

5-5-19 Christ Reveals His Resurrection

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,

Christ is Risen!

Indeed He is Risen!

It seems that I find myself repeating myself every year when I say it was the best Pascha ever. And it certainly seems like it was the best Pascha ever. That was reinforced when I got a phone call from my son, Michael, Pascha good morning from Colorado. He had attended a small Orthodox church in Colorado Springs and he said it was a nice service, and they did the best they could do with what they had. But he said from now he was going to plan to come home for Pascha, and celebrate with us. He said their choir consisted of one old gentleman.

I always appreciate our choir and the chanters, we are blessed and spoiled at the same time. It's hard for me to imagine any of the great feast, and most especially Pascha, without our magnificent choir. We must be grateful for the dedication and the hard work that they put in. They bring a sense of beauty and majesty to our worship, and we are blessed to have them. Today we commemorate two of Christ's apostles St. Nathaniel, the patron saint of our own beloved priest, Father Nathaniel. And I would love to tell the story of St. Nathaniel, but it would require a rather long homily. So, I recommend that you go by the Church Bookstore and purchase the book entitled The Lives of a Holy Apostles. His story proceeds the life of St. Thomas, the second disciple that we commemorate today. Today is called Thomas Sunday. It is always celebrated every year on the second Sunday of Pascha. The church has designated this Sunday specifically to encourage us, to remind us, to reaffirm to us the truly Christ has risen from the dead.

A few years ago, John Rupe gave me a book entitled The Resurrection of Jesus by a Michael Licona. About 700 pages long. The book is not in any way meant to be a theological dissertation, but rather at a historical account. A book written with the most careful adherence to the rules of a true historian writing on a specific subject. He makes no claim as to the authenticity of the Christian faith, but he makes it perfectly clear that from a purely historical perspective, the disciples of Christ believe unconditionally, that He was the Christ, the son of God, that He resurrected from the dead. They believed there was such conviction that they were willing to be tortured and killed rather than to deny the Lord. And as you know, most of them were tortured and killed.

Everything that Christ did during His earthly ministry was specific for the revelation of Himself in the fulfilling of all the prophecies concerning the coming of the Messiah. At the beginning of His ministry, He called to Himself 12 apostles. These men lived as a small community, traveling throughout the land. They watched and listened as Jesus performed miracle after Miracle. They saw Him cure every sort of disease. He healed the lepers, restored sight to the blind, even cast out demons, raising the dead to life again. They were with Him when He fed thousands with only a few fish and a little bread. They were in the boat when He commanded the wind and the waves to be calm, and nature itself obeyed Him. During the storm when they feared for their lives, they saw Him walking on the water approaching.

They saw that faith in Him allowed Peter to get out of the boat and begin to walk on the water. They saw that when Peter's faith began to waver, and fear set in, that he began to sink. Proving

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that it was faith in Jesus Christ that gave them this power. Christ told the 12 of the things that come, His arrest, His suffering, His crucifixion, His burial, and His resurrection from the dead. Surely this was difficult for the disciples to understand. This was their teacher, their instructor, the healer, the miracle worker. How could it be possible? How could it be possible for Him to be overcome, to be arrested, tortured, and crucified?

On the one hand, we see what appears to be great faith. Thomas saying to all the apostles, "Let us go and die with Him." Or Peter, when they came to arrest Jesus, drew his sword and cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest. On the other hand, we see faithlessness, even cowardliness, the same Peter denying that he even knew who Jesus was after the arrest. On this Sunday, the church acknowledges the love and care and compassion of Christ, His patience, His forbearance to our weakness, our faithlessness. He desires to bring us to a great faith.

In today's Gospel from John 20, verse 19 we read. "So, when it was in the evening on the same day, the first day of the week. And when the doors were shut where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, peace be with you." The Lord entered the room in a miraculous way. He didn't knock on the door. They were already afraid for their lives, but more important, even though the doors were locked, He mystically revealed Himself in the room to show that He was all powerful. What had appeared to be a complete defeat. Think of that. What had appeared to be a complete defeat, the crucifixion, was in reality the great victory.

The only defeat was death itself. Death had been defeated. Christ had risen from the dead. Death could not hold Him. The power of hell was abolished. The enemy of the human race was defeated. Christ had risen, and He appeared to them alive, bringing the words of comfort, "Peace be to you." Verse 20, "And when he had said this, he showed them both His hands and His side." He strengthens their weak faith. He brings peace to their troubled souls. He shows that it is Him, that He is not a ghost, that He has flesh and blood. He shows them the wounds of His crucifixion.

The Gospel goes on to tell us that all the disciples, except Thomas, was there when Christ appeared to them the first time. So, of course, they tell Thomas when they see him, that they have seen the Lord. And I suspect they tell him with great joy and celebration. One might reasonably expect that Thomas would enter it into their joy, enter into the celebration, but he's reluctant to accept the testimony of his fellow apostles. Even though he'd been present at the raising of Lazarus from the dead, and many other miracles, still to believe that Jesus who had been subjected to torture and crucifixion had Himself raised Himself from the dead. This was difficult for Thomas to comprehend.

He made it clear that just to see Jesus would not be enough. To see Him would not be enough for Him to believe. He said He would not believe unless he put his finger into the wound of His hands and side. The fathers of the church say that Thomas was an exactly, he has a precise man. He liked things to be in order. He was devoted to the Lord, as were the other disciples, minus of course, Judas the betrayer. He offered himself at all the disciples to go with the Lord to Jerusalem and die with Him. But we must be careful not to judge Thomas too hard. It was no easy thing to believe that Jesus had overcome the ultimate defeat. The defeat of death.

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When we examine ourselves, what do we believe? Not just what we say that we believe, but what do we believe by the actions of our lives? The trust and hope and comfort that we embraced because of our faith in Jesus Christ. When we encounter struggles in our life, we must respond with hope in God's providence, believing that He cares for us. That He directs our lives and open and closes the doors in order to direct us to paradise. We must accept this direction with faith and hope, believing in Him, believing in Him. God is infinitely the most competent doctor of our soul. He surgically removes the spiritual disease of our passion, our ego, our pride, our vanity, our self will, in our hardships, in health crisis, in financial struggles, when our heart is weighed down in sorrow, God is there. God is there.

God loves us and He takes our misery and He turns it into joy if we just allow Him to do so. He takes our struggles and turns them into victories, if we trust Him, believe that Him and depend upon Him. If we ever find ourselves questioning God, doubting God, not completely convinced of His love, His mercy, His compassion, His divinity, His power, His care for our lives individually. This was difficult for Thomas as well. "A week later, the Lord again appears to the disciples behind locked doors. This time Thomas is with them. Again, the Lord greets them with the blessing of peace, but before anyone has a chance to say anything, the Lord singles out Thomas and he says to him," verse 27, "reach here your finger and see my hands. And reach here your hand and put it into my side. And do not be unbelieving, but believing. Thomas answered and said to him, my Lord and my God."

My Lord and my God. The Lord took Thomas from doubt to great faith. Thomas went on to be the apostle to India. He helped the poor. He preached the Gospel, he established churches. He believed he was faithful to his Lord. This is what the Lord desires for all of us. He desires that we learn to believe in Him, to trust Him, to place our hope in Him. He wants us to have the same peace in our soul that He gave to His apostles. The Lord desires to take us from whatever unbelieving state we are in, to belief. Just as he did the father of the demon possessed boy who cried out to Jesus, "I believe, help my unbelief."

Jesus desires to take us some doubt, to unwavering conviction in Him as the incarnate son of God. He desires to take away our pride and replace it with humility. He desires to take away our avers and replace it with generosity. He desires to take away all of our sinful passions and replace them with the virtues. Christ's resurrection has made this possible for each and every one of us.

The Lord gave us through the Apostle Thomas irrefutable proof that He had risen from the dead. He mystically appeared to his disciples in the upper room where they hid behind locked doors. He gave Thomas exactly what he had asked for as proof that He was risen from the dead. Commanding him to place his hand into the wounds of His crucifixion so that Thomas, and so that all of us may believe that truly it was Christ who rose from the dead.

Christ is Risen!

Indeed, He is Risen!