

**SECOND SUNDAY OF PASCHA (THOMAS SUNDAY)
APRIL 2/ 15, 2007**

ACTS 5:12-20

ST. JOHN 20:19-31

Fr. Dr. Photios+ (W)

Gospel: *Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.*

And when He had so said, He shewed 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 Ghost:

Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.

But Thomas, one of the twelve, 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 again His disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you.

Then saith He to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold My hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into My side: and be not faithless, but believing.

And Thomas answered and said unto Him, My Lord and my God.

Jesus saith 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 might have life through His name.

...

St. Gregory the Great:

Divine compassion brought it about in a wonderful way that when the doubting disciple touched the wounds in his Master's body, he cured the wounds of our unbelief. Thomas' unbelief was of more advantage to our faith than the faith of the believing disciples because when he was led back to faith by touching Jesus, our minds were relieved of all doubt and made firm in faith. And so after His resurrection Jesus allowed His disciples to doubt. But He did not desert him in his doubt. It is much the same as when before His birth He desired Mary to have a husband, who had not yet married her. The disciple who doubted and touched became a witness to the truth of the Resurrection in just the same way as the husband of His mother had been the guardian of her perfect virginity.

[Forty Gospel Homilies cited in *Gleanings from Orthodox Christian Authors and the Holy Fathers, Sunday of St. Thomas*, p. 1, http://www.orthodox.net/gleanings/sunday_stthomas.html.]

Thomas the Doubter: He Required Proof

This Sunday represents the Second Coming of Christ, following Pascha which celebrates His First Coming. Eight days from the Resurrection, the eighth and first day, “we celebrate the *future* (emphasis supplied) incorruption of every human creature”.¹ So, it is fitting that Thomas, present at Christ's second appearance to the disciples, although initially doubting the Lord's Resurrection believed when he saw the Saviour's marked hands.²

Remember the Lord appeared to Mary Magdalene and then the first time to the Apostles. In His first appearance to them, He had comforted them with the words “Peace be unto you,” and breathed the life of the Holy Spirit onto them (not to be confused with the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost). At this time, He gave them the power to forgive (or not) sins, but ‘full spiritual powers,’ including the raising of the dead came after the Ascension when “the Holy Spirit descended and gave them *all* (emphasis supplied) their spiritual powers and functions”.³ The Lord showed His great courage, strength, yet kindness to them (us) as He stood in their midst. He “bestowed upon them peace, complete calm and passionless”.⁴ He has overcome the world and the evil one on the Cross. In effect, he said:

O disciples, do not be troubled or fearful. Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world (John 16:33) and the prince of this world. I have borne the sins of the world; I have done away with death; I have given you life eternal.⁵

Doors Don't Matter

The doors being shut made no difference. He cannot be restrained by the doors of the material world. He stood in their midst without opening the door. This was “to show that God has power to do whatever He wishes; and by His sudden and most glorious entry through the closed doors He showed that He is God by nature and can do all things that He wishes to do”.⁶

Look! See! I *Am* Real, and I Have Risen!

Christ shows His body, hands, feet and side to assure them He is real, not just a phantom. He had told them He would rise, and now He demonstrates vividly the fact that he *is* risen!⁷ According to St. John Chrysostom the imprints of the nails and the fact that the Lord ate were shown in order those seeing would believe in His Resurrection:

On this account, He arose bearing the signs of the Cross and on this account He ate.⁸

Christ Saves Thomas

Initially, since Thomas needed proof of His Resurrection, his faith was lacking compared to the simple believer, who believes wholly without condition. Faith substantively is hope, not secular ‘evidence’. Per St. John Chrysostom:

For this is of faith, to receive things *not* (emphasis supplied) seen since ‘Faith is the substance of things hoped for the evidence of things not seen’ (Hebrews 11:1). And here He pronounces blessed not the disciples only, but those who after them should believe.⁹

However, Thomas’ initial faintheartedness turned out to be a blessing; it was Divine Providence that he was absent at His first appearance to the disciples. Yes, he ‘required’ proof, but when he did touch our Saviour’s wounds, his faith strengthened and intensified:

Yet this circumstance (Thomas’ absence) was truly in accordance with the Divine disposition; Thomas was not absent in vain, but because of his lack of faith, and in order that the mystery of the Lord’s Resurrection might be revealed more surely and powerfully.

...

the disbelief of Thomas became an *agent of our faith* (emphasis supplied).¹⁰

The Lord knew all about Thomas' expression of disbelief; after all, He knows everything! Christ comes the second time to save His disbelieving disciple:

For the sake of one soul He shows Himself with the wounds He bore; He comes to save one disbelieving disciple.¹¹

The Touching and Thomas' Rekindling of Faith

Christ invited him to feel for himself His wounds. When he had touched Him, his doubts were cured, and he was filled with the Holy Spirit and joy.¹² Thomas cried out and confessed his faith in Christ "My Lord and my God." In referring to Him as his Lord, he refers to His human nature, the reference to Him as my God being to Christ's divine nature.¹³

Thomas, because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have *not* (emphasis supplied) seen, and yet have believed.¹⁴

Believe *in* Faith

The Lord died and rose from the dead so we "might not die through sin but walk in *newness* (emphasis supplied) of life, glorifying and thanking Christ our true God".¹⁵ We need to accept that which may not be forthcoming in explanations the secular world expects. True faith is accepting what is unseen with belief. Christ calls blessed not only His original disciples but all believers throughout the ages. The Lord shows "it is even more blessed to believe without seeing, and that those who have not seen will not be any poorer than those who have seen".¹⁶ Blessed, indeed, was Thomas whose eyes were opened by the 'proof'. And blessed we can be too if we believe *in* faith!

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

¹ Hieromonk German Ciuba (tr. from the Slavonic into English; tr. from the original Greek into Slavonic in the year 6851, A.D. 1343), *The Gospel Commentary*, Russian Orthodox Church of the Nativity of Christ (Old Rite), Erie, PA, 2002, p. 160.

² *id.*

³ *id.*, p. 165.

⁴ *id.*, p. 162.

⁵ *id.*, pp. 161-162.

⁶ *id.*, p. 161.

⁷ *id.*, p. 163.

⁸ *Thomas Sunday Early Work of the Twelve*, May 5, 2000, Second Sunday of Pascha, Revision C, quoting St. John Chrysostom, Homily LXXXVII on John 20, p. 3, http://stathanasius.org/bible/thomas_sunday.html.

⁹ *id.*

¹⁰ Ciuba, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

¹¹ *id.*, p. 167.

¹² *id.*, p. 168.

¹³ *id.*

¹⁴ St. John 20:28-29

¹⁵ Ciuba, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

¹⁶ *id.*, pp. 168-169.