

SUNDAY OF ST. THOMAS
“How Do I Know?”
John 20:19-31

By Archpriest Peter Olsen
St. Basil’s Russian Orthodox Church, Watervliet, NY, April 23, 2023

Human life has existed for a very long time, but when compared with the age of the universe, our earth and its various forms of life is actually relatively young. Scholars have studied very acutely the development of human technology. Human beings who once dwelled in caves, clothed themselves with animal skins, and survived by hunting with spears and arrows, are now flying rocket ships to the moon and beyond. Knowledge is at the heart of this rapid transformation and change in human technology. In today’s Gospel the Holy Apostle Thomas said that “Unless I see...I will not believe” (John 20:25). In the contemporary world isn’t this the prevalent attitude? Or is it? If mankind really reduced the acquisition of knowledge to its most rudimentary form of “seeing is believing,” then how can we explain all of the amazing development and growth of human knowledge and technology? All of this would have been impossible if we did not reach beyond what we can only see with our eyes and dare to believe in what we could see with our hearts. In other words, to venture beyond the lowest form of empirical knowledge (“seeing is believing”), and dare to *believe* in our intuitions, our dreams, and our visions of possibilities that far exceed what we can only see with our physical eyes.

Fr. Alexander Schmemmann* points out that if humanity’s development is reduced to the statement “I won’t believe it till I see it,” “then our world truly is poor, superficial, and most of all, incredibly boring.” No doubt contemporary man has proven that he is capable of overcoming the tendency to only believe in what he sees and to reach for further heights of knowledge and understanding. Yet when it comes to believing in God, man has reduced faith in God to burying his head in the sand and saying “unless I see...I will not believe.” It is because of our contemporary spiritual poverty that the man of today chooses not to make the leap in order to rise higher than physical sight in order to see God with the eyes of his heart.

I read in the newspaper the other day that in the future, to some extent, robots may replace physicians. Computerized mechanical doctors will make preliminary diagnoses and, in some cases, prescribe and even perform treatment. For example, if you were to suffer a burn on your arm, it won’t be a doctor, a PA, or even a nurse, but a robot who will examine, treat and bandage the wound. But no robot will be able to have feelings, such as love and empathy, which are essential for treating those who are ill and suffering. No machine can enter the spiritual realm and be filled with wonder, hope, and awe, or experience the joy and beauty of art, music and poetry. No robot or machine can reach beyond empiricism and say “I believe in God” because I can see Him with the eyes of my heart.

Believing in the existence of God is not the same thing as believing *in* God. If we believe *in* God, we will live a life of love, kindness and mercy. If we believe *in* God, we will repent for our sins and practice prayer, fasting and forgiveness. Pharaoh for a time believed in the power of God and freed the Hebrews, but He did not believe *in* God and did not repent for his cruelty. As a result his army perished in the Red Sea. The Devil believes in the existence of God but he does not believe *in* God. Therefore, he wages a constant battle against God, humanity and everything that is good. If we believe *in* God, then we will believe in His Word *and live* according to His teachings and commandments.

Every person believes *in* something or someone with the eyes of their heart. The Lord said, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Luke 12:34). For over two thousand years millions of people have confirmed their faith *in* God. Millions of people today still joyfully proclaim that “Christ is Risen!” and still send out the triumphant response that “Truly He is Risen!” Every person, if he opens his heart, will hear the sounds of an eternal voice: “I am the way, the resurrection and the life...” (John 11:25). Our spiritual eyes will be opened and we will

recognize Christ within us, answering the Holy Apostle Thomas, “Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believe.”

* See “Doubting Thomas” by Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemmann, posted on the website “Orthocath,” musings by a revert to the Orthodox Catholic faith.

