

ST. THOMAS IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

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In the Synoptic gospels, Thomas is not given any special prominence. One finds his name only in the list of the twelve disciples of Jesus (Mt 10:3; Mk 3:18; Lk 6:15). Like most of the disciples in these gospels, Thomas is very much a faceless figure.

However, that is not the case in the Gospel of John, where Thomas is given great prominence. Thomas is one of the three disciples who are presented as ideal or model disciples, the other two being Peter and “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (Jn 13:23; 19:26; 21:7, 20), generally identified with John, the author of the fourth gospel. Ideal or model disciples means that their faith, their relationship with Jesus, the values they stand for, are to be emulated and imitated by believers. They stand as models for all followers of Jesus of all times. All these three are found in several texts in the gospel of John.

Thomas is found only in four texts in the gospel of John (11:16; 14:5-5; 20:24-29; 21:2). However, those texts are very significant and they tell a lot about Thomas. Of these, the first three are more important than the fourth, i.e., Jn 21:2.

With regard to this fourth text, a simple observation will suffice. The text is almost parallel to the list of the Twelve in the synoptic Gospels. However, unlike in the Synoptic Gospels, there is no full list of the Twelve anywhere in the fourth gospel. It is a shorter list of seven disciples that one finds in Jn 21:2 in the context of the

miraculous fishing. It must be noted that in that list, Thomas is mentioned next to Peter, with the probable implication that Thomas had by then emerged as the third most important disciple after Peter and the “disciple whom Jesus loved” (or the second most important disciple after Peter?). Did Thomas, perhaps, acquire this special importance because of Jesus’ appearance in Jn 20:24-29 just for Thomas’ sake? Such a possibility cannot be denied.

Since the other three texts shed much light on Thomas’ character, they need to be examined at greater length.

1. JOHN 11:16

Chapter 11 deals with the raising of Lazarus. Thomas appears in the section, where Jesus is preparing to go to Bethany to raise Lazarus from death. Lazarus falls ill. His sisters, Martha and Mary send Jesus a very brief message: “Lord, he whom you love, is ill” (Jn 11:3). Augustine comments that such a message is more than enough, because one does not love a person and abandons him in a time of need (*non amas et deseris*). They are convinced that since “Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus” (Jn 11:5), he will certainly do what the occasion requires. However, Jesus does not make any immediate move. He stays two more days in the place where he was, and it is then that he tells the disciples: “Let us go to Judea again” (Jn 11:7).

This is followed by two different reactions on the part of his disciples. The first reaction seems to have been the majority opinion, held probably by all the eleven disciples and that was: “Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again” (v.8)? The disciples could be referring to what happened in the previous chapter: “The Jews took up stones again to stone him” (Jn 10:31); and: “Then they tried to arrest him again” (Jn 10:39). One finds this happening also in other passages in the Gospel of John (Jn

7:30: 8:20). Somehow Jesus escapes every time, just because his hour, his time, set by the Father for him to suffer, die and rise again, “had not yet come” (Jn 7:30; 8:20).

It must be kept in mind that all such hostile reactions came from Jesus’ opponents, the Jewish leaders, namely, the priests, the Scribes and the Pharisees, mainly when Jesus happened to be in Jerusalem, in the temple or in the temple precincts. That is understandable, because Jerusalem was the main centre of their activities and, in the Gospel of John, Jesus is also found there quite often engaging in bitter controversies with them.

The disciples were fully aware of such situations, because they had witnessed all those situations. This explains their reaction to Jesus’ proposal to go to Bethany. Bethany was quite close to Jerusalem, just some three kilometers away. If Jesus went to Bethany, it was almost certain, that from there he would go to Jerusalem. The disciples were of the view that any further visit on the part of Jesus to Jerusalem would be imprudent, risky. The anger of the Jews at their repeated failure to arrest or to stone Jesus is most unlikely to have cooled down by then. They are, thus advising Jesus, out of their concern for him, not to expose himself to danger by going to Bethany.

However, it is not as simple as that. They are afraid of what may happen to Jesus, but also of what may happen to themselves; they are concerned not only about the safety of Jesus, but also about their own safety. What is really at the back of the minds of the disciples is evident from the words of Thomas. He exhorts them: “let us go and die with him”. The disciples are simply not ready for that. They are in a dilemma. On the one hand, being Jesus’ disciples, they cannot refuse to go with him; on the other hand, if they do go with him, they are likely to be killed along with him. So, the best solution they can think of is that Jesus should desist from going to Bethany. That is the

only way both Jesus and the disciples will be safe!

Such an understanding should not be ruled out. There are at least two other occasions when the disciples react exactly in the same manner.

In Mt 16:21 Jesus speaks to the disciples about his impending passion and death. In vv.24-26 of the same chapter Jesus speaks to them about the need for them to follow his example in this matter. The obvious implication is that being his disciples, they too will have to suffer and die like him. The disciples perceived this only too clearly. Hence Peter's reaction in the name of all: "God forbid Lord, this must never happen to you." And it must be noted that this is the only occasion where Jesus calls a disciple of his (here Peter) *Satan*, which alone shows that the attitude taken by Peter is very serious, not at all acceptable to Jesus, not at all worthy of a follower of Jesus. Peter and his companions are not ready to suffer and die like Jesus. They conclude that the best way to avoid such an eventuality is to prevent Jesus from accepting suffering and death. That is the implication of Peter's objection and that explains Jesus unusually serious reproach of Peter.

The other occasion is the washing of the feet of the disciples by Jesus. When Jesus approaches Peter to wash his feet, Peter objects. First, he asks: "Lord, are you going to wash my feet" (Jn 13:6)? Then he says categorically: "You will never wash my feet" (Jn 13:8). Peter's objection is to be related to what Jesus says later on: "if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet" (Jn 13:14). And he continues in the following verse: "I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you." The disciples clearly foresee the danger in letting Jesus wash their feet: he will insist on their following his example and washing one another's feet, which very thing they were not ready to do. That explains Peter's objection. How seriously Jesus took this objection is

evident from his words to Peter: “Unless, I wash you, you have no share with me.” (Jn 13:8). Jesus is not saying that Peter will have no supper with Jesus, unless he allows him to wash his feet! Not at all. He is rather telling that Peter will have no share in whatever Jesus is for his followers. Unless Jesus washes his feet, unless Peter is ready to wash the feet of others, he will be like a branch cut off from the vine. (Jn 15:4-6).

The reaction of the eleven disciples is followed by a reaction from Thomas. He exhorts his fellow disciples: “Let us also go that we may die with him” (Jn 11:16). These words of Thomas reveal that he has fully understood Jesus’ mind. He is convinced that once Jesus has decided to do something, there is no question of his turning back from it under pressure from anyone. It was not because Jesus was adamant; but because he was intent on drinking the cup given him by the Father (Jn 18:11). Since Jesus knew that he was doing what was in accordance with the Father’s will, there was no question of his reconsidering his decision. Thomas had seen how Jesus had not compromised even when *many of his disciples* left him because they found his teaching hard to understand and to accept (Jn 6:60, 66). If the disciples were to stick to their standpoint, the obvious outcome would be that Jesus and the disciples will part company. And the consequence? Jesus will go to Bethany and the disciples will stay back; and with that staying back, they will cease to be his disciples.

Thomas’ words also reveal that he had understood the mind of his companions. In their heart of hearts, they were not in favour of Jesus going to Judea again. He also understood why they were trying to dissuade Jesus from going to Judea: they were not prepared to go and die with him. This is evident from his exhortation: let us go and die with him. With this exhortation, he wins over his companions. Thus, by his timely intervention, a serious crisis in the ministry of Jesus and a bankruptcy in the life of the disciples is averted.

A closer look at Thomas' exhortation will reveal that it contains two elements, both of which are valid also for the believers of all time. The first element is: 'let us go', meaning let us go with him. The exhortation is thus to take an attitude different from that which was taken by the *many disciples* in Jn 6:60, 66. The many disciples in Jn.6 decided to go away, not to walk with Jesus any longer, because they found his teaching unbearable, unacceptable. Against that background, Thomas' words 'let us go with him', mean 'let us continue walking with him, going with him, let us continue listening to him, listening to his teachings and living according to those teachings. In brief, Thomas tells them, *let us continue to be his disciples*.

The second element is: 'let us die with him', let us suffer and die with him, let us share in his suffering and death.' Jesus is going to complete his life work by his suffering and death (Jn 4:34; 17:4; 19:30). Any disciple who follows Jesus, will have to be ready to meet the same fate. That was going to be literally true of his immediate disciples.

But what about the generations that were to come after them? Does Thomas' exhortation make sense also for them? Surely it does. And how? One can think of two ways in which they share in Jesus' suffering and death.

One is death on a spiritual or interior level – not the spiritual death that is brought about by sin (Jn 5:25), but a death on the interior level, brought about by suffering (2 Cor 4:8-9). Sufferings, willingly accepted, help a person to share in Jesus' passion and death. Such sufferings help a person to die to himself, to die to sin, to die to his sinful inclinations, to die to selfishness. It is this kind of death that Paul has in mind when he says that a believer puts himself in danger every hour (1 Cor 15:30), that he dies every day (1 Cor 15:31). That is what Paul means when he says that, just as Jesus died to sin and lived

to God, every believer should also die to sin and live to God in Christ Jesus (Rom 6:11). It is by accepting such sufferings that a person carries in his body the death of Jesus (2 Cor 4:10); that he is all the time being given up to death for Jesus' sake (2 Cor 4:11). That is how one shares in Jesus' sufferings and become like him in death (Phil 3:21). That is how one carries in one's body the marks of Christ's sufferings (Gal 6:17).

The second kind of death is one's physical death, which puts an end to one's life on earth. It is by this death that one ceases to be away from the Lord and begins to be with the Lord (2 Cor 5:6). But a believer does not just die; he dies in the Lord; he falls asleep in the Lord (1Thess 4:13, 14, 15). Moreover, like Jesus and like Peter, one can give glory to God by one's death (Jn 21:19), turning death into one's own glorification by God along with Jesus.

Thus, Thomas' exhortation, 'let us go and die with him' leads to a higher degree of understanding of the idea of discipleship, the idea of following Jesus. Going with Jesus, walking with Jesus, brings one to share in Jesus' death and finally brings one to share in his glory in the presence of the Father (Jn 14:3; 17:24).

2. JOHN 14:5-6

The text forms part of the farewell discourse of Jesus, which occasionally takes the form of a dialogue between Jesus and one or another of his disciples, and which begins towards the middle of chapter 13 and goes on till the end of chapter 16. In this discourse, Jesus takes leave of his disciples. The main theme that Jesus deals with is his imminent departure from the world and return to the Father: he has come from the Father into the world and now he is leaving the world and is returning to the Father (Jn 16:28). Jesus was to accomplish that return to the Father, that departure to the Father (Lk 9:31; Jn 13:1), through his suffering, death and resurrection.

In Jn 14:1-4, there is much talk about this theme. Jesus is aware that his disciples are upset at the fact that he is going away. Though he had spoken about it several times earlier (Mt 16:21-28; 17:22-23; 20:17-19; Mk 8:31 – 9:1, 30-32; 10:32-34; Lk 9:22-27; 43-45; 18:31-34), they had probably not taken it very seriously. Now they realize that Jesus meant all that he had said; all that he foretold was going to happen.

They also think of their condition once Jesus will no more be with them. They will have to face much hostility from Jesus' opponents. When Jesus was with them, he protected them (Jn 17:12). He protected them on all levels. He protected them from perils by working miracles for them (Mt 8:23-27). He protected them by taking their side and defending them when the Scribes and the Pharisees brought accusations against them (Mt 12:1-8; 15:1-9; Mk 2:23-28; 7:1-13; Lk 6:1-5). As long as Jesus was with them, they did not lack anything (Lk 22:35). He did not lose anyone of those whom the Father had given him, meaning the disciples, except Judas (Jn 17:12). All these thoughts make them feel downcast.

Naturally, Jesus tries to console them. He makes it clear that although he is going away, he is not leaving them orphans. He is going to prepare a place for them. Once that has been done, he will return to them and take them to be with him where he will be by then, that is, in the presence of the Father (Jn 14:1-4).

At the end of that passage, Jesus tells them: "And you know the place where I am going" (Jn 14:5). This is a sort of compliment Jesus pays to his disciples, similar to the one found in Lk 22:28: "you are those who have stood by me in my trials." But in both texts Jesus overestimates the disciples. The Gospels offer ample evidence that the disciples did not always stand with Jesus. And in spite of what Jesus says in Jn 14:5, it is obvious from Thomas' objection: "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?", that the

disciples had no idea either where Jesus was going or the way there.

This objection raised by Thomas leads to Jesus making one of the most important self-revelations found in the Gospel of John. There are several other such self-revelations found in that Gospel. Jesus' self-revelation as "I AM" (Jn 6:20; 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19; 18:5) is, in a way, theologically the most important. Why? Because "I AM" is the name that God revealed to Moses in Exod 3:14. And that means that Jesus is applying to himself the very name of God. Some other important self-revelations of Jesus in John are: "I am the bread of life" (Jn 6:35); "I am the light of the world" (Jn 8:12); "I am the gate" (Jn 10:9); "I am the good shepherd" (Jn 10:11); "I am the resurrection and the life" (Jn 11:25); "I am the true vine" (Jn 15:1).

However, compared to all these, Jesus' self-revelation in Jn 14:6, seems to be of greater importance. Though the I AM proclamation is theologically significant, it somehow reveals only the divine nature of Jesus. In Jn 14:6, by using three terms, namely, the Way, the Truth and the Life, Jesus reveals at the same time his divine and his human natures in a very prominent way. It must be based mainly on this text that Augustine has said that Christ as man is the way by which we go; and Christ as God is the fatherland to which we go (*Christus homo est via qua imus; Christus Deus est patria quo imus*).

2.1. JESUS IS THE "WAY"

What does Jesus mean when he says that he is the way? The answer is found in the second part of the same verse: "No one comes to the Father except through me." Jesus is the way to the Father and no one can go to the Father except through him. He is the way to the Father, in as much as he shows the way to the Father, in as much as he reveals the Father. A little later on in the same chapter, in answer to Philip's request: "Lord, show us the Father" (Jn 14:8), Jesus says:

“Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn 14:9). To this must be added two other texts in John. In John 1:18 one reads: “No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.” As John the Baptist came to reveal Jesus to Israel (Jn 1:31), Jesus came to reveal the Father to the world, to the entire human race. To all these must be added Jesus’ statement in Jn 10:30: “The Father and I are one.” Since Jesus is close to the heart of the Father; since he is one with the Father; he has seen the Father and knows the Father. This intimacy with the Father turns him into the perfect revealer of the Father. That allows him to function as the perfect way to the Father.

We often come across the term “Way” in the Old Testament. Positively it is always the way of the Lord, the way of the commandments of God. It is the way shown by God, taught by God, because it is he who gave the commandments by observing which man can obtain life (Ezek 20:13, 21; Neh 9:29). Living an upright life meant walking in the way of God’s commandments, living in obedience to his commandments. Ps 119, the long Psalm in praise of the law, in praise of the word of God, deals elaborately with these ideas.

The term “way” is used in the book of Acts with a very special meaning. One finds such use of the term in a number of texts (9:2; 18:17; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). The term stands for the Christian faith, the Christian way of life, the Gospel message. Since the book of Acts is an attempt to outline the history of the early Church from the time of Jesus’ Ascension, his return to the Father, the expression “the Way” in the Acts must mean the life lived by the disciples of Christ, who came to be known as Christians for the first time at Antioch (Acts 11:26). Christians must have meant people who followed the way marked out by Jesus, the way of life taught by Jesus, the way of the commandments given by him to his disciples.

The journey of faith undertaken by the believer has two dimensions. On the one hand, one has to go to Jesus and on the other, one has to go to the Father. These two aspects are implied in the second part of Jn.14:6. The main point Jesus stresses here is the journey to the Father, the going to the Father. However, that going to the Father presupposes going to Jesus. That is the implication of the idea of going to the Father *through* Jesus. First, one has to go to Jesus, and it is through him, or in his company, that one goes to the Father. Going to Jesus is more important in the sense that it is the condition for going to the Father; there can be no going to the Father, unless one first goes to Jesus. By going to Jesus, one goes, at the same time, to the Father as well. It must be to stress the importance of going to Jesus that many texts in the fourth Gospel speak of going to Jesus (6:5, 35, 37, 44, 45, 65; 7:37; 8:2; 10:41; 12:9). Jesus is the Way in as much as, by his life-example and by his teachings, Jesus shows his followers the right way to the Father.

It is all very well to say that Jesus is the Way. But how does he actually become the Way to a person? It is when one accepts Jesus as one's Way, and only then, does he become the Way for him. Here one may recall the different reactions of Jesus' disciples, as recorded in Jn.6. After listening to Jesus' discourse on the Eucharist, "many of his disciples" said: "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?" (Jn 6:60). Again, it is said about these many disciples in John 6:66: "Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him." Accepting Jesus as the Way demands that one accepts the reaction of the Twelve in the same story. When the many disciples had gone away, Jesus turns to the Twelve and asks them: "Do you also wish to go away" (Jn 6:67)? To this, Peter answers in the name of all: "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God" (Jn 6:68-69). The Twelve decide to continue walking

with Jesus, whereas many of his disciples decided not to walk with him any longer.

Yes, it is by accepting Jesus as the Holy One of God; it is by accepting that he is the only one who has the words of eternal life; it is by walking with Jesus even in the face of trials, holding on to his example and his teachings; holding fast to his commandments, especially the commandment of Love, that one accepts Jesus as the Way to the Father, as the Way to Eternal life. On the other hand, Jesus as the Way makes no sense for one who does not accept to walk with him, to walk in his way.

2.2. JESUS IS THE “TRUTH”

The term truth here is not to be understood in an abstract philosophical sense. It must rather be understood against the background of its connotations in the Bible. Truth further specifies how one is to walk along the way taught by Jesus: it is by walking in the way of truth that one can walk in the way of Jesus.

In John 8:26 Jesus says: “the one who sent me is true”, and, in the second part of the verse, he adds: “I declare what I have heard from him”. The two sections of the verse are related. How are they related? Since the one who sent Jesus is true and since he declares what he has heard from him, whatever Jesus says is true. That is the meaning also of 8:14: “my testimony is true”. Whatever Jesus says, his revelation about the Father, is true, because he has been sent by the Father. One can derive the same conclusion also from John 3:32 where Jesus is presented as one who “testifies to what he has seen and heard”. If Jesus’ testimony is based on what he has seen with the Father and what he has heard from the Father, who is true, then whatever he says and does must also be true. There can be no falsehood in him.

In John 17:3 Jesus goes to the extent of saying: “And this is eternal life, that they may know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” Since Jesus has been sent by the only true God, he too has to be true. Since Jesus has come to reveal the only true God, he also has to be true. To Pilate he says that he has come into the world to bear witness to the truth (Jn 18:37). How does he do that? By manifesting truth in his entire person and life. There is no duplicity in him. He always does the truth and speaks the truth. There is always perfect harmony between what he says and what he does. There is always perfect harmony between his life and his teaching. Without this, it would have been impossible for him to bear witness to the truth, to reveal the only true God.

It was because of his firm adherence to the truth that he was always persecuted by his opponents. They seek to kill him because he always stands in the truth, stands for the truth, speaks the truth and does the truth. He has no share in their hypocrisy and double standards. He is never afraid of telling the truth. This character of Jesus is borne out in Mt 23, where he takes the scribes and the Pharisees to task for their wicked and untruthful ways. He calls them hypocrites no less than seven times (vv.13, 14, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29). He is never afraid of telling the truth. This is an aspect of Jesus’ character, which even the Scribes and the Pharisees accept in Mt.22:16; Mk 12:14; Lk 20:21. They tell Jesus: “Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality, but teach the way of God in accordance with truth.” Of course, this was their *captatio benevolentiae*, aimed at trapping Jesus. However, what they say about Jesus was perfectly true.

Jesus is persecuted because his opponents are children of their father, the devil (Jn 8:44), who was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him (Jn 8:44). He “is a liar and the father of lies” (Jn 8:44). Since they are

children of the devil, who has always been a liar, they too are liars (Jn 8:55). But Jesus cannot be a liar, because he is the Truth. What we find in the Gospel of John is the ongoing conflict, between the devil, the arch-liar and his children on one side and Jesus, the Truth, and his followers on the other. This point is also clear in John 8. They persecute Jesus because he always speaks the truth that he has heard from the Father (Jn 8:40). They persecute Jesus because they do not believe; they do not believe, because Jesus speaks the truth (Jn 8:46). They do not believe, because Jesus speaks the words of God, which they cannot afford to hear (Jn 8:47).

How does one accept Jesus as the truth? In John 8:45-47 within the context where Jesus speaks of truth, he asks a daring question to his opponents: “which of you convicts of sin?” There is thus intimate relationship between truth and sin. Sin is the absence of truth; it is untruth or falsehood. It is the same idea that is implied in the sin, or blasphemy, against the Holy Spirit, which has no forgiveness (Mt 12:31; Mk 3:28; Lk 12:10). It is remarkable that Mk 12:31 considers it an “eternal sin”. There is also a close parallelism between being from God and being from the truth. In Jn 8:47, “whoever is from God hears the words of God”; and in Jn 18:34 he says: “everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my words.” The main expressions in the two verses are parallel: being from God (Jn 8:47) and belonging to the truth (Jn 18:37) are the same; and so are the expressions to hear the words of God (Jn 8:47) and to hear the voice of Jesus (Jn 18:37).

One who is from the truth, listens to God’s words and Jesus’ voice, which are both the same. Whether or not one is truthful can thus, be judged from one’s attitude towards the words of God. If one listens to God’s words, if one accepts the teaching of Jesus, one is from God (Jn 8:47) and one is from the truth (Jn 18:37).

However, it must be kept in mind that Jesus does not answer Pilate’s question; “What is truth” (Jn 18:38). Truth is not a matter of

definition, but a matter of living, a matter of relationships, with God, with Jesus, with the word of God, with one's fellowmen and with oneself. When all goes well on those levels, then gradually one begins to grasp the truth (Jn 8:32), one begins to be of the truth; one begins to stand in the truth.

Truth is a term that is used in reference to relationships, namely, man's relationship with God and his relationship with his fellow humans. Man's relationship with God should be marked by truthfulness, sincerity and honesty. So too everyone's relationship with his fellow humans. Truth on the level of relationship, whether it be with God or with one's neighbour, necessarily requires that one should be from the truth; one should stand in the truth; there should be truth in one's heart, in one's thoughts, in one's words and in one's actions. Speaking the truth and doing the truth necessarily require that one has truth in one's heart. One can have truth in one's heart only if one has the "Spirit of truth" (Jn 14:17; 15:26; 16:13) dwelling in one's heart. This Spirit of truth dwelling in one's heart will keep recalling to one the teachings of Jesus. Thus, living in truth ultimately means living by the teachings of Jesus.

2.3. JESUS IS THE "LIFE"

Life is one of the most important themes in the Gospel of John. It is obvious that life does not signify the physical or biological life in a person; rather it refers to the interior life, the divine life that one has within oneself.

Jesus presents himself as the one who gives, communicates, life. This is expressed by means of different images. He gives living water. (4:10, 11; 7:38). In John 7:37-38 Jesus invites those who are thirsty, opening to them the possibility of drinking from the streams of living water that will flow from his heart. This promise of Jesus refers to what happens in John 19:34, where water and blood gush forth from

the pierced heart of Jesus. Living water means water that gives life, water which is the source of life. Jesus is the true bread, given by the Father and coming down from heaven (Jn 6:32, 33, 50, 58). Jesus speaks of himself as the bread of life (Jn 6:35, 41, 48, 50, 51) and as the one who gives the bread of life (Jn 6:51). Bread of life means bread that gives life, bread that is the source of life, bread that communicates life. And the life given by this bread is not ordinary life, but eternal life (Jn 6:51, 58). Jesus is the one who has the words of eternal life (Jn 6:68). Words of eternal life means words that give eternal life, words that lead to eternal life. Since Jesus is the giver of living water, the giver of the bread of life, the giver of the words of eternal life, it is obvious that he is the giver of life; he is the source of life; he is Life itself.

Here one should also remember what Jesus says in John 5. Just as the Father has life within himself, he has given the Son to have life in himself (Jn 5:26); and the Son gives life to whomsoever he wishes (Jn 5:21). This text is particularly significant, because according to it, God the Father is the ultimate source of life; all life comes from him, but through his Son Jesus Christ. The text that comes closest to Jesus' assertion that he is life, is 1John 1:1-2, Jesus is "the eternal life that was with the Father" (1Jn 1:2). This life which was "from the beginning" (1Jn 1:1), "was revealed" (1Sam 1:2) to humanity through the incarnation, and as a consequence, men have been able to hear with their ears, to see with their eyes, to look upon him in wonder and to touch with their hands this Life Incarnate (1Jn 1:1, 3).

What exactly is this life? If it is the life that comes from God, it must be divine life. If Jesus possesses this life in as much as he is the Father's Only Begotten Son (Jn 1:18), the believers come to possess this life by sharing in the sonship of Jesus (Jn 1:13). They share in the sonship of Jesus when, in baptism, they are born anew, born from above (Jn 3:3), born from water and the Spirit (Jn 3:5)); in short, born

from above, that is, born of God (Jn 1:13).

Something very remarkable about John's presentation of the theme is that he speaks of it in connection with God and Jesus on the one hand, and with the believer, on the other. It is given to the believer by God and by Jesus. It is possessed by the believer. This explains why in the fourth Gospel Jesus always says that the believer *has*, and not *will have*, eternal life; he already possesses eternal life (Jn 3:36; 5:24; 6:47, 54).

How are we to understand the use of the present tense in these cases? Man is not eternal; as a physical being, he has a beginning and an end. How then can the life in him be eternal? Man is mortal; but God is immortal and eternal. The life that one possesses as one born of God, is the life of God, and so, though mortal and finite, he possesses eternal life; he has eternal life abiding in him. That is what Jesus means by his words to Martha "Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die" (Jn 11:25-26).

If the believer already has eternal life, does that mean that the future has nothing further in store for him? This does not follow. The Johannine literature has wonderful texts that portray the future life of the believer, which is the full flowering of the life that he possesses already. In Jn 7:24 Jesus prays to the Father: "Father I desire that those, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am to see my glory, which you have given me." The believer will be with Jesus, in the presence of the Father, sharing in the glory of Jesus, which he shares with the Father. According to Rev 3:21, the believer who conquers, is granted to sit on the throne of Jesus, who himself has conquered and has sat on the throne of his Father. So, the Father, the Son and the believer, all on the one and the same throne! This shows the intimate union that will exist between the Father, the Son and the believer, which is a continuation and the full flowering of the union

that exists between them already in this life (Jn 14:21, 23).

To conclude, a text from 1John 3:2: “Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he will be revealed, we will be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” The text defies all explanation! In John 14:2-3 Jesus consoles the disciples telling them that he is going away to prepare a dwelling place for them. Are we to imagine that, being a carpenter (Mt 13:55; Mk 6:3), he will prepare many dwelling places for his followers in heaven? Rather, his work on behalf of his disciples will consist in helping them to become more and more like him, more and more worthy to live in his presence and in the presence of the Father, more and more fitting dwelling places for the Father and for him.

How does Jesus become life for the believer? Although, unlike in the early Church, infant baptism is the practice today, as people grow up the significance of baptism as a rebirth, making one a child of God, must always be taken seriously. Then, it will be one’s lifelong responsibility to remain faithful to that life of God within oneself. By baptism one begins to have the “seed of God” (1Jn 3:9) dwelling within oneself, which makes it impossible for one to sin (1Jn 5:18). This deep awareness will make one avoid sin, which leads to death (Jn 5:25) and slavery (Jn 8:34). It is primarily by listening to Jesus’ voice (Jn 5:25), his words (Jn 8:25, 51, 52) that one keeps oneself from sin. If ever one happens to sin and thereby dies, one should turn to Jesus, who is one’s sole advocate with God (1Jn 2:1). Along with this constant listening to Jesus’ words, one should also eat his body and drink his blood in the Eucharist in order to have life within oneself.

3. JOHN 20:24-29

In the Gospel of John, one finds three appearances of the Risen Lord to the disciples: the first in 20:19-23, the second in 20:26-29 and the third in 21:1-14. Of these the second is exclusively meant for Thomas. Apart from showing the importance given to Thomas in the Gospel of John, the text also contains a treasure of ideas regarding the life of a believer.

The first text, that is, John 20:19-23, recounts Jesus' first appearance to the disciples. Unfortunately, Thomas was absent on the occasion (Jn 20:24); only the other ten were present. On his return, the eleven tell Thomas that they had seen Jesus (Jn 20:25), just as what happens in Lk 24:33-35: the disciples who were in Jerusalem tell the two disciples, who returned from Emmaus, how Jesus had risen and how he had appeared to Simon; and the two Emmaus disciples on their part, tell them how Jesus had appeared to them on the road. But Thomas was not ready to believe merely on the basis of the story of the ten disciples. He insisted: "Unless I see the marks of the nails in his hands, and put my finger into the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe" (Jn 20:25). It is this insistence of Thomas that has given rise to the presentation of the apostle as doubting Thomas, or unbelieving Thomas.

How are we to understand Thomas' reaction? One can look at it from two different angles.

Thomas insistence is a mark of his great love for Jesus. In 11:16 Thomas had proved to be more loyal and faithful to Jesus than the other eleven. When the other disciples hesitated to go to Bethany with Jesus for fear that they too might be arrested and killed along with Jesus, it was Thomas who made it clear to them that, as Jesus' disciples, they had to be ready to follow him, even to the point of dying with him. Add to that another point: Thomas could ask why

Jesus had appeared to his disciples when he, Thomas, himself was absent. It cannot be that Jesus did not know that Thomas was away. Was Jesus deliberately ignoring Thomas, ignoring Thomas' love for him? He must have felt terribly hurt by this sidelining of him by Jesus. Hence, his insistence on seeing the risen Jesus with his own eyes and verifying his identity in the way he describes.

The fact that Jesus appears a second time for the sake of Thomas alone shows how Jesus is, so to say, disarmed by Thomas' love for him. Jesus yields to Thomas' persistence, because it comes from love.

Faith is also an important issue in the story. Two texts point to Thomas' lack of faith. In v.25 Thomas asserts categorically: "Unless I see....., I will not believe". In v.27: "Do not doubt (disbelieve), but believe". In v.29: "Have you believed because you have seen me?" Again, in the same verse: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." Jesus' exhortation to Thomas: stop being an unbeliever, but be a believer, has the tone also of a reproach, which reminds us of Jesus' reproach to his disciples when he was still with them (Mk 16:14; Lk.8:25).

It must be kept in mind that Jesus never yielded when people, who did not believe in him, challenged him, asking for signs from him (Mt 12:38-39; 16:1; Mk 8:11-12; Lk 11:16, 29; Jn 2:18). His opponents challenged him even as he hung on the cross: "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross" (Mt 27:41); but Jesus ignored their challenge; he did not come down from the cross. Jesus, however, took up Thomas's challenge; he yielded to his pestering, his insistence, and appeared a second time for his sake alone. From this, it follows that Thomas' refusal to believe the words of his fellow disciples, was not a stubborn refusal to believe in Jesus' resurrection.

Even more important is the open confession of Thomas' faith in Jesus in the words: "My Lord and my God" (Jn 20:28). One finds

important confessions of faith on the lips of several people in the Gospel of John (1:49 – Nathanael; 3:2 – Nicodemus; 4:19 – the Samaritan woman; 6:69 – Peter; 9:17 – the blind man; 11:27 – Martha; 20:28 - Thomas). This is the only confession of faith, where someone addresses Jesus as Lord and God. A close look at the contents of all these texts reveals that Thomas' confession of faith is the most important of all. The addition of the personal (possessive) pronoun *my* is also significant. Such a specification is not found in any other of the above-mentioned texts. It shows the intimate relationship between Jesus and Thomas. It shows the mutual belongingness of Jesus and Thomas. Though only one side of this belongingness is explicitly mentioned, the other side is certainly understood. For Thomas Jesus is God, because he is the Risen Lord.

It was Thomas' blunt statement in John 14:5: "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" that led to the self-revelation of Jesus as the Way, the Truth and the Life. In the same way, it was his refusal to believe the words of the ten, that led to the magnificent statement of Jesus: "Blessed are those, who have not seen and yet have come to believe" (Jn 20:29). The text is not making a comparison between Thomas and the ten, in the sense that the ten believed without seeing, whereas Thomas insisted on seeing and believing, with the possible implication that the ten are more blessed than Thomas. Not at all. Jesus refers rather to those future generations that will believe in him, without seeing him physically, but rather through the testimony of the apostles, either written (Jn 20:31) or oral (Jn 17:20). Concern for the future generations of disciples was always part of Jesus' consciousness, as is evident in Jn 17:20: "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word."

The Church in general and every individual believer, has to be immensely grateful to Thomas: (i) for his exhortation in Jn 11:16 "let

us go and die with him”; (ii) for his question to Jesus about where he was going, which elicited Jesus’ great self-revelation in John 14:6 “I am the way the truth and the life”; (iii) Jesus’ words in John 20:29 “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe”. If not for Thomas’ bold interventions, we would not have these divine pearls in the fourth Gospel.

4. AN IMPORTANT TRAIT OF THOMAS’ CHARACTER

The examination of the texts on Thomas in John would be incomplete without paying attention to an important aspect of this great apostle’s character. It is his outspokenness. Thomas is a very open and spontaneous character; he is a very sincere and honest person. He speaks his mind. He does not hide anything. He says what he thinks, without bothering about what others may think about him or say about him. He prefers to be himself. We find this character of Thomas in all the three texts that have been examined.

In John 11:16 Thomas takes a very independent and personal stand vis-à-vis the other eleven. When they hesitate to accompany Jesus to Judea, Thomas not only has no hesitations, but he even goes to the extent of exhorting the others to shed their fears and to go with Jesus. He could certainly have feared consequences for taking such a stand. Here one may think of the incident narrated in Mt 20:20-28. When James and John approached Jesus with the request to have the first and the second seats in his kingdom, it is said: “when the ten heard it, they were angry with the two brothers.” Thomas’ exhortation in John 11:16 could have made the eleven very angry and indignant at Thomas. Was he putting them down by presenting himself as the most loyal disciple in the group? Was he trying to play the good boy before Jesus and thus to win his favour? Thomas was certainly intelligent enough to foresee such resentment on the part of the eleven. But he is not the least worried about that. He has the courage to continue doing

and saying what he thinks is the right thing to do and to say.

One finds the same point also in John 14:5-6. It is most unlikely that the other eleven had any clear notion of where Jesus was going or of the way there. But none of them dared to ask Jesus about it; none of them put any question to him. They all presumed that they did not have to take Jesus' talk about going to Judea any more seriously than his talk about returning to the Father. Here again, Thomas is Thomas. He has not understood fully what Jesus was talking about. And he is not ashamed of asking him about it. If, for that, the others are going to take him for an idiot, let them! Thomas, in a way, shares in the healthy attitude of Jesus himself, who, at the age of twelve, sat among the teachers of the law in the temple, "listening to them and asking them questions" (LK 2:46).

This outspoken character of Thomas is even more obvious in Jn 20:24-29. His fellow disciples report to him that they had seen Jesus. Normally as a good companion of theirs, he should have accepted their report. But Thomas does not oblige; and he has his own reasons for not obliging. If, by his refusal to accept their testimony, they are going to consider him proud and obstinate, let them do so! If, by his insistence on seeing Jesus before believing, he is going to be dismissed by Jesus, let it be so. Once he takes a firm stand, he would hold on to it until the end. Thus, when Jesus appears the second time, he stands almost isolated, just as isolated as in the other two texts. But on all three occasions, Jesus looks into the heart of Thomas (1 Sam 16:7) and upholds him; and that for his great honesty.