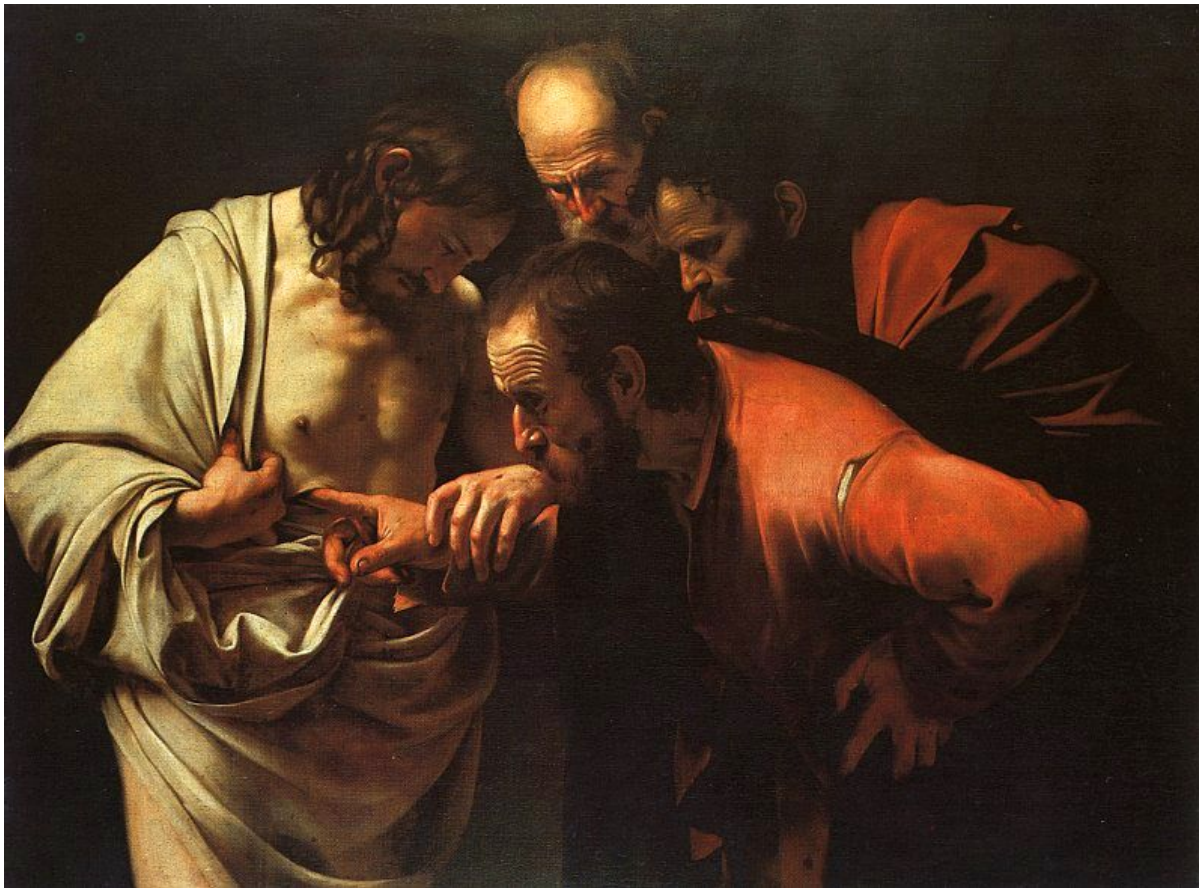


The other disciples in the scene

By [David Keck](#)

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*For more commentary on this week's readings, see the [Reflections on the Lectionary](#) page, which includes Keck's current Living by the Word column as well as past magazine and blog content. For full-text access to all articles, [subscribe](#) to the Century.*



Caravaggio painted his *The Incredulity of St. Thomas* sometime around the turn of the seventeenth century. Jesus (in white linen) stands to the left, Thomas is next to him (in a thread-bare red shirt), and Jesus is guiding Thomas's hand as Thomas places his finger in the wound just under Jesus' right breast. Two other disciples, also in red, hover in the scene—Caravaggio places one of their heads above Thomas's and one behind him. Jesus' head inclines with tenderness toward Thomas. The four heads are almost touching as they form the shape of a cross.

Jesus' eyes offer compassionate patience as he looks down on their hands, but Thomas's eyes are popping. I would imagine that he is just about to cry out his startling epiphany, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28).

The other two disciples are in the background, so it is hard to see their eyes, but they are deeply drawn to what is happening before them. Their arched posture brings tension and energy as they witness Jesus guiding Thomas's hand to his side. This is the second time they have seen their resurrected Lord, but now one of their number is actually going to touch Jesus, indeed actually going to place a finger in his wound (and remove any doubts that just might be lingering). Although these figures are in the background, I am most fascinated by them. They represent the intense interest of the church whenever Jesus draws someone closer, whenever someone reaches out to our Lord.

Christians love seeing this—we are delighted when a person starts taking a greater interest in worship or wants to become more involved in a ministry. Witnessing this is not idle curiosity, but a gift. Someone else's enthusiasm strengthens our own faith. At times, perhaps, we hover in the scene because we need to be reminded—as Thomas's encounter is reminding his colleagues—that yes, it is true, Jesus has risen from the dead, and God has won the victory.

Blessed are those who believe without seeing (20:29). But seeing others believe is also a blessing, indeed a much-needed one.