

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Christ is Risen!

The following is an excerpt from the homilies of St. Gregory the Great, Pope of Rome (also known as "St. Gregory the Dialogist").

But Thomas, one of the twelve, who was called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. This one disciple was absent. When he returned and heard what had happened, he refused to believe what he heard. The Lord came again and offered his side to the unbelieving disciple to be touched. He showed his hands; and by showing the scars of his wounds he cured the wound of his unbelief. What, dearly beloved, do you notice in all this? Do you believe that it was by chance that this chosen disciple was absent then? And that on coming later he heard, that on hearing he doubted, that after doubting he touched Jesus, and after touching him he believed? This did not happen by chance, but by divine providence. Divine compassion brought it about in a wonderful way that when the doubting disciple touched the wounds in his master's body, he cured the wounds of our unbelief. Thomas' unbelief was of more advantage to our faith than the faith of the believing disciples, because when he was led back to faith by touching Jesus, our minds were relieved of all doubt and made firm in faith. And so, after his resurrection Jesus allowed his disciple to doubt. But he did not desert him in his doubt. It is much the same as when before his birth, he desired that Mary have a husband, who had not yet married her. The disciple who doubted and touched became a witness to the truth of the resurrection in just the same way as the husband of his mother had been the guardian of her perfect virginity.

Thomas touched him and cried aloud: "My Lord and my God." Jesus said to him: "Because you have seen me, you have believed?" When the apostle Paul says "that faith is the ground of things to be hoped for, the proof of things that are not evident, it is clear that faith is the proof of those things which cannot be made evident: things that are evident no longer involve faith but recognition. Why then, when Thomas saw, when he touched, was it said to him: "Because you have seen me, you have believed"? He saw one thing, and he believed another. Divinity could not be seen by a mortal person. He saw a human being, and he confessed him as God, saying: "My Lord and my God." Seeing he believed. He apprehended a mere man, and testified that this was the invisible God.

We rejoice greatly at what follows: "Blessed are they who have not seen and have believed." Certainly, this saying refers to us who keep in our minds one whom we

do not see in his body. It refers to us, but only if we follow up our faith with our works. That person truly believes who expresses his belief in his works. Paul says of those others who retain the faith only in name: "They profess that they know God, but deny him by their deeds." James says of them that "Faith without works is dead".

When our minds have doubts concerning the power of the resurrection, and seek reasons for these things, questions necessarily come to it. They are ceaselessly arising, but still we cannot grasp them by reason. When our minds cannot probe what they behold by sight of the thing, they may believe what they hear concerning the promise of divine power. Dearly beloved, think about these promises. Despise things that pass away with time as if they were already gone. Apply all your attention to hastening of the resurrection, which Truth has shown us in himself. Flee the earthly desires which separate us from our Creator, because you will penetrate more deeply into the vision of the omnipotent God the more perfectly you love the Mediator between God and man, who lives and reigns with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

Today is also the feast of the Great Martyr George.

This glorious and victorious saint was born in Cappadocia, in Asia Minor in the second half of the fourth century. He was the son of aristocrats who were very wealthy. They were virtuous and devout Christians. His father held a high rank in the army, but when his superiors discovered that he was a Christian, he was arrested, tortured and put to death for his faith in Christ. After his father's death Georges mother moved his family to Palestine where she was originally from.

When George grew up, he entered the military, where in his twentieth year, attained the rank of a Tribune. This put him in the service of the Emperor Diocletian. In the year 303, Diocletian began what was the last Roman persecution against Christians. It was the bloodiest persecution up to that time. Diocletian offered great rewards to the Christians who would reject Jesus and offer sacrifices to the Roman gods. Nothing could separate George from the love of Christ. George went before the emperor and courageously confessed that he was a Christian. The emperor had him thrown into prison and ordered that his feet be placed in a stockade of wooden hobbles and that a heavy stone be placed on his chest.

After that, the emperor commanded that George be tied to a wheel under which was a board with large nails and he was to be rotated until his entire body became as one bloody wound. After that, they buried him in a pit with only his head showing above the ground and there they left him for three days and three nights. Then George was given a deadly poison to drink by some magician. But, through all of these sufferings, George continuously prayed to God and God healed him instantly and saved him from death to the great astonishment of the people. This brought many of his fellow soldiers to belief in Christ.

When he resurrected a dead man through his prayer, many then accepted the Faith of Christ. Among these also was Alexandra, the wife of the Emperor Athanasius, the chief pagan priest and the farmers: Glycerius, Valerius, Donatus and Therinus. After many other tortures, too many and gruesome to talk about this morning, the emperor ordered George and the emperor's wife Alexandra to be beheaded. Blessed Alexandra died on the scaffold before being beheaded. George willingly lowered his head and was beheaded. St. George was killed in the year 303 A.D.

The miracles which have occurred over the grave of St. George are without number. Numerous are his appearances, either in dreams or openly, to those who have invoked him and implored his help from that time until today. Enflamed with love for Christ the Lord, it was not difficult for this saintly George to leave all for the sake of this love: rank, wealth, imperial honor, his friends and the entire world. For this love, the Lord rewarded him with the wealth of unfading glory in heaven and on earth and eternal life in His kingdom. In addition, the Lord bestowed upon him the power and authority to assist all those in miseries and difficulties who honor him and call upon his name.

The famous account of Saint George subduing the dragon took place before Saint George's being martyred by Emperor Diocletian.

In the east, in the district of Attaleia in the city of Alagia, there reigned Slevios, who was not only an idolater but also a vehement fighter against the Christians. He did not even wish to hear the name of "Christian" pronounced in his presence. As a result, many Christians were tortured that they might be coerced to deny the name of Christ. He therefore put many to death. Near the city was a lake, where a terrible dragon made its nest. From time to time it emerged from its lair and snatched what came its way, whether man or beast, and devoured its victim. The inhabitants, daily, were oppressed and fearful of the pending harm from that plague-bearing

beast. No one could pass through those parts where the reptile lurked, without being subject to intense danger, since the creature would poison anyone who came within reach of his breath. One day, while Slevios summoned his army before him, they approached that spot where the dragon kept itself. They planned to attack and slay it. However, they were not able to kill the beast.

The people, seeing that Slevios failed in his attempt to slay the dragon, assembled and approached the king and begged him to protect them. The king, guided by his priests of the idols, addressed his subjects and said, "All of you know that even though we often tried to put to death the beast, yet we, were unable because it is not the will of the gods. Therefore, now, according to the command of the gods, each one among us is to surrender his child. We shall each have a turn to deliver up a child to the dragon. This includes even the king, who has but one child, a daughter. Thus, when it comes to be my turn I, too, shall offer her." Although no one among the people wished to hand over even one child, still, when the time came, a child was fed to the beast.

Since then the children, one after the other, were bound and given over to that horrible creature, the time came when the lot fell for the king to give his own daughter since no one was exempt from this draft. He had her garbed as though he were sending her to a public festival or fair. She was arrayed in regal porphyry and gold and crimson calico, as one might expect a princess to be clad.

The king, then turned to the people and begged them to have mercy on him since his daughter was his only child. He offered them gold and silver even his kingdom, the no one took mercy upon him. How could they, since he was the one to devise the lottery in which they all had to give up one of their children. The King, therefore, agreed to fulfill his commitment to even offer his own daughter to the beast.

George was returning from a war. He was passing by the lake where the dragon lived and decided to water his horse. It was then that he noticed the maiden. She was sitting weeping bitterly. George asked the young girl why she was there and why was she crying? So she explained about the dragon and warned him to leave. After finding out that her father worshiped the goddess Artemis he told her to take courage in the Lord God who made the heaven and the earth, the sea and all that is within, because our Lord Jesus Christ is about abolished the strength of that beast.

George fell down on his knees and prayed to God asking for his help. As soon as he finished praying, the monster came out of the lake. The beast was a horrible looking monster was terrifying to look at. George, immediately, made the sign of the cross and prayed to God for help defeating the monster. Immediately the dragon fell down at the feet of George's horse. He instructed the maiden to tie her scarf around the beast's neck and lead it into the center of the city. There they told the people what happened, giving credit to the one true God. The King and all the city proclaimed their faith in Jesus Christ. After hearing and seeing this, George took his spear and slayed the dragon.

After his martyrdom, St. George performed many miracles. He helped many captured prisoners to return to their home. He is also known for having healed many who were sick or injured. He also guided many to believe in the one true God.

Just as St. Thomas cried out "My Lord and my God.", and Jesus telling him "Blessed are they who have not seen and have believed.", George believed, even though he had not seen Jesus in person. We too, must open our hearts, asking Jesus to "Help my unbelief." As the father of the sick boy cried out.