

Sunday of Thomas
John 20:19-31

Then it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, "Peace be unto you". And when He had said, he showed unto them His hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord. Then said Jesus to them again, "Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you".

And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and saith unto them, "Receive ye the Holy Spirit: Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained".

But Thomas, one of the twelve, which was called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, "We have seen the Lord". But he said unto them, "Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe".

And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and He stood in the midst, and said, "Peace be unto you".

Then saith He to Thomas, "Bring thy finger here, and behold My hands; and bring thy hand, and thrust it into My side: and be not unbelieving but believing". And Thomas answered and said unto Him, "My Lord and my God".

Jesus said unto him, "Thomas, because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed". And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in His name.



Christ is Risen!

Beginning on Palm Sunday, the Orthodox Church commemorated our Lord's Passion, Crucifixion, and Death on the Cross. It was a difficult week for all the faithful since we were not able to fully participate in the Church's services. We did whatever we could, coming to the church whenever possible, to receive the blessings of the Church, from the palms of entrance Sunday, Holy Unction, and the veneration of the Cross and Tomb of our Savior. All of this gave us some sort of grace and comfort, but we were still a little sad.

Then came Pascha. All was forgotten. The moment we started to chant Christ is Risen, it's like something was lifted from us. We were not sad anymore. Even though we were not able to enter the church, we still made an effort to come and "receive the light". We were reminded again, even those watching on the internet from their homes, that Christ indeed is victorious, and we with Him. We were reminded that Christ truly defeated death and rose on the third day, and we with Him.

Bright Week passed and the daily routine of "life" slowly crept in. The quarantine, "social distancing", and everything else we are experiencing because of the coronavirus forced us back to our "everyday life". We still have doubts. We still have fear. "When will this end?" "When will things return to normal?" "Have I caught the virus?" These are all questions, doubts, and fears that are expected. We are human and we are weak. This is normal. Even the disciples, who had heard countless times from our Savior that He would rise on the third day and who were told from the women that His tomb was empty, "were assembled for fear of the Jews". They were afraid just like we are today. They had doubts just like we have today. Thomas had to see and feel for himself that Christ was arisen. He doubted the witness of his fellow brethren.

Amidst the doubt and fear of the disciples who were hiding in the room, Christ appeared to them on the first day of the week and said, "Peace be unto you". One week later, on the eighth day with Thomas present, Christ appeared again and said, "Peace be unto you".

My beloved, amidst all of us who are staying in our homes out of fear, doubt, and obedience to the rules enforced by our government, Christ appears to us and says, "Peace be unto you". Christ, who is the King of Peace, who gives rest to those who have labored, who heals the sick, who comforts those who struggle, enters into our homes and bestows upon us His Peace and Light.

What do we have to fear? What do we have to doubt? Is all of this happening without God's knowing or approval? Is this virus happening because the Lord can't do anything about it? Is the quarantine and social distancing occurring outside of God's Providence? **Of course not!**

Nothing happens in the universe without God allowing it. It is fact that all the suffering, wars, pestilences, and every other trial and tribulation occur because of our own sins and the sins of the world. They occur from our own doing, but God allows them. Why He allows them only He knows. We cannot comprehend God's Providence and Wisdom.

What we must try to do is to remove the fear and doubt we have inside us. We remain cautious still and try our best to stay healthy and safe. However, we should not fear and have doubt because we need to understand that God is allowing this. And, we should not fear and have doubt because Christ brings us His Peace. As long as we remain faithful to Him and to His Church, we will be blessed (*blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed*).

On Holy and Great Saturday, we chant at the cherubic hymn:

"Let all mortal flesh keep silence and stand with fear and trembling, and take no thought for earthly thing, for the King of kings and Lord of lords cometh to be slain and given as food for the faithful".

"Take no thought for earthly thing". We need not be afraid or doubt. "The King of kings and Lord of lords" is coming into our homes and He bestows upon us His Peace and Love. This will pass my brethren. We will all be together again one day in our Church and we will all worship together as one Body-Christ's Body.

Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen!

Fr George Kamberidis