



Lent  
DAILY DEVOTIONALS  
Believing Is Seeing  
Romano Guardini

*Thomas declared, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it." John 20:25*

Thomas appears to have been a realist – reserved, cool perhaps a little obstinate.

The days went by, and the disciples went on living under this considerable tension. Another week, and they were together again in the house, this time Thomas with them. The same thing repeated itself. Jesus passed through closed doors, stepped into their midst, and spoke: "Peace be upon you!" Then he called the man who was struggling against faith: "Let me have thy finger; see, here are my hands. Let me have thy hand; put it into my side. Cease thy doubting, and believe!" At this point Thomas was overwhelmed. The truth of it all came home to him: this man standing before him, so moving, arousing such deep feelings within him, this man so full of mystery, so different from all other men – He is the very same One they used to be together with, who was put to death a short time ago. And Thomas surrendered: "Thou art my Lord and my God!" Thomas believed.

Then we come upon the strange words: "And Jesus said to him, 'Thou hast learned to believe, Thomas because thou hast seen me. Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have learned to believe!'"

Such words as these are really extraordinary! Thomas believed because he saw. But our Lord did not call him blessed. He had been allowed to "see," to see the hands and the side, and to touch the blessed wounds, yet he was not blessed! Perhaps Thomas had a narrow escape from a great danger. He wants proofs, wanted to see and touch: but then too, it might have been rebellion deep within him, the vain glory of an intelligence that would not surrender, a sluggishness and coldness of heart. He got what he asked for: a look and a touch. But it must have been a concession he deplored having received, when he thought on it afterwards. He could have believed and been saved, not because he got what he demanded; he could have believed because God's mercy had touched his heart and given him the grace of interior vision, the gift of the opening of the heart, and of its surrender.

God could also have let him stay with the words he had spoken: in that state of unbelief which cuts itself off from everything, that insists on human evidence to become convinced. In that case he would have remained an unbeliever and gone on his way. In that state, external seeing and touching would not have helped him at all, he simply would have called it delusion. Nothing that comes from God, even the greatest miracle can be proven like  $2 \times 2 = 4$ . It touches one; it is only seen and grasped when the heart is open and the spirit purged of self. Then it awakens faith. But when these conditions are not present there are always reasons to be found to say solemnly and impressively that it is all delusion, or that such-and-such is so because some other thing is so. Or the excuse that always is handy: We cannot explain it yet...the future will enlighten us about it!

Thomas was standing a hairsbreadth away from obduracy and perdition. He was not at all blessed. Blessed indeed are "those who have not seen, and yet have learned to believe!" Those who ask for no miracles, demand nothing out of the ordinary, but who find God's Message in everyday life. Those who require no compelling proofs, but who know that everything coming from God must remain in certain ultimate suspense, so that faith may never cease to require daring. Those who know that the heart is not overcome by faith, that there is no force or violence there, compelling belief by rigid certitudes. What comes from God touches gently, comes quietly; does not disturb freedom; leads to quiet, profound, peaceful resolve within the heart.

And those are called blessed who make the effort to remain open hearted. Who seek to cleanse their hearts of all self-righteousness, obstinacy, presumption, inclination to "know better." Who are quick to hear, humble, free spirited. Who are able to find God's message in the gospel for the day, or even from the sermons of preachers with no message in particular, or in phrases from the Law they have heard a thousand times, phrases with no quality of charismatic power about them, or in the happenings of everyday life which always ends up the same way: work and rest, anxiety – and then again some kind of success, some joy, an encounter, and a sorrow.

Blessed are those who can see the Lord in all these things!