

04/11/21

Quasi Modo Geneti, 1st Sunday after Easter
Our Risen Lord Offers Us Peace

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, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you." When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you."

And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.

The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!"

Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing."

And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"

Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book, but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

Grace be unto you and peace, from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

On that first Easter Day, St. John tells us, the disciples of Jesus were gathered together in a room with the doors closed, and their hearts were filled with fear—fear of Jesus' enemies, fear that the priests and Pharisees

would turn their venomous hatred now against His followers, fear that those who had sought to destroy their Master would also seek to kill them. And as they huddled together in that closed room, their hearts were undoubtedly troubled also by something else. When Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, those disciples had fled in terror and left their Lord all alone—deserting Him, concerned only to protect themselves. Peter had at first drawn his sword and had even struck a blow in Jesus' behalf, cutting off the ear of one of the High Priest's servants, but his bravado was short-lived. Peter, too, then lost his nerve, and he would soon deny with an oath that he even knew the Prophet from Galilee. Only the disciple John had accompanied those brave women to the hill Golgotha—the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and others—to stand with them under the cross, to wait with them until the end, to watch their Master die. The rest had run away to hide, and the guilt from their act of leaving their Lord—their Friend, and their Teacher—only compounded and made worse their fear.

Their risen Lord appears to them and says to them, "Peace be with you!" How wonderful that word of Jesus must have sounded to them as its meaning more and more became manifest to them, as they more and more grasped what He intended for them, as the light of those words grew clearer and brighter and dispersed the darkness in their minds and hearts! "Peace to you!" Jesus says to them and also to us, and, in St. John's precious Gospel account from that first Easter Day, our Lord makes us partakers of that blessed peace, and He also shows us where that peace continues to be found.

I

"Peace to you!" Jesus says to His disciples, "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you. Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." And thus, by instituting for His Church His holy Word of Absolution, our Savior makes explicit the tie between the true peace which His resurrection victory brings to us and the pardon which He has won for us.

His word of peace to His disciples was His clear word of forgiveness to them for abandoning Him in the hour of His passion. And He sends them—and all those who follow in their apostolic ministry—to speak His forgiveness to penitent sinners everywhere. They are sent by Christ Jesus as the Father has sent Him—to wield the same power over our transgressions and our fallenness which our Triune God has invested in our incarnate Lord. To all who come to Him in repentance—to you and to me—Christ Himself speaks His word of cleansing and pardon, His word of forgiveness which is filled with the same divine authority which on that first Easter morning brought our crucified Redeemer back to life.

We should note here, St. John makes a special point of mentioning that Jesus came to His disciples through the closed doors of the room where they were gathered. He entered through those closed doors with the same physical body in which they could see and touch His wounds, and the Church of Christ has always found in that display of His divine power an instructive parallel to how our Lord's body and blood are present in the bread and the wine of His holy Supper. We are thus reminded that, also in His sacramental meal, our risen Savior imparts to us His pardon, unites us to Himself and to His Easter Victory, and pours His peace into our hearts.

II

Our text also makes us aware that there is yet another way that our Lord speaks His word of peace to us. St. John tells us that the disciple Thomas was not present when Jesus appeared to the others on that first Easter Day. Thomas would not believe their report. He could not accept that his Lord had risen until Jesus appeared also to him and let him touch the wounds in His hands and in His side. And when Thomas then knelt before his Lord in worship, Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." That would also be true of those disciples, and it would be true of Thomas himself. In the years ahead, as they served their Savior as His apostles and as they were persecuted for His sake and as most of them died as martyrs for preaching His Gospel, it was that same word which they preached which would sustain also their faith—not what they had seen with their eyes or felt with their hands. The passage of time would have made them question and doubt if their belief was based only on the fading evidence of their sight and their sense of touch. Only the Spirit-filled Word of God which they themselves preached—only the proclamation of His Easter-victory in Word and Sacrament—could nurture and keep strong their faith that Christ Jesus is risen and that they and we are reconciled to our Triune God.

We call him "doubting Thomas" for his slowness to believe. But we need to remember that, without the power of Christ's resurrection working in His word of absolution and in His holy sacraments and in the preaching of His Gospel Word, you and I would be disbelieving skeptics just as Thomas was. Also to us our risen Savior says, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed," and with those words He calls us to find and receive the peace of His resurrection—the peace of forgiveness and the peace of the sure hope of eternal life—where that peace must be found. It was St. Peter who penned the words of today's *Introit* "As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby." He and the other apostles

knew from their own experience that only in the Gospel as it comes to us in word and sacrament can we receive the peace which our risen Redeemer wants us to have.

III

“Peace be with you!” Jesus says to us in the waters of Baptism and here at His altar as we receive His body and His blood for the forgiveness of our sins. “Peace be with you!” He says to us every Sunday as we gather to hear His word read and preached to us. And we should think for a moment about what that word “peace” means for us.

Through faith in that word about Him who was crucified for our sin and who was raised again so that also we might have life, we are given the only true peace for our souls—the peace of conscience which is ours in the knowledge that His blood cleanses us from all sin, the peace of being free from the fear of dying because He assures us that His victory over the grave belongs also to us. And it is not a drowsy, motionless kind of peace that makes us think only of idleness and rest and sleep. The peace which our risen Lord speaks into our souls is filled with energy and dynamic beauty, filled with the light and the music of our Savior’s active love. “As the Father has sent Me, I also send you,” Jesus says, and His words are spoken also to you and to me. Surely we know that the apostolic ministry which He has established to tend to His Church wields His authority and speaks His word which is filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. But it also true that, in their daily lives and in their interactions with each other and with those around them, all Christians are sent to speak His word of peace. The Gospel which each of us may share with a lonely friend, the word of Christ’s forgiveness which any of us may speak to a penitent colleague, the word about His resurrection which we can all share with a grieving neighbor—that word, too, is filled with the life-giving power of our Triune God, the same divine power of Easter-morning which breathed life again into the body of Christ Jesus.

To us who without Him are dying sinners, our risen Lord says, “Peace be with you.” And He sends us to speak that word of peace to a world which desperately needs to hear it.

May the Holy Spirit lead us to hear and to share that Easter word of peace, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.