On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them: “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them: “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him: “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them: “Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

Eight days later, his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them, and said: “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.”

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.
THE SERMON

The week after Pascha (Easter), the Church celebrates the Sunday of Thomas. This Sunday is also called the Sunday of (in Greek: Ἀντίπασχα) “Antipascha” because it commemorates several appearances of the risen Christ to His disciples. “Antipascha” means “in the place of Pascha” and not “in opposition to Pascha.” It is a “second” Pascha in the same way that every Sunday and every Divine Liturgy is a unique celebration of the Resurrection of Christ.

The underlying theme of the Sunday of Thomas is the mystical reality of signs. The Epistle (Acts 5:12-20) says, “Now many signs and wonders were done among the people through the apostles.” But in the Gospel (John 20:19-31), it is Christ Himself who presents the signs. The Gospel readings from Pascha to Pentecost are taken from the Gospel of Saint John for a reason. This Gospel is called the “Spiritual Gospel” because it reveals the Person of the God-Man Jesus Christ through symbolic theology more than historical events, as told in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, & Luke).

On the Sunday of the Resurrection — the “Eighth Day” — Jesus is seen by the women who had come to the tomb. The women then go and tell the Apostles. This is why Saint Mary Magdelene is called the “Apostle to the Apostles.” Later, the Lord appears to two disciples traveling on the seven-mile road from Jerusalem to Emmaus. When they arrive, the Lord sits at the table with them, He takes bread, blesses it, and gives it to them. At once, their eyes are opened, and they know it is Him. He then vanishes from their sight.

After this encounter, the Lord appears before the other disciples in Jerusalem. Even with locked doors, Jesus comes, stands among them, and says, “Peace be with you.” The Lord does not rebuke the disciples for abandoning or betraying Him, nor does He recount His passion, death, and descent into Hades. The first thing our Lord gives to His disciples after His Resurrection is His peace. His peace is everlasting (Isaiah 9:6). And whenever we encounter Christ, we are in His peace and receive His grace. Even when the “doors” of our hearts are locked, Christ enters in and offers to us His peace — the peace that “surpasses all understanding” (Philippians 4:7).

We hear the words “Peace be with you” and “Peace be with all” several times in the celebration of the Divine Liturgy because Christ is truly in our midst. As Saint Seraphim of Sarov says, “When peace dwells in a man’s heart, it enables him to contemplate the grace of the Holy Spirit from within. … When a man lives in peace, God reveals mysteries to him.” This is the true peace that we gain through prayer and participating in the holy sacraments of the Church.

When Christ gives the disciples His peace, He empowers them for their God-given mission as “ministers of peace” (Luke 10:1-6). “As the Father has sent me, even so I send
you.” He then breathes on them and says: “Receive the Holy Spirit.” In this way, the Lord empowers them for the ministry that lies ahead and gives them apostolic authority.

One of the Apostles, Thomas, was not with them when Jesus appeared. The other disciples tell him, “We have seen the Lord.” Thomas replies, “Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails in His hands and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe.” Yet, Thomas’ absence the first time the Lord appears to the disciples was part of God’s Providence.

The following Sunday, the doors were again shut. Jesus appears, stands among them, and again says, “Peace be with you.” Then, with divine love, He says to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Put your hand in my side. Do not be faithless but believing.” Jesus demonstrates to him, and to all of us, that He was not a ghost but the risen Christ. It is then that Thomas makes one of the greatest confessions about the divinity of Christ in Scripture, “My Lord and my God!”

As a result, the Church refers to Thomas’s disbelief as “good” in our hymns, “Oh, how good is Thomas’s unbelief!” (in Greek: Ὦ καλὴ ἀπιστία τοῦ Θωμᾶ!). It is “good” because it is based on a desire to find Christ and to meet Him directly and personally. If Thomas had not asked to touch the prints of the nails, we would not know without a doubt that Christ was Resurrected both in body and spirit. If Thomas had not doubted, we would not have this assurance. Thus, Thomas’s unbelief helps form our belief.

Jesus says to Thomas, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.” These words refer to us, the “blessed who have not seen.” We have not touched His side, and we have not put our fingers on His scars. But we believe and love Him because we know, by the work of the Holy Spirit and by the apostolic witness of the Scriptures and the Church, that He is risen and He is with us. We encounter Him in our hearts, in one another, and we receive His risen Body and Blood in Holy Communion.

May we continue to grow in our faith in Christ, as the Holy Apostle Thomas did. When we encounter doubt, may it be an opportunity to ask Christ to reveal Himself more fully. Let us be inspired by Thomas and open our hearts to Christ and His peace. Christ is Risen! (in Greek: Χριστός Ανέστη!)