THE DOUBLE TURNING TOWARD CHRIST

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Truly, Saint Thomas the Apostle, the Doubter, has very many followers: millions, hundreds of millions. How many times in our lives have we heard it from the lips of those close to us, our acquaintances, our friends: "I would believe all of it if I saw it, but God demands too much of me. How am I to believe that He rose from the tomb, that He rose from the dead? How am I to believe that there is some life after death? How am I to believe that He is present in a piece of bread? If I saw all of it, then I would believe."

A few years ago, at the request of one of my acquaintances, I had the opportunity to meet his friend, who was studying, doing a doctorate in some branch of physics, whose name I probably could not even repeat. A very specialised field, somewhere in Oxford or Cambridge. From an academic family, as I could see: lecturers at the Polytechnic, well-off. A young fellow, around 30, and he came to talk about his life, which for the average observer was a string of successes, a life that to the average person would seem like something out of a fairy tale. When he came and we began to talk, he simply began to cry. He began to cry. He says to me, and I was not yet a bishop then: "Father, you have no idea how much I would like to believe that God exists and that I am not alone. Father, how many sleepless nights there have been in my life. How many times I wake up in the middle of the night and wonder whether God exists or not. Whether I am alone, or whether there is someone to whom my fate is not a matter of indifference." He says: "Father, there is nothing I long for so much as that one day I will simply wake up with that certainty, with that conviction that so many people have, that God exists."

And I see on his face that unhappiness hidden beneath the successes of this world, beneath an American smile. I see the pain of his heart, which finds its expression and comes out of him together with his tears. And I ask, I begin to probe: what stands in the way? What stands in the way of your believing that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that God exists? Then I hear the answer: "Father, if the Lord Jesus stood next to me, if I could see Him, touch Him, then I would certainly believe." I say: "You see, you are not seeking faith, you want knowledge. You would weigh the Lord Jesus, measure Him, examine Him."

Faith, my dear ones, presupposes a certain uncertainty. Faith is an act of the intellect which bows before God because God is the supreme Being, because God can deceive neither Himself nor us. My dear ones, how many seekers of knowledge, and not of faith, there are around us – of the faith that Saint John the Apostle reminds us of today in the lesson, that this is the victory which overcomes the world: our faith.

And we see, my dear ones, a world in which faith in the true God is disappearing. We see the effects of the disappearance of faith. We see people tossed about, chasing after who knows what, people filled with unhappiness, hidden behind an artificial smile, behind silly conversations, little jokes. Dear faithful, but we see this unbelief not only among openly godless people, among people hostile to the Lord Jesus and His Church. We also see, we perceive, we sense this unbelief among many pious people, or rather one should say: apparently pious people. We see, my dear ones, a whole mass of false Catholics, Catholics who have God on their lips but most certainly do not have Him in their hearts. Catholics to whom one could address the words of reproach that God once addressed to the Israelites: "This people honours me only with their lips." What a great misfortune it is to be an apparent Catholic. Something that has become common bread today in the post-conciliar religion: a whole mass of so-called Catholics, a whole mass of unbelieving bishops, priests and laity.

We may wonder where this unbelief comes from among people who seem to be pious, also within Catholic tradition. Where does this unbelief come from among people who have God on their lips? How is it possible? They go to church, perhaps they even approach the sacraments, they make a pious impression on us. How is it possible that there is no faith in

them, that their soul, their heart is empty, that perhaps they hold their little hands nicely folded? Perhaps this priest or that one will put on a beautiful alb with beautiful lace, but he is like a clanging cymbal. Somewhere beneath the skin we sense that what he does, what he says, is completely worthless, completely empty.

MARY MAGDALENE

Dear faithful, in the past week, throughout the whole octave, we heard many passages of the Gospel describing various meetings of the Lord Jesus with those close to Him. On Thursday in the Easter octave, Holy Church read to us a passage from the Gospel of Saint John describing the meeting of the Lord Jesus with Mary Magdalene. With that Mary Magdalene whose sins the Lord Jesus forgave, who washed His feet with her own tears at the feast at Simon's house. With that Mary Magdalene who was the sister of Lazarus, raised by the Saviour. Mary Magdalene, whose love for the Lord Jesus no one could certainly deny. Mary Magdalene, who stood by the tomb, looked into it more than once, because she loved and sought him whom she could not find. Her heart was living through sadness, longing, this uncertainty. The Saviour taken away. "We do not know, we do not know where they have laid Him."

Note: already in this sadness, which flows from sincere love of the Saviour, the Risen One Himself reveals Himself to her. While she is turned toward the tomb, she hears a voice behind her, turns around, and the Saviour is standing before her. She turns in His direction, but does not recognise Him. Magdalene, to whom the Lord Jesus was so close, turns to Him, turns around to Him, the Lord Jesus is standing before her, and she does not recognise Him. She talks with Him as with a stranger. We cannot explain it away by saying that perhaps the sun blinded her, perhaps her eyes were full of tears. But note: after a moment the Saviour addresses her by name: "Mary." The Evangelist recorded what happened then. She, having turned, says to Him: "Rabboni, which is to say: Master." For a second time she turns. But this makes no sense at all: she had already turned to the Lord Jesus, she had spoken with Him. The Evangelist tells us that she turned to Him. How are we to understand this?

But, my dear ones, that first turning toward the Lord Jesus was of a purely and exclusively physical character. Mary Magdalene turned to the Lord Jesus with her body, and therefore she did not recognise Him. She was so heavily weighed down by suffering, by longing, by the emotions bound up with the Passion of the Lord Jesus, that this bodily turning did not allow her to recognise the risen Saviour. That is not small, it is enormous [?]. And only when the Lord Jesus calls her by name: "Mary," does she turn a second time, this time turning in her soul, turning toward the Saviour with her heart, and at that moment she immediately recognises Him.

This is a very important lesson for all of us, who are to a greater or lesser degree unbelieving, doubters: this double turning of Mary Magdalene. How many Catholics there are today who turn to the Lord Jesus only with their bodies, who come to tick off a little church on Sunday, nicely fold their hands, perhaps sing nicely, but how many of these unfortunate Catholics have never completed the double turning toward Christ? How many apparent Catholics there are who turn to the Lord Jesus with their bodies, but have never turned to Him with their hearts, with their souls? And that is why we will never truly come to know the Lord Jesus.

MY LORD AND MY GOD

My dear ones, we must realise what a great danger this is for each of us. What a great misfortune it is to be an apparent Catholic. What a great misfortune for Catholics, including Catholics of tradition, including a whole mass of priests, that they are in essence unbelieving people, people who have turned to the Lord Jesus with their bodies, who perhaps often have religious matters on their lips, but in whose hearts there is emptiness. They have never turned toward Christ. They have not found the Risen One. Weighed down by the cares of this world, chained like slaves to various emotions which obscure God from them, which make slaves of them.

Dear faithful, on this Low Sunday we must ask with all our heart that, with the help of God's grace, we

may complete the work of the double turning toward Christ: both body and soul. We must ask that, with the help of God's grace, we may find the Risen One, that we may see Him with the eyes of our souls. "Thomas, blessed are they that have not seen, and have believed." Saint Thomas touches the wounds of Christ today in order to heal the wound of our unbelief. Saint Thomas shows us how we can pass from unbelief to faith.

In just a moment, the risen Saviour will become present among us on this altar. In just a moment each of us will behold the risen Jesus hidden under the appearance of the Host. Let us fall on our knees and repeat in our hearts this confession, the most beautiful confession of Saint Thomas: "My Lord and my God."

Amen.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Praised be Jesus Christ.