



The Parish Churches of S Philip and S Augustine and S Matthew with S Mary the Virgin Newcastle

Homily for the Feast of Saint Thomas (3rd July) 2026

If ever I were to decide to produce *Saint John's Gospel - the Movie*, I would seek to cast a well known actor in the part of Saint Thomas. It would be something of a cameo role, because Thomas is not frequently at the centre of the action, but when he does appear, Jesus makes an important theological point. What is more, all his appearances are connected with the Resurrection.

So, he has a speaking part at the resurrection of Lazarus; it is his question, which provokes Jesus' Self-revelation as the Way, the Truth and the Life; he is mentioned as being present when some of the Apostles encounter the risen Christ on the beach; and, of course, he is at the centre of the narrative whence he derives his soubriquet, *Doubting Thomas*.

It seems that Thomas was rather more prominent in the *Johannine* community than those of the other Evangelists, who only mention him in lists of the Twelve and never recall any event in which he had a prominent role.

Was it, perhaps, that Thomas's memory was associated with truths that were important in what many New Testament scholars suppose to have been the theologically fractious community from which the Fourth Gospel emerged?

In these few moments, there is not time to consider the four appearances of Thomas in detail; but we can briefly consider three points.

First, there is that passage where Jesus describes Himself as the Way, the Truth and the Life. We know from Saint Paul's letters that in those early days, Christian communities were vulnerable to all sorts of influences as our earliest forebears in the Faith tried to make sense of and understand Who exactly Jesus is. Maybe, like the Corinthians, the members of the *Johannine* community needed to be reminded, of Whom it was that they were disciples.

Secondly, there is the episode wherein Jesus shows Thomas His hands and His side. This emphasises that there is a continuity between the Jesus of Nazareth, Who was crucified and the risen Christ, Who appeared to His Apostles. Although David Jenkins was correct in his notoriously and provocatively phrased assertion that the Resurrection was more than a conjuring trick with bones, it is equally the case that the Resurrection was much more than some vague notion of stating that Jesus was still with the Apostles in their memories of Him: that there was and is a living reality, which is the risen Christ with the same identity as the Jesus with Whom they had walked and talked prior to the events of Calvary.

Thirdly - and later in the same narrative - we have the dictum, "Blessed are they who have not seen and yet believe." Probably, the Fourth Gospel was being written as the living memory of Jesus' incarnate memory was beginning to attenuate through the mortality of those who witnessed it. As Jesus prepares to take His leave of the written record of those days, in response to Thomas's rather gruesome demand for proof, He reflects on the generations to come who will not be able to demand such evidence - having neither the tangible risen Christ, nor even those who had met with Him - but who will believe, never-the-less.

Linking these important theological themes with Saint Thomas might suggest that he enjoyed a greater prominence in the *Johannine* community than, perhaps, he does for us today. There is some evidence that this profile continued in some regions for quite some time - not least the *Mar Thoma Church*, which considers itself the heir to a community established by the Apostle, whose memory we honour today.