



**SAINT THOMAS CHURCH FIFTH AVENUE**  
**in the City of New York**  
*The Reverend Canon Carl F. Turner, Rector*  
**[www.SaintThomasChurch.org](http://www.SaintThomasChurch.org)**

**Sunday, September 12, 2021**  
*Patronal Feast Day*

*Solemn Evensong*  
*4pm*

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A Sermon by  
The Rev. Alison Turner, *Associate for Children and Family Ministry*  
*on*  
Colossians 3:1-17  
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**This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.**

Today is a joyful day, a day of gratitude, and one of good news, as we gather in worship and celebration for this Solemn Evensong, to mark the occasion of a hopeful new school year. But, unlike last September, we gather with the full choir of men and boys, commission a new Board of Trustees, and install a new Head of School. This is the day that we - students, faculty, staff, parents, Alumni, and the local and worldwide Saint Thomas Parish family - have been waiting for. We have been anticipating this day for a very long time. **This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us all rejoice and be glad in it.**

Some of you will have been at mass this morning, when the newly appointed Head and Deputy head choristers were admitted for service in leadership, and when Father Moretz was commissioned for his new role as Vicar and take a greater role in leading our parish and school as we implement our strategic plan. And at Evensong we gather for a in installation.

Now, an installation sounds like something we might *do* with a painting, a sculpture, or even (dare I say it) a camera system! In this setting, however, an installation is not simply about *doing* something but, rather, rooting someone in their new and distinctive role within this unique community, and affirming their calling in this place. Today's installation is, therefore, a symbolic and poignant moment in which we mark this time in our school's history and our parish story. Mr. Seeley has now been welcomed as Head of School, and his installation into the Choir also makes him part of something bigger in this beautiful house of God.

Chris, from this day, every time you enter this beautiful church, and take your place in Choir, may you be reminded of your call to lead us here as Head of the Saint Thomas Choir School. But may you also be inspired through the wider parish community to write a new chapter in the history of our beloved school because of that calling. For we have not just called an educator and a man of faith, we have called Christopher. God also calls you by your name. You bring who are to this role and to this community.

How appropriate it is that you carry the name of a saint whose story is about protection along the journey; Christopher - Christ bearer! Or, if we look back to the 10th century, Christopher also means someone who carries Christ in their heart, and we can already see that in you. Carrying Christ in your heart isn't just what you *do* but it is who you *are*, as you now follow in the footsteps of previous heads of school and, looking ahead, being a forerunner to those who are yet to come.

As Head of School, you know that people will turn to you for wisdom, patience, inspiration, and guidance. But I also hope that they will turn to you for joy, and from this day forward, our prayer is that you will also grow in your own learning; that you will also be nurtured in faith, as you encourage others to do the same, and to contribute to, and share a joint vision for the coming years. On days that run smoothly, on days that stretch you and challenge you, may you remember every day is part of the whole tapestry of the unique gift of life found in a school, and in this Choir School with its love of being a family, and making music and not just about learning.

During Evensongs or other services, may this be a place from where you too will be inspired. May you be nurtured in faith, find wisdom in scripture and as we worship sing, psalms, hymns and spiritual songs together may you too be renewed in your knowledge and understanding of Christ dwelling within you, within one another and, indeed, this place.

At times, just like the boys, you will discover new things about this sacred space, you will be led to new insights, and helped to make connections with the busy world around us. Perhaps you will spot the intricate carvings of people who have lived inspirational lives and this, in turn, will lead to gratitude for Saint Thomas Choir School and Church. As you gaze at these famous stained-glass windows, you will begin to notice that each one has been dedicated to someone's memory but always to the glory of God which, after all, is the purpose of our Christian journey. As the new organ case boldly states - Soli Deo Gloria - To God alone be the glory! There's always something new to see here, especially as our eyes raise up to this amazing Reredos, where we see a myriad of Saints lovingly carved behind us each revealing their own charism, or gift held in their hands. Some characters are easy to identify, such as Saint Peter holding his keys of the kingdom, or those bearing symbols of martyrdom like St Bartholomew. Then there are those more recent saints whose lives, along with the additional sculpted faces of the 1960s that look out on Fifth Avenue, inspire us to follow Christ in acts of justice and mercy, and reflect what it means to walk humbly in serving God and our neighbor.

I am sure that we all have our favorites, but it's not the individual pieces that make this Reredos beautiful, rather, beauty is seen in how each individual comes together united in a life, transformed by Christ that we too may be transformed and our community be the one that is transformative in the world. Now, there doesn't seem to be a St. Christopher up there yet, but one unmissable, beautifully carved character above the High Altar is of course Saint Thomas, our patron saint, someone so often passed by as a person of doubt rather than a man of faith. His representation here depicts the Gospel reading we heard at mass this morning and the exclamation of Thomas on seeing the Lord's wounded side, "My Lord and my God!" to which Jesus responded to him, *"Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."* That stone frieze serves as a prophetic reminder that we are called into a living relationship with the Lord and especially today on our Patronal Feast Day.

However, if we look very carefully at Thomas, he is depicted so differently to all the other saints on the Reredos, who are presented as upright, almost proud of their attributes or accolades, and certainly confident in their gift and relationship with Jesus.

I've been reflecting how there are many aspects of Saint Thomas' life which mirror and model collaborative leadership for both our new Head of School and our new Board of Trustees. Some years ago, when I was first entrusted with leading a school, I learned very quickly how important this was to the health and vitality of my school community – faculty as well as students, but also *my* own health and vitality.

Firstly, Thomas has courage to ***dare greatly***. As one of Mr. Seeley's favorite authors, Brené Brown says, *"[Daring greatly] means the courage to be vulnerable. It means to show up and be seen. To ask for what you need. To talk about how you're feeling. To have the hard conversations."*

Thomas, here, shows that kind of humility, and takes a risk, as he kneels at the feet of Jesus. He knows his need of Jesus and bears *nothing* in his hands. Unlike other saints on the Reredos, they are empty and wholeheartedly open to the wounded hands of Jesus, of whom he inquires, and bravely questions - sometimes saying those things that other people are too afraid to say but wished they had the courage to do. That kind of openness and that kind of questioning is not doubt but a desire to be known and to understand - something that is certainly encouraged in this school by students and faculty alike.

And in his kneeling, Thomas shows his disposition to serve. What we know of his life from that moment, is his whole hearted commitment to live a life of compassion, patience, kindness, and forgiveness. A life, by virtue of our baptism, that *we* are also called to inhabit. As we heard in the second lesson, by putting on love, we will discover perfect harmony - how appropriate is that for a school dedicated to making beautiful music!

Here, especially, our music plays that key role in connecting all the aspects of our common life as a school community together. As the choristers' pray puts it so simply, we pray that the words on our lips may be believed in our hearts, and shown forth and practiced in our lives. If all that we do, and all we *are* together is bound up in the love of Jesus, then our community and school will be so harmonious that others will want to be part of it too.