

**Readings:** *Ephesians 2: 19 – 22; Psalm 117 (116); John 22: 24 – 29.*

Today's Gospel account of the meeting of Thomas with the Risen Lord is well known – it's always read at mass on Low Sunday – and he is included among those who witnessed the Ascension and received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Holy Scripture tells us nothing about what happened later. But there is a legend – dating perhaps from the 4<sup>th</sup> century – that, before they separated to preach Jesus in different lands, the Twelve Apostles drew up a statement of faith – each contributing one clause. Thomas, unsurprisingly, contributed the fifth clause “(I believe he) descended into hell... on the third day rose again from the dead.” The purpose of this legend was to give apostolic authority to what we call ‘The Apostles’ Creed’. In origin it is the baptismal creed of the Roman Church and dates from the second century – so, even if not strictly ‘apostolic’, it is as early as some of the New Testament writings.

The traditional stories of the twelve apostles have them going to different countries, where all of them, except Saint John, suffered martyrdom. For most of the Twelve there is little external evidence for the place of their ministry and death; but Thomas, like Peter and Paul, is an exception, because there is a living tradition that he preached the Gospel in Southern India, where today there are many congregations of ‘Thomas Christians’.

The traditional symbols of Saint Thomas are three spears and a carpenter's setsquare. They derive from his legend which tells that he was a carpenter / builder who agreed to build a palace for an Indian king, but while the king was away spent the money on the poor. When the king returned and was angry, Thomas showed him a vision of a palace in heaven which was prepared for the king as the reward for his generosity to the poor. This led to the king's conversion, but his pagan high priest was so angry that he killed Thomas by wounding him with three spears.

There is now no way of telling how much, if any, truth there is in these stories, but what is certain is that, as today's reading from the letter to the Ephesians records, the Church of which we are members is *built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets*. It is the witness of the apostles to the death and resurrection of Jesus which is the foundation of the Church and the basis for the Christian faith, which we profess in the creeds and for which we give thanks today.