

The First Sunday after Easter - Quasimodogeniti

Hymns: 205, 276, 314, 208

The INTROIT

(1 Peter 2:2; Ps.81:8,1)

P: As newborn babes

C: desire the sincere milk of the Word.

P: Hear, O My people, and I will testify unto thee:

C: O Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto me.

P: Sing aloud unto God, our Strength.

C: Make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob.

The COLLECT

Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we who have celebrated the solemnities of the Lord's resurrection may by the help of Thy grace, bring forth the fruits thereof in our life and conversation; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

The FIRST LESSON

Job 19:25-27

For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.

THE GRADUAL

(1 Cor. 5:7, Matt.28:2)

P: Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us.

C: Hallelujah!

P: The angel of the Lord descended from heaven:

C: and came and rolled back the stone from the door and sat upon it. Hallelujah!

The EPISTLE

1 John 5:4-10

For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?

This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.

If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.

P: Hallelujah! Christ, our Passover:

C: is sacrificed for us. Hallelujah!

The HOLY GOSPEL

St. 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.

John 20:19-31 — “That Believing Ye Might Have Life”

INTRODUCTION

I. I WILL NOT BELIEVE

II. THESE ARE WRITTEN, THAT YE MIGHT BELIEVE

III. THAT BELIEVING YE MIGHT HAVE LIFE

CONCLUSION

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John 20:19-31 — “That Believing Ye Might Have Life”

Grace, mercy, and peace to you all from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Today is the First Sunday after Easter. The appointed Gospel reading is 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.

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In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

The more that I study the Scriptures, the more that I am awestruck by the depth of the doctrine that the Holy Spirit has breathed out upon the Church through the words that have been recorded and preserved for us. In today's text is enough information for a person to contemplate and grow for a lifetime, and even beyond the current life. Nevertheless, that is what is revealed to us in this text, that the Scriptures are written for us today in our lives as we live and work and play today. It is not merely a hope for the future, but hope for our present life and circumstances.

Here we find the hope that is declared by the risen Lord, declared to His Church on earth. Here we find the LORD Himself declaring the purpose that drives the Church onward in absolute confidence and everlasting hope. Here the LORD declares His purpose for His Church and for all who are members of His Church. That purpose is that the saints should be gathered together in His holy name to receive from Him the peace that He alone can give, the peace that is received in connection with the gift of the Holy Spirit and the declaration of the remission of sins. This is the purpose for Christ's Church on earth. There is no other purpose. And this purpose completely fills and vitalizes both the life of the Church and of the saints whom the Holy Spirit incorporates into the Church through the means of grace and the sure and unadulterated declarations of the Holy Scriptures.

I. I WILL NOT BELIEVE

In our text we encounter the cause of all of our problems in life. In our text we hear the cause of all of the schisms and heresies that injure and mock the true Church. What is this terrible source of evil? It is the decision to rely upon one's own reason and strength so as to say with Thomas, **"I will not believe."**

According to our own reason and strength we imagine that faith is a work that we do. According to our own reason and strength we imagine that we become believers by believing. But in our text, if we are willing to hear it as it is presented to us, if we are willing to hear it without interpreting it, we hear that the exact opposite is true. Faith is not our work at all. It is God's work. We do not choose to believe. We do not decide to believe. The only choices and decisions that we make are the choices and decisions that lead us to say, **"I will not believe."**

This is why the Holy Spirit moved St. John to record this for us. According to our own reason and strength, we have no capacity for believing the things of God. According to our own reason and strength, we are like the disciples who were gathered on the evening of the Resurrection of our Lord. Notice the reason for their gathering. Was it to partake of the cup of the New Testament in Christ's blood? Was it to rejoice in the victory that the Lord Jesus declared from the cross on Good Friday? Was it to be strengthened and renewed through the faith of the body and blood of Jesus? No. John tells us that they were congregated on account of their fear of the Jews.

That's right. The first congregation of the New Testament was a congregation of unbelievers. Even though they all had heard the good news that the angels proclaimed at sunrise, they did not believe. Rather, they were afraid. Of what were they afraid? The threats of living in this world. They feared most especially the Jews. They feared what the Jews would seek to do to those who had been known as disciples of Jesus. They heard the message that the angels had given. Some had even seen the Lord with their own eyes. Yet the cause of their congregating was their fear of the Jews.

This will not do. The Lord Jesus will not permit fear to rule over His saints. So, He does not wait until they should come to Him in Galilee, like He had told them to do and like the angels reminded them. No. They did not trust the words of Jesus and so they did not congregate where He had told them to congregate. Instead, they chose what they thought was best. Their way filled them with fear and emptied them of all hope. So the Lord Jesus did as He did with the first two unbelievers. Since they would not come to Him, He came to them.

Interestingly, even amazingly, He does not scold them. Rather, He greets them with the

gift of His peace. **“Peace to you all!”** And with these words He showed them His hands and his side. Then He says it again: **“Peace to you all!”** This second time He reminds them of the apostleship that He had entrusted to them earlier. Even as before, He again breathes out upon them the Holy Spirit and again entrusts to them the office of the keys of heaven. He comes to them to renew them in the purpose of the Church, that is, the forgiveness of sins through the faith that the Holy Spirit works.

But for whatever reason, Thomas was not with them. Whatever his reason, it was not on account of heading to Galilee as Jesus had told them all. When the others told him about the presence of the Lord Jesus, Thomas chose the way of unbelief. At least ten men saw and reported what they saw to Thomas. Others were with them. The women had reported the matter also. But to their testimony and to the testimony of the angels, Thomas adamantly declares, **“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.”**

Today we do likewise. We encounter the troubles of the world and we seek to hide from them. We hear the promise that God’s grace is ours and that He daily provides all that we need for this body and life as well as for our everlasting life, and we refuse to believe. We look around and we rely upon what we see with our eyes and perceive with our minds. And so we live in fear and we become depressed to the point of giving up. We congregate and we seek to be told how to live our lives to make things better. We pray and beg God to fix things, to make things better. We cry out in desperation, demanding of God an explanation as to why He has abandoned us. We demand that God show Himself to us in our lives. Like Thomas, we seek signs and evidence of God at work among us before we will believe.

II. THESE ARE WRITTEN, THAT YE MIGHT BELIEVE

In response to the faithless declaration of Thomas, the Lord gave the proof that he demanded in his sinful and belligerent rejection of the truth. The Lord Jesus gave Thomas what he demanded. The Lord Jesus came to the group again the following Sunday. This time Thomas is with them. Again they have the place of gathering shut up tightly. As before, the Lord Jesus comes to them through the closed door. Why did He not knock? He did not knock on the stone door of the sepulcher either. Jesus is making known to them all what Thomas now involuntarily blurts out, **“The Lord of me and the God of me!”** Thomas did not decide to say this. This is the response of the faith that the Holy Spirit had given to Thomas, the very faith that drew Thomas to Jesus and motivated Thomas to follow Jesus throughout His ministry. This is the faith that Thomas previously had chosen to deny. This is the true confession that Peter made when Jesus asked them who they say that He is. Now Thomas could no longer keep that faith under restraint. His human reason was overruled and the faith that was renewed in his heart jumped out of his mouth. This is what St. Paul explains in Romans 10, **“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”**

After Thomas had been restored to faith, then and only then the Lord Jesus says to him, **“Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.”**

This is a beautiful statement of God’s grace. While Thomas certainly would have heard in his own heart a call to repentance, this is primarily a declaration of the power of the Gospel.

Who are those of whom the Lord Jesus speaks? Who are those who believed without having seen?

St. John explains this when he writes: **“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!”**

This is the reason for which the Scriptures are given. The Scriptures are the written record of what God has declared concerning Himself. Ever since Moses, the Scriptures have been given. The LORD added to His Scriptures over time, giving more and more testimony so that we would have in abundance what is necessary for faith to be generated in us.

Before Moses, before the Scriptures were given, faith still ruled the hearts of those who trusted in the resurrection. Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, they all trusted in the promise of the LORD’s salvation through the promised Seed. They all trusted in the resurrection, as we heard also in Job’s declaration. And amazingly, even as we hear in today’s text, they all lived in the new life of the resurrection in their daily lives. Consider Job’s confession of faith.

For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.

This was not a confession of a faith that relied upon God’s future faithfulness. This was an expression of absolute confidence and hope for his present suffering. Job was under horrible attack by Satan. He had lost every earthly possession, including the health of his body. He was in physical, emotional, and mental anguish. Yet by faith his spirit cried out with the absolute confidence of the LORD’s faithfulness.

You see, the power of the resurrection of the body is not merely a power that will be applied to us someday. From the moment of our baptism we are made to be partakers of the resurrection. The new life begins with the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit. The new life begins with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the remission of sins. This is why the Lord Jesus comes to us through the closed door of the bread and the wine. Even though the bread is shut up tightly, the Word is spoken over it and the bread is broken and behold, Jesus is present for us to touch and see and take into our hearts. The wine is closed up in a container, but it is poured out into the cup of the New Testament and the Word is spoken over it and behold, Jesus is present to be received by all who are gathered in His body.

Our unbelief is driven out when He comes to us as He has promised. He washes away our guilty conscience in the waters of Baptism and gives to us the renewed conscience of a cleansed heart and soul in connection with His resurrection. And so we are made to be partakers of the resurrection of the body, not at the Last Day, but today and everyday. He joins us to His resurrection so that we live in Him and He in us until we see Him face to face. And so with Thomas we are moved against our own reason and strength to cry out, **“The Lord of me and the God of me!”**

This is what stands written, so that we should be made to be believers rather than continuing to choose our own way. Yes, the Scriptures are written, presently, so that through hearing them we hear God speaking to our own hearts and faith is born in us and we believe what stands written.

III. THAT BELIEVING YE MIGHT HAVE LIFE

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.

What a marvelous declaration! Here it again as it is written:

But these are written in order that you-all should believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, life you-all should have in the name of Him.

These are written. Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of His disciples. It is the same today. Jesus continues to work His miracles among us today. He preserves us body and soul. He heals us of diseases, even when we don't know that we are being attacked by the microorganisms and mutations in our bodies. He protects us from the assaults of the devil, and of the world. We don't see all the miracles that the LORD works for us. But these are written! Yes, these are written in order that we should believe. These are written so that the Holy Spirit works faith in us and we know and believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. This is not wishful thinking. The Holy Spirit does use the Scriptures for this purpose. He does make believers of us through the preaching of the doctrine of the Scriptures.

Moreover, this is not something that we must do for ourselves. No! Far from it! This is the present and ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures have been breathed out by the activity of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit applies the words of the Scriptures to our hearts, minds, and souls so that the regeneration of faith is born in us and we do believe. Yes, we believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. We believe what can only be known through the preaching of the true doctrine of the Scriptures. We believe that Jesus is the Christ, not that He was the Christ. We believe that He is the Son of God, not that He was the Son of God. We believe that He is risen from the dead, with His body. We believe that He is not confined by time and space but that He does come to us in water and Spirit to make believers of us and that He does give His body with the bread and His blood with the wine. We believe that through these ordained means of grace He does come to us today to speak peace to our troubled hearts. We believe that through these ordained means of grace He does breathe out upon us His Holy Spirit and with the Holy Spirit He gives us the faith to believe that He is the Christ, who has purchased our redemption, and that He is the Son of God, who raised Himself from the dead so that He can live for us as the same Christ who presently gives us the remission of sins.

And so, even as He makes believers of us we do believe, and even as we believe, we do have life in His name. John was very careful not to say that we have life by believing. No. He was very careful to say that believing we have life in the name of Jesus. And while the King James translates that we have life through His name, and while this is a true statement, this is not what is written. For the Holy Spirit made certain that we would not be left with a statement that could be misunderstood to mean that we must take this life and make it our own by believing. No. What John writes is that according to the faith that the Holy Spirit works in us we believe, and that believing we have life in the name of Jesus. We do not have to take hold of this life and apply it to ourselves. We have life in the name of Jesus. It is the name of Jesus in which we live. His name is applied to us in Baptism. His name is the name into which the Holy Spirit gathers us. His name is the name by which the Sacraments are effective and present for us. His name is the name in which life abides. And so, as we live in His name His life is ours. As we abide in His name we are truly free to live!

CONCLUSION

What a wonderful text has been recorded for us! How wonderful the Scriptures are! A question has often been asked regarding why Jesus left Thomas in his unbelief for an entire week. Many commentators have speculated on this, but speculation is not necessary. Jesus did not leave Thomas to his unbelief. This was Thomas' own stubborn choice. Did Jesus not tell them repeatedly before His suffering, death, and burial that He would rise from the dead? Did not Job know this centuries before? Is it not recorded throughout the Old Testament Scriptures? Did not Jesus give them the New Testament in His blood on the very night of His betrayal? Thomas had no reason whatsoever to refuse to believe, and this is exactly the choice that he chose. He defied the testimony of the Scriptures. He defied the testimony of the angels. He defied the testimony of his fellow apostles. He defied the faith that was in his own heart.

This is what is recorded for us for our benefit. We do the same thing in our lives. We defy the promises of the Scriptures, too. The Scriptures record for us the power of Baptism as the power of the resurrection to live before God with a clean conscience. But we refuse to believe. We insist that we must see the healing and we must see the victory over sin, death, and the work of the evil one in the world, before we will believe. But God has promised it. He has seen to it that it has been written for us. He has called us together in the name of Jesus to receive these things so that we should have life in His name. He has given us the divine liturgy, with the blessed creeds, by which we hear and confess the true faith. God has done it all. He has given us the faith so that we believe. All that remains for us to do is to rejoice in the life that He has given to us to enjoy. Is this not marvelous? In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus forever. Amen.