

# Archbishop Lori's Homily: Feast of St. Thomas the Apostle; Closing Mass, Fortnight for Freedom

*Convocation of Catholic Leaders*

*Orlando, Florida*

*July 3, 2017*

When I was in the fourth or fifth grade, something awful happened. The sole television set in our house broke down and was pronounced unfixable. And let me tell you it was hard for me to adjust to life without Saturday morning cartoons and episodes of *I Love Lucy*, not to mention Bishop Fulton Sheen's iconic series, *Life Is Worth Living*. Worse than all of the above was a conscious decision Mom and Dad made, namely, that we'd all be better off without television. After all, if Lowell Thomas was still broadcasting the news on the radio, what could we possibly miss?

The demise of our television set and the decision not to buy a new one was hard to take. I did my best to pout, mope, and act as though life were *not* worth living - all to no avail. One Sunday night, however, I was at friend's house ostensibly doing homework but actually watching *Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom* hosted by Marlin Perkins. While I was out, Mom and Dad received a phone call from our local parish. That day there had been a parish fund-raiser that included a raffle. The grand prize was a brand new Zenith T.V., and guess what, Mom and Dad had won it. When I returned home, Mom and Dad told me the good news but I didn't believe it. In fact, I thought it was terrible that they'd make up such a story, knowing how I felt. It was only when the T.V. was delivered to our house later that night that I believed. Blessed are those who have not seen *Leave It to Beaver* yet still believe!

If a normally credulous ten-year old had a hard time believing his parents won a raffle, imagine what it must have been like for the Apostle Thomas who, alas, has gone down in history with the nickname, "Doubting Thomas". After all, in his case the stakes were somewhat higher! He was among those who had been with the Lord from the beginning. He heard him preach, saw the miracles, and enjoyed the Lord's

friendship. Then came the Lord's crucifixion and death. It must have seemed as though his world had come to an end. So, when the other Apostles told him that, while he was out, the Risen Lord had appeared to them, Thomas thought they were delusional and demanded proof. He wanted, with his own hand, to inspect the wounds of the crucified Lord. A week later, Thomas got his chance - as the Lord invited him to touch the wounds by which we have made whole.

Pope St. Gregory the Great comments that Thomas' incredulity, his lack of belief, even his resistance to believing - did more to kindle our faith than the faith of the other apostles. For when Thomas saw the Risen Lord bearing the wounds of our mortal flesh, he uttered a profession of faith repeated countless times by Christians everywhere: "My Lord and my God!" That encounter with the Risen Lord changed Thomas forever. His encounter with Jesus unlocked his God-given freedom. Not bound by the fetters of doubt and unbelief, he was no longer a *doubting* Thomas. He was instead an *evangelizing* Thomas who proclaimed the Gospel far and wide and bore witness to the Crucified and Risen Lord by his own death, his martyrdom.

Tradition has it St. Thomas brought the Gospel to present-day India. Even though he did not know either the language or the culture, Thomas, in the power of the Spirit, went forth, far beyond his comfort zone. What has come down to us, especially through the Syro Malabar and Syro Malankara Churches, is a pattern to guide the Church's work of spreading the Gospel, whether near or far, namely, to engage the culture constructively, drawing from it whatever is compatible with the Gospel, while proclaiming and celebrating the Gospel with joy and keeping one's eyes fixed on serving the poor and the vulnerable.

Notice, that it was 'for freedom that the Lord set Thomas free' (cf. Gal. 5:1). By breathing into Thomas the power of the Holy Spirit, the Risen Lord set Thomas free from the heavy yoke of slavery to sin; the Risen Lord set Thomas free from the constraints of unbelief that lock us in a self-contained world of fear and despair; the Risen Lord set Thomas free for mission - free to leave behind everything so as to bring the Gospel as a stranger in a strange land.

Now, the Lord looks upon us with love. In this moment of Eucharistic worship when we give thanks for the God-given gift of religious freedom, let us ask the Lord to

restore in us this gift and help us use it well and wisely. It is all too easy to allow the freedom with which God endowed us from birth to lie dormant and to be covered over and weakened by our sins, or to be neglected because of an attitude of complacency. Might it be that you and I must undergo a process not unlike that of the Apostle Thomas?

Before religious liberty is a political or legal issue, it is first and foremost a matter of innate human dignity – for our religious freedom inheres not on the parchments where laws are written; rather, it is indelibly engraved on the human heart. When we encounter the Risen Lord, no matter how incredulous we have been, no matter how resistant to the Gospel, when we encounter the Lord—this beautiful gift of religious freedom comes alive. It is entangled in the DNA of a response of faith and love to the Lord, to the Church, and to the mission which the Lord has mapped out for each and every one of us. Without truth there is no freedom. Without freedom, there is no love.

If we would revitalize the evangelizing mission of the Church in our dioceses, in our parishes, in other ecclesial settings, then we must unlock in ourselves and in the people we serve a renewed sense of this freedom that lies in the depth of our being. This gift is unlocked when we allow the Lord to free us from the slavery of sin – those things that cause us to misuse our freedom to our own unhappiness and the unhappiness of those around us. This gift is unlocked when we allow the Lord to set us free from fear, to make us “free to worship him without fear all the days of our life” – to give us “knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of our sins.” In a word, we are made free when at long last we allow the Risen Lord to touch the wounds of our existence, to heal our wounded freedom, to liberate us from the self-contained prison of our unruly desires, wants, and needs! Thus liberated, we are free for mission. Our spirit is freed, our tongue is loosened, our religion is no longer contrived, rather, we have the authenticity of true witnesses to Jesus Christ crucified and risen, witnesses who are able to engage those who have no faith, those who are alienated from the Church, those whose faith is lukewarm, those who are at the cusp of holiness and mission themselves. Isn't this why we came here? Isn't this what we are praying for?

And what of our civil freedoms so threatened in this days? Overt and bloody

persecution, even genocide, in so many parts of the world Polite persecution, as Pope Francis terms it, in the West? Here, I make my own the prophetic words that President John Garvey of the Catholic University of America spoke to us bishops several years ago. Standing before us gathered in plenary assembly he told us that if we want to preserve our freedoms we must love God more. Yes, we must take all the steps necessary to protect our freedoms - we must speak up for the persecuted, we must advocate for laws that protect religious freedom, when necessary we must litigate - but in the end nothing, *nothing* will ever be more important than evangelizing, bearing witness, teaching and fulfilling our mission in love - “come rain or come shine”!

Surely, the Sun is shining upon us, here in Orlando! May Christ the Sun of Justice, dispel our doubt, outshine our sins, enlighten our minds and hearts, and give such ardor to our faith and freedom that we may proclaim his Name even to the ends of the earth! St. Thomas the Apostle, pray for us!