



THOMAS SUNDAY

May 1

THE GOSPEL READING

John 20:19-31

[Seeing and Believing]

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.



GREEK ORTHODOX
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THE SERMON

Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is Risen. On Sunday, the first day of the week, He is seen by the women who had come to the tomb. The women went and told the apostles. As we read in the Gospel of Luke (24:13-35), the Lord appears to two disciples traveling on the seven-mile road from Jerusalem to Emmaus.

Those two disciples (one named Cleopas, and the other, tradition tells us, was the apostle Luke) had not heard about the Resurrection and had much sorrow in their hearts. The Lord joins them, but they were not able to recognize Him according to the Gospel. Christ intentionally prevents them from realizing who is speaking to them, and He asks them why they were so sad. Cleopas answers and says to Him: are you the only one who does not know what just happened in Jerusalem?

Then Jesus explains that He had to suffer thus before accomplishing His Mission and entering His glory. Beginning with the Old Testament, He explains to them all the things concerning Himself in the Scriptures. As they arrive in Emmaus, the disciples ask their traveling companion to stay and have supper with them. Then as the Lord sits at the table with them, He takes bread, blesses it, and gives it to them. Their eyes are at once opened, and they know it was Him. He then vanishes from their sight.

Jesus reveals Himself to Cleopas and Luke in the Eucharistic breaking of the bread because, in it, we mystically encounter Him fully in the sacraments. Then, He vanishes. The laws of nature no longer constrain what the Lord can do. His risen Body can disappear at will, it can go through locked doors, and ascend to heaven. This is why we can receive His Body and Blood in Holy Communion *wherever* and *whenever* the Divine Liturgy is celebrated.

After His encounter with the two disciples in Emmaus, the Lord appears before the other disciples in Jerusalem. Even as the doors were locked, since they were afraid of the reaction from the local community following the Crucifixion, Jesus comes and stands among them and says to them: "Peace be with you." The first thing our Lord gives to His disciples after His Resurrection is His peace. Of His Peace there is no end (Isaiah 9:6), and whenever we encounter Christ, we are in His Peace and receive His Grace.

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 in our midst. As Saint Cyril of Jerusalem says, "He is alive forevermore, and of a surety He will preserve those whose hope is in Him, in joy without ceasing . . . For our being at peace with each other and with God must be accounted a fountain and source of all good." This is the true peace that we gain through prayer and by participating in the Sacraments of the Church.

When Christ gives the disciples His Peace, He shows them His hands and His side and says to them once more, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." Then He breathed on them and said: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive

the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." In this way, the Lord empowers them for the ministry that lies ahead and gives them apostolic authority to forgive sins.

This power and authority are *entirely* from God, from the Holy Spirit. This was given to the apostles and transmitted to their successors (bishops and priests) by the laying on of hands. There is an *unbroken* line of succession from the apostles to us, even to this day. In this way, the bishops and priests, while imperfect human beings, become the means through which Church sacraments are manifestations of His Grace. As Saint John Chrysostom says, "Neither Angel nor Archangel can do anything with regard to what is given from God; but the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, dispenses all, while the priest lends his tongue and affords his hand."

One of the apostles, Thomas, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples tell him: "We have seen the Lord." Thomas replies, "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." Thomas's absence the first time the Lord appears was part of God's Providence, and taking a closer look helps us understand why.

First, let us remember that the Holy Apostle Thomas had tremendous zeal. His desire for clear-cut evidence was based on his desire to be faithful to the Scriptures, especially the Prophets. Thomas sought to understand how an event such as the crucifixion could actually fulfill the Old Testament promises about the Messiah. His skepticism, then, came from a sincere desire for a personal encounter with the true Christ which would validate what the other apostles were saying.

As a result, the Church refers to Thomas's disbelief as "good" in our hymns (Ὁ καλή ἀπιστία τοῦ Θωμᾶ!, in Greek. Oh, how good is Thomas's unbelief!). It is "good" because it is based on a desire to find Christ, and meet Him directly and personally. If Thomas did not ask to touch the prints of the nails, we would not know without a doubt that Christ was Resurrected both in Body and Spirit. Christ honors Thomas's request, and Thomas provides one of the strongest statements of faith in the New Testament: "My Lord and my God!"

The following Sunday, the doors were again shut, but Jesus comes and stands among them and says again, "Peace be with you." Then, with divine love, He says 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." 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!" Jesus says to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

These words refer to *us*. We have not touched His side, 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 testimony of the Scriptures and the Church, that He is risen. 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 knowledge of Him, as Thomas did. When we encounter doubt, may it be an opportunity to ask Him to reveal Himself more fully to us as Thomas did. Let us be inspired by Thomas and come to terms with our own skepticism by opening ourselves up to Him and His will. Christ is Risen, and nothing can ever be the same again.

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