

**THURSDAY OF THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD**  
**MAY 4/17, 2007**

**ACTS 1: 1-12**

**ST. LUKE 24: 36-53**

Fr. Dr. Photios+ (W)

**Gospel:** And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them his hands and his feet. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And he took it, and did eat before them. And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high. And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen.

Look, it's Me!

They didn't know how He arrived, but He did, right in the middle of them, saying "Peace, be unto you." The disciples were terrified and didn't believe He was real. They thought He was a phantasm, "like those apparitions of the dead which often appear near the tombs".<sup>1</sup> He has to point out his appendages, his hands and feet, and indicate to them that a spirit doesn't have any. Even when they had touched his hands and feet, they did not believe.<sup>2</sup> Whilst they wondered about the phenomenon, He asked for something to eat, "Have ye here any meat?"

## The Proof of His Eating and What It Means

He ate the broiled fish and honeycomb in front of them. He wasn't hungry. He didn't need food, but he ate to demonstrate that "His risen body was the same which suffered on the Cross."<sup>3</sup> According to the Fathers of the Church, what Christ ate on this day has a hidden meaning:

By eating a piece of a broiled fish, He indicates that He has consumed with the fire of His divinity our human nature which had been swimming in the salty sea of this life, and He has scorched away all the damp slime our nature has taken on as it sank into the depths and was battered by the waves. Thus He made our nature food fit for God, fashioning that which before was defiled into sweet food of which God can commune. For this is suggested by the honeycomb: the sweetness, now, of our nature which before had been rejected. Another meaning is suggested by the broiled fish, namely, active virtue which, aided by the coals of the asceticism of the desert and of the hesychast life, removes everything that is moist and fat. And the honeycomb suggests knowledge and divine vision, for the words of God are sweet. There is also another kind of comb, one full of wasps, which leave no honey. This signifies the wisdom of the pagan Greeks. But the honeycomb suggests the sweetness of divine wisdom [left by Christ].<sup>4</sup>

## His Body Was Spiritual And Incorrupt As Ours Will Be

After His Resurrection, the Lord's Body is governed by the divine spirit. It is spiritual, not a spirit, knows no coarseness and is incorruptible. He can enter doors that are shut and move effortlessly from one place to another.<sup>5</sup> We shall have the same spiritual body after the General Resurrection:

(That body, however, which we shall have) after the Resurrection is called by Saint Paul spiritual; it is moved and governed by the Divine Spirit, not by its feelings, and in some **unknown and spiritual manner it becomes and remains incorruptible** (emphasis supplied).<sup>6</sup>

## Finally They believed He Had Risen! Now He Explains Further

They finally believed due to His showing the evidence of His Resurrection: His speaking, moving of hands and feet and eating. The disciples calmed down and listened. They needed to be still in order to know He is God.<sup>7</sup> As the Lord explained, it was necessary He suffer by the wood of the Cross because "death had come through a tree, it was necessary that corruption also be destroyed through a tree. By the pain which He endured unconquered on the tree, the Lord brought to an end that pleasure which came through a tree."<sup>8</sup>

Christ continued it was essential He “*rise on the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations:*”

Here the Lord is speaking of baptism. For in baptism repentance comes through confession and turning away from one’s former wickedness and impiety. Then follows the remission of sins.<sup>9</sup>

However, baptism is not done only in Christ’s name. This baptism is spiritual, not a “ritual Judaic washing,” and it is different from the Lord’s baptism by St. John the Baptist: that was for repentance only:

Instead, the baptism of Christ bestows the communion of the Holy Spirit and the remission of sins, which he Himself showed when He was baptised in the Jordan for our sakes, thus allowing the Holy Spirit to be revealed in the form of a dove. Furthermore, baptism in the name of Christ means baptism in the death of Christ. For just as He died and on the third day arose, **so too are we buried in the water as a type of His death, and then raised up from death incorruptible in soul and given the earnest of the incorruptibility of the body** (emphasis supplied). Moreover, the name *Christ* Itself indicates the Father Who chrismates, the Spirit Which is the Chrism, and the Son Who is chrismated.<sup>10</sup>

The name Christ includes the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit does not proceed also from the Son:

The Church does not deny that the Holy Spirit is sent not only by the Father, but also by the Son; the Church does not deny that the Holy Ghost is communicated to all rational creatures not only from the Father but also through the Son; but what she does reject is that the Holy Ghost had the principle of His **procession** (emphasis supplied) in the God-head itself, not merely from the Father, but also from the Son.

[Alexei Khomiakov, *The Church Is One*, VII – The Creed]

...

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, Who proceeds from the Father,

[The Creed]

...

But when the Comforter is come, Whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of Truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me] (St. John 15: 26)

Baptism in Christ's name is baptism into His death:

For just as Christ died and rose again on the third day, so we also are symbolically submerged in water, and we emerge with souls incorruptible, receiving the pledge of the Spirit of incorruption. Also, the name of Christ (the Anointed One) itself shows forth the Father Who anointed Him, the anointing, which is the Spirit, and the Son Who is anointed. Thus remission of sins is in the name of the Lord.<sup>11</sup>

He promises them that he will send the Father's promise, the Holy Spirit, and instructed them to stay in Jerusalem until that occurred. Christ spent 40 days with them in Bethany "often seen coming and going". He then gave the disciples His blessing and was carried up to heaven in their presence!:

Then He blessed the disciples, protecting them with His power until the coming of the Spirit; or teaching us to give a blessing to those in need of one, when we are about to go anywhere. And He was carried up into heaven.<sup>12</sup>

Unlike Elijah, who was taken up as if he were into heaven, Christ was actually taken up into heaven:

As the Precursor of all He ascended with His holy flesh, to appear in the presence of God (for us), and to share His Father's throne.<sup>13</sup>

Precursor, for whom? He is a forerunner for us!

The disciples were invigorated by the Lord's presence. They returned to Jerusalem in great joy, and although the Holy Spirit had not come, they acted spiritually:

Formerly they had shut themselves up, but now they live in the midst of the priests. They neither fear nor care for anything worldly; they continually praise and bless God in the temple.<sup>14</sup>

Brethren, the Lord's Ascension into heaven is beyond any doubt. If you are in the presence of those who render blasphemous opinions to the contrary, kindly stand your ground and explain to them courteously the facts of the Resurrection and Ascension. If they persist, simply leave their presence. Then pray for them.

Follow the example of the holy Apostles, be fearless for Christ, concentrate on His world and not this one. Continue to pray to Our Lord, asking Him to give us the strength, courage and perseverance to get on the narrow path and **stay** there. Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Have Mercy On Us Sinners!

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

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<sup>1</sup> Bl. Theophylact's *Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to Saint Luke, Vol. III* in the series, Bl. Theophylact's *Explanation of the New Testament* (tr. from the original Greek by Fr. Christopher Stade), Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, p. 324.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *id.*

<sup>4</sup> *id.*, pp. 324-325.

<sup>5</sup> *id.*, p. 324.

<sup>6</sup> 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. 224.

<sup>7</sup> Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 325.

<sup>8</sup> *id.*, pp. 325-326.

<sup>9</sup> *id.*, p. 326.

<sup>10</sup> *id.*

<sup>11</sup> *The Gospel Commentary, op. cit.*, pp. 227-228.

<sup>12</sup> *id.*, pp. 228-229.

<sup>13</sup> *id.*, p. 229.

<sup>14</sup> *id.*