

***We shouldn't "waste" doubt. Our faith needs it.  
"Doubting" Thomas the Apostle can teach us  
plenty then.***

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger made the startling claim that “faith can only mature by suffering anew, at every stage in life, the oppression and the power of unbelief.” Doubt serves to focus and purify us, reordering our priorities. Thomas the Apostle says what he says in the Upper Room, not because he doesn't want to believe, but precisely because *he does want to believe*. As Saint Anthony of Padua puts it, “By doubting, Thomas got to know more deeply and to stand more securely.”

After all, belief, as St. Thomas Aquinas understands it, is not principally an inner conviction, and even less a feeling. Belief really involves coming into contact with a truth. And that is what Caravaggio depicts graphically in his painting — Thomas coming into physical contact with Jesus — the Way, the Truth, and the Life.



**As Bishop Robert Barron explains:**

To have faith is to allow oneself to be overwhelmed by the power of God, to permit the divine energy to reign at all levels of one's being. God is insisting that knowledge of him comes, not through grasping, but through being grasped.

That is why one of the most compelling details of the painting is not the apostle's prodding of the wound, but rather that he himself is being grasped by the Risen Savior.

Belief, says Cardinal Ratzinger, "is certainty that God has shown himself and has opened up for us the view of truth itself. The assent of belief comes, not through the degree of evidence bringing the process of thought to its conclusion, but by an act of will — a certain inner closeness, a kind of love." That inner closeness is represented in the diamond formed by the four heads clustered at the centre of the painting. The older apostle, Peter, and the younger man, the Apostle John, together are caught up in the inner closeness that moves them together in love to view the Truth that has been opened up to the world through the opening in Christ's side.

Which means we must not waste our doubt when we experience it.

**The poet Rainer Maria Rilke offers key counsel in a letter:**

Your doubt can become a good quality if you *train* it. It must become *knowing*, it must become criticism. Ask it, whenever it wants to spoil something for you, *why* something is ugly; demand proofs from it, test it, and you will find it perhaps bewildered and embarrassed, perhaps also protesting. But don't give in; insist on arguments, and act in this way, attentive and persistent, every single time, and the day will come when, instead of being a destroyer, it will become one of your best workers — perhaps the most intelligent of all the ones that are building your life.

**St. Bernard helps us grasp why this makes great sense:**

Where can the weak find a place of firm security and peace except in the wounds of the Savior? Indeed, the more secure is my place there, the more he can do to help me. The world rages, the flesh is heavy, and the devil lays his snares, but I do not fall. I may have sinned gravely. My conscience would be distressed, but it would not be in turmoil, for I would recall the wounds of the Lord. He was wounded for our iniquities. And so, if I bear in mind this strong effective remedy, I can never again be terrified by the malignancy of sin.

The supreme irony of it all is that at Mass, when the Host and chalice are elevated at the Consecration, it is the words of the impenetrable, doubting, wounded Apostle Thomas that we invoke in order to express our wholehearted belief in what is held up before us: *My Lord and my God*.