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His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America – Homily for the Sunday of Thomas



His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros

Homily for the Sunday of Thomas

April 26, 2020

Holy Resurrection Greek Orthodox Church, Brookville, New York

Brothers and Sisters in the Risen Christ,

Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη! [and in response: Ἀληθῶς Ἀνέστη!]

Christ is Risen! [and in response: Truly He is Risen!]

And though the doors were sealed shut – καὶ τῶν θυρῶν κεκλεισμένων, the Lord

appeared.

Though the doors were sealed shut because of fear, the Lord appeared, and granted peace.

Though the doors were sealed shut, the Lord appeared, and faith was renewed.

We are gathered yet again on the Eighth Day after the Resurrection, most of us sealed shut in our homes, and the fear of the pandemic still prevailing in our world. And we are gathered this morning in the Church of the Resurrection, here in Brookville, New York, in order to continue our affirmation of the *Anastasis*, of the newness of life that commenced two thousand years ago, and extends to this day and to this hour.

Indeed, one could say that the Day of Resurrection – the First Day of the Week after the Sabbath of God's rest from His labors of salvation on our behalf – is indeed the Beginning of the Eighth Day of Creation;

The Eighth Day that is the unwaning day of His Kingdom;[*]

The Eighth Day that is mirrored in today's Feast that we call Thomas Sunday.

We all know the story. Thomas was not present with the other Disciples on the evening of Pascha, one week ago, when the Lord appeared to them miraculously within the locked room. And when the Disciples told Thomas later on about the Resurrection appearance of the Lord, Thomas replied:

"Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and unless I put my finger into the wound of the nails, and I unless I stick my hand into his side, I will never believe!" ***[†]***

Thomas is defiant, adamant, even mocking. A far cry from his declaration just a few weeks prior when the Lord said he was returning to Bethany for the dead Lazaros. Then Thomas exclaimed, "*Let us also go, that we may die with him!*"[‡]

You see, Thomas, like so any of the other Disciples at different times, had a misplaced enthusiasm for the Lord's ministry and miracles. He had witnessed so many marvels, but had not as yet understood their meaning.

Therefore, in the face of the loss of his Master and Lord, he becomes aggressive and obstinate, frustrated at the suggestion that Christ might indeed be risen from the dead. He doubts his brothers, because he doubts himself, and thus we know him as, "Doubting Thomas."

It is too easy for us to judge Thomas, especially in his moment of loss and weakness. Truly, we are not so different from him in our current circumstances of pain, loss, and frustration. We have all known times in our lives when we felt strong in our faith, that we could even confront our own death with courage and confidence. But then a Holy Week happens like the one we just experienced, and all the pillars on which we have leaned our whole lives come crashing down. And we are like Thomas.

We are hurt.

We are angry.

And we demand proof that what we believe is real.

My beloved Christians, there are so many lessons that we can learn from Thomas; he has much to teach us.

Thomas was not with the other Disciples when the Lord appeared, and although the other Ten affirmed the Resurrection to him, he would not accept their testimony. Perhaps he was angry that he had not been included in that vision of the Lord. He had once been so willing to go all the way, even to the point of death. Perhaps now he was embarrassed by his reactions to the death of his Master and Lord, and was emotionally cut off from his brothers. He was alone and isolated.

This is what can easily happen to us in these days of the pandemic and the social distancing we are all doing now, for the sake of our own health and that of others.

We are shut off from our brothers and sisters in Christ. And even though I and your clergy continue to celebrate, we feel the same isolation and loneliness that you do, because we are cut off from you.

But there is Good News; though the doors are sealed shut – τῶν θυρῶν κεκλεισμένων,

the Lord appears;

the Lord grants peace;

the Lord is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and He grants unto us eternal life.

He will come to us in our isolation, in our loneliness, in our limitations, and He will manifest to us the miracle of eternal life, just as He did to Thomas. To each of us, in

the Eighth Day of the Resurrection, He will invite us to come close to Him, to experience Him, as He did to Thomas:

After eight days, the Disciples were again assembled inside, and this time, Thomas was with them. Though the doors were sealed shut, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be unto you." Then Jesus addressed Thomas, "Bring your finger here and probe My hands. And take your hand and put it into My side. Doubt no more. Believe!" Thomas cried out to Him, "My Lord and my God!" ***[§]***

In this moment of profound challenge from the Lord, Thomas is reunited with his brothers. He lets go of his anger, his resentment, his shame. His confession is the greatest affirmation of Christ in the Gospels. Jesus Christ is both Lord and God! But hear how the Lord receives his worship and what He says to us:

"Because you have seen Me, is it only now you believe? Blessed are those who have seen nothing, and yet they believe!" ***[**]***

If you have not seen, you are blessed. If you have not experienced, you can believe. And if we cannot join together in person, we can do so in spirit, and still be the one community, the one Body, the one Church of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is alive, dead though He was, and is alive forevermore![††]

Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη! [Ἀληθῶς Ἀνέστη!]

[*] Cf. the Ninth Ode of Pascha, "ἐν τῇ ἀνεσπέρῳ ἡμέρᾳ τῆς βασιλείας σου."

[†] John 20:25.

[‡] John 11:6.

[§] John 20:26-28.

[**] John 20:29.

[††] Revelation 1:18.

Source