that they have seen the risen Lord: “Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe.” Thus the Doubt of Saint Thomas proceeds from the secret strengths of his character, revealed in the Despair of Saint Thomas. He loves the Lord. He doesn’t want to hear stories of spirits or of causes outliving their founder. He doesn’t want “spin.” He wants to see Jesus, Jesus who was crucified.

3) The virtues of Thomas’s Doubt are manifested on the first Sunday after Easter in the same upper room, as we heard in today’s Gospel. The doors were locked, and Jesus appeared in their midst, meeting Thomas on his own ground. “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand and place it in my side; do not be faithless but believing.”

The Gospel doesn’t say whether Thomas did touch Jesus. But Thomas obeyed Jesus by being faithful, and he made the highest confession of faith of all the apostles: “My Lord and my God.” You can see him doing this, in the tableau just over the altar, kneeling before Jesus.

4) The Mission of Saint Thomas, according to tradition, took him east, all the way to Persia and India, where ancient churches still claim him as their founder. This remarkable character was surely a prince among the apostles, a great soldier for Christ. His mission goes on. It is here with us, and I want to finish by describing that mission.

Notice that it was *the wounds of the Body of the risen Christ* that convinced Saint Thomas and inspired his great confession of faith. That still holds true. Jesus told Thomas that

those of us who have not seen with our eyes the glorious scars on the resurrected Lord are blessed through him: “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” Yet Thomas nailed down a principle by which many of us come to believe that Jesus lives. This is how it happens:

The members of the Body of Christ who most convince me that Jesus lives are the true saints. These are the Christians who really do take up their crosses daily and follow him. They bear in their own lives the living sacrifice of Jesus. In their honesty, their kindness, their courage, their generosity, their self-forgetful humility, their divine sense of humor, they show the print of the nails and the mark of the spear-wound. They live by Christ, and they show that he lives and reigns in them. Their triumphs are Christ’s triumphs in them. They constitute the authentic Church, the genuine Body of the same Christ who suffered for us and our salvation, died and rose again.

The Mission of Saint Thomas is for us to *be that kind of a Church; to be a family of that sort of Christian*. This great parish, named after this extraordinary apostle – this wonderful “Puddleglum” character – has a mission to show forth Christ crucified and risen in the middle of New York.

Let us be a community where people can see Jesus’ marks of love among us, and where they will want to join us, with the holy apostle, in worship and praise, exclaiming, “My Lord and my God!”

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen..