

Date: May 12, 2024

Subject: Thomas Sunday

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ: **Christ Is Risen; Truly He is Risen!**

My greetings to you on the occasion of the end of Bright Week. But since Pascha is such a great and joyous celebration, it does not end with the conclusion of Bright Week. This Sunday, which we know as Thomas Sunday, the Church services are very festive and similar in content to the services of Bright week. As a matter of fact, the celebration of the Resurrection of our Savior continues until He ascends back to Heaven on Ascension Day, forty days after Pascha.

JOHN 20: 19-31

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.

The Gospel reading for this Sunday shows us clearly why it is called Thomas Sunday. And when we think about what is being described, we might wonder and ask how it could be possible for Thomas, one of the twelve major apostles of the Savior, who spent so much time with Him, who saw all of His great works, and who heard from Him beforehand all the details about how He was to suffer, die, and resurrect, could disbelieve in the Resurrection after it happened. He believed only after the Savior gave him physical proof that He had died and was now standing, in person, in front of him in His resurrected body. But before we are tempted to condemn him for his disbelief,

we should read the Church's accepted commentary on this event the better to understand the reason for his disbelief.

It was not that Thomas fully disbelieved. He actually wanted to believe but was racked with doubt about how it was possible for such a great miracle to truly occur. Was the Savior really able, through His Godly power, to resurrect Himself, both spiritually and physically? Not wanting to be fooled into believing in a mirage, he needed physical proof. And the Savior, being infinitely loving and merciful, gave him that proof.

Another question that may tempt us is this: if the Savior's body was a resurrected body, that is, a glorified body that should possess superior attributes than it had prior to His death, why did it still demonstrate the wounds of crucifixion? The answer is this—the Savior knew that the presence of the wounds was necessary in order to convince Thomas, and through Thomas, all of us, of the truth of His Resurrection. Again, we see evidence of the Savior's great love and mercy to us Christians, who are so weak in faith.

Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed. Through these words, the Savior explains that there are two levels of faith. The lower level is faith that comes from being given proof that an event actually and irrefutably occurred. This was the faith possessed by Thomas. But a much higher level of faith does not require physical proof. Since we cannot have our faith in Christ and His Resurrection physically proven (after Jesus' ascension), we need to possess this more exalted kind of faith in order to be saved.

But do we have that kind of faith? Our sins and lifestyles irrefutably prove that we do not. So what must we do? The answer is given to us in the Gospel by the father of the possessed boy who came to the Savior, asking Him to heal his son, despite not having true faith in the Savior as can be seen in his words: ***but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us and help us.*** When the Savior answered him that he needed to believe that He was able to heal his son, the father, in a most honest and tearful response, said: *Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.*

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, the words of the father of the possessed boy should be our words of prayer on a daily basis, if we really want to have true faith and be saved. True faith is not what we can attain by our own efforts. It is a gift that only God is able to give. Therefore, if we are truly able to understand how sinful we are, and want to be healed, then, in sincere humility, we need to pray using these words. And since we sin all the time, we need to say them not once, but continually, and then, using God's grace, attempt to live in a pious manner going forward. If we do this, we open ourselves to God's mercy and will hear Him invite us to live with Him eternally. May God give us both the humility and spiritual strength to persevere in this most important work.

With Much Love in Christ,
Archpriest. Serge Kotar