

This Sunday is called Thomas Sunday and offers to us the following Gospel Reading:

JOHN 20: 19-31

9 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.

20 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.

21 Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.

22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost:

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

24 But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.

25 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.

26 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.

27 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.

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

29 Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.

30 And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book:

31 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.

After His Resurrection, our Savior was faced with the need to totally rebuild the faith of His apostles in Him. They had lost their faith despite His repeated attempts to explain to them His need to die while He was still with them. They could not understand how Jesus, if He is God, could be killed. Their minds, not yet spiritually elevated by the Grace of the Holy Spirit, could not comprehend the profound meaning of the Savior's mission, why He had become God-man.

For 40 days , the Savior remained in our world for this purpose. He would appear to the apostles to teach them and then disappear. Then He would appear again at a later time to teach them again, and again disappear. He needed to do this in order to give them time to independently reflect on His teaching. He knew that if He would remain with them continually, they would depend on Him for everything. Thus, they would not be able to independently fulfill the mission that they had been chosen for which was to go around the world to teach the Good News to all people.

The first person according to the Gospel to see the resurrected Christ was St. Mary Magdalene, followed by the other myrrh-bearing women. But when they told the apostles about it, the apostles did not believe them. Later that same day, Jesus appears to the apostles who are gathered together in a room with all of the doors and window tightly locked. The apostles, fearing arrest by the Jewish authorities, were in a highly demoralized and fearful state. Therefore, appearing to them in person, He calms them with the words; "Peace be with you". Since He entered through locked doors, He immediately shows them the scars on His hands and side to convince them that He was not a ghost but standing bodily in front of them. He strengthens them spiritually by reminding them that they were chosen by both God the Father and Himself for a divine mission. Then, with His breath as a partial gift of Grace of the Holy Spirit, He opens their minds to understand correctly divine Scripture and empowers them with the authority to either forgive the sins of people or to bind them on the person.

There are several very important moments in this meeting. The first thing to notice is how Jesus physically enters into the room. He walks bodily into a locked room. This is the glorified state of bodies that all people will possess after the General Resurrection, when we will begin our new and eternal life. Secondly, we can see that we are not able to understand divine Scripture by ourselves without the Grace of the Holy Spirit, something that Protestants erroneously believe and teach. Thirdly, our Savior requires us to confess our sins to a priest or bishop in order to freed from them. We cannot confess to God directly by ourselves without the participation of a clergyman. Our spiritual father is given this authority to either free us from our sins or even to bind them on us if we are not adequately repenting. Finally, the gift of Grace that the apostles receive is only a partial gift, specifically to give them correct understanding of Scripture. The full measure of Grace will only be given on the day of the Pentecost.

This first meeting of the Lord with His apostles was missed by Ap. Thomas, and when he later was told about it, being a doubter by nature he declared that he could not believe that it had happened. Since he considered it impossible for a man to rise from the dead, he could only believe if he personally would be able to feel with his fingers Jesus' scars from the crucifixion. A week later, under the same conditions, Jesus appears to the apostles once again and before Thomas is able to say anything, Jesus tells him to put his fingers into His scars. With his faith restored by the Savior, Thomas immediately witnesses Jesus as his Savior. The Savior's response to this witness reveals to us that true blessed faith means accepting things that are not seen rather than demanding proof of their existence.

My dear brothers and sisters, let us pray that God also gifts us with the ability to innocently and without questioning believe in His divine Truth. Let us not forget to run to confession often as a

means of keeping our souls free from our sins. And may the Grace-filled days of Pascha give us such strength and it will continue to spiritually fill us in the days following this wonderful holiday.

With Love in Christ

Archpriest Serge Kotar