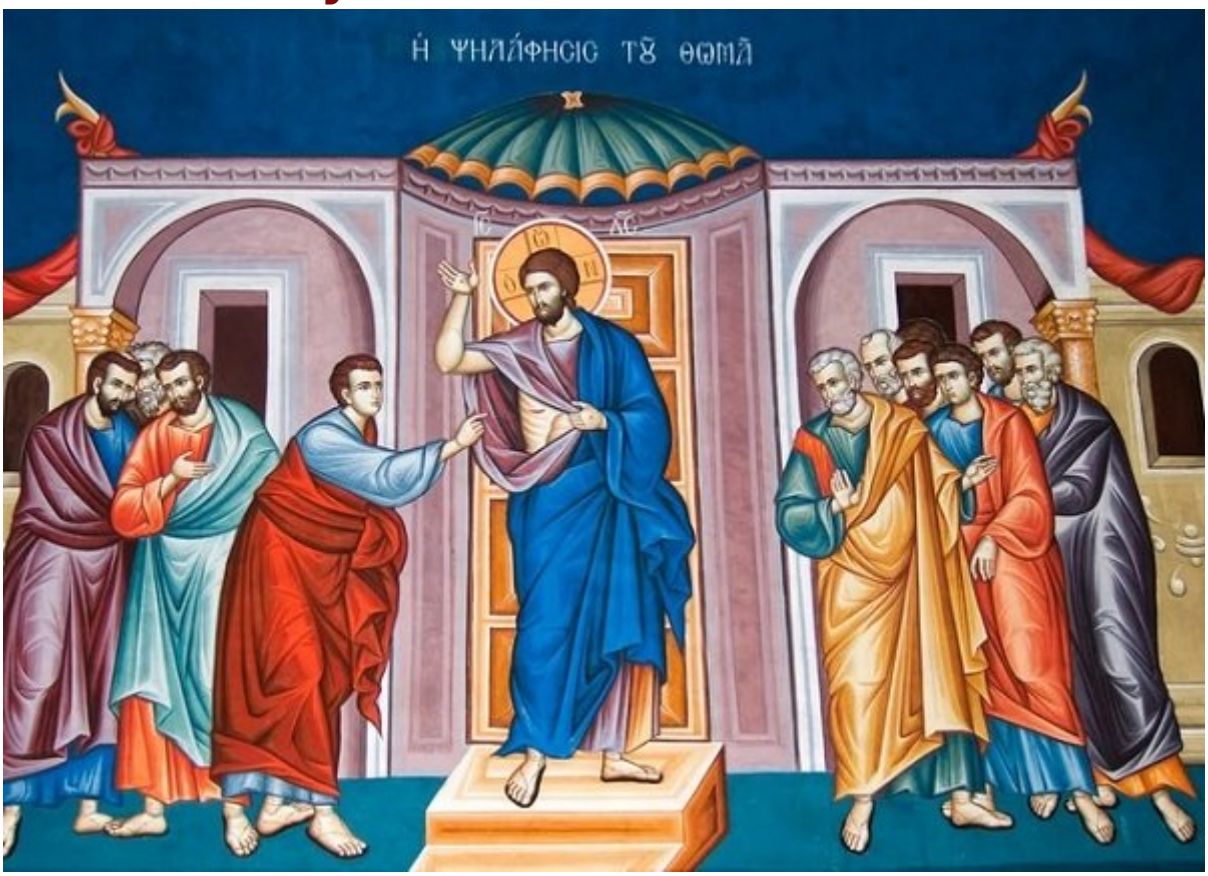
27/04/2020

Thomas Sunday



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In the Gospel, it states that the disciples ‘were assembled for fear of the Jews’[1]. One could envisage that fear was not the only motivation that gathered them together. Perhaps they would have been less vulnerable if they had remained dispersed. Probably they gathered together because their hearts all burned with the same love for the Teacher, which acted as a catalyst of unity. They had become witnesses of the death of the Lord, but their love for Him kept Him alive within them. The Lord heard the sighs of this fearful love and He fastened His love to them. He revealed himself to them and gave them His peace.

We can see in each of the Lord’s appearances after the Resurrection, that each one only took place when the Lord discerned a living sensation of sorrowful love in the heart of his Disciples.

Mary Magdalene went ‘very early in the morning’ to Christ, to bring the myrrh of her sorrowful love and to render the honours fitting for the dead to the Lord. She did not know about the Resurrection, but because of her fervent love for her

Benefactor, Who had freed her from the tyranny of seven demons, Christ remained alive in her heart. The Risen Lord Who ‘knows the hearts of all’[2], fastened His Spirit to the spirit of Magdalen and appeared to her to ‘wipe away all tears from her eyes’[3].

Before the shocking events of the Lord’s Passion, the disciples lived in a holy atmosphere of continual ecstasy, surprise and joyful exaltation. They were able to behold, sometimes less and sometimes more clearly, ‘His glory, the glory of the only-begotten of the Father full of grace and truth’[4]. They became continual witnesses of supernatural signs and miracles which the Lord performed. He had even granted the disciples themselves ‘power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease’[5]. From this glorious joy, they sunk into an abyss of grief. While the bridegroom was with them[6] ceaseless joy and the incorruptible consolation of His presence overflowed in their hearts, but equally strong was their bottomless grief now that the Lord had died. However, they turned the energy of their ordeal into energy for prayer and the sorrow which flooded their hearts was poured as a torrent of prayer before God. The Comforting Lord ‘heard their groaning’[7] and answered their prayer with His presence. He came in their midst to give them His peace ‘which passeth all understanding,[8] and transformed their sorrow into joy, because every contact with divine presence fundamentally changes man. It illumines his mind and calms his heart. By contrast, contact with the spirit of evil, even if it approaches as a wolf in sheep’s clothing, always imparts distress.

The same spiritual law that applied for the disciples continues until today in the life of the faithful. It is not possible for someone to see the Lord and bear in his heart the joy of the Resurrection, if he does not first feel in the depths of his being the pain of the Lord’s sufferings and grief when He was crucified. One kind of crucifixion for the man of faith is the consciousness of his destitution. If the man of faith bears sorrowful love in his heart for his insufficiencies and most of all for his inadequacy to give thanks worthily to such a God and Saviour as Christ, then the Lord will surely not overlook his sorrow. He will reveal to His servant the power of His Resurrection in a spiritual way. He will manifest Himself invisibly, but sensed in man’s heart.

The disciples ‘rejoiced when they saw the Lord’[9]. Their joy however was not psychological, but spiritual and lifted up their spirit to Heaven. He filled them with his peace, with delight, but even more than that, he filled them with His own life, as ‘he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost’[10]. This act of the Lord brings to our mind the awesome moment of man’s creation, when ‘God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the

breath of life; and man became a living soul’[11]. Through His breath, God gave life to His creature ‘according to His image and likeness’, in a similar way Christ now breathes in the faces of the disciples, refashioning them and imparting the Spirit of eternal life.

Through His word, ‘Receive ye the Holy Ghost’, He inaugurated a new creation. In His breath, He imparted the first dispensation of the Holy Spirit that would heal and strengthen their nature, so it would be able to bear the grace of the Comforter on the day of Pentecost, the fulness of divine love. If man’s nature is not strengthened, it cannot bear anything heavenly. ‘The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God’[12]. The disciples received the anointing of grace during the appearances of the Risen Lord. Their hearts received the earnest of the Spirit[13] that would refashion them into apostolic hearts, which ‘drew all the world into their net’[14]. The ‘little flock’[15] that was gathered together ‘for fear of the Jews’, was transfigured into a hidden leaven, that would soon leaven the whole lump, that is, all the world unto the ages of ages.

The Apostle Thomas fell into temptation as he was separated from his brethren, and he found himself threatened by eternal perdition, expressing words of doubt and disbelief. However, God is not angry with man if he admits disbelief, as long as he remains open and honest. His desire is that man voluntarily make his experiment, and surrender to Him freely, embracing His will as the sole law of his being, even if it opposes his psychology.

In the life of every Christian there will come a moment when he will wrestle with God. However, there is an honourable battle and a battle based on pride, there is desire for greater fullness of knowledge and there is morbid doubt. The honourable battle leads to the assurance of unfaltering faith and fiery love for the Lord. For this reason it is much more precious than luke-warm faith[16]. Man desires to learn and fights so that he can receive information in his heart about the truth. The determinant difference between honourable and morbid fighting with God rests in man’s predisposition. It is revealed in the attitude that he will adopt when the truth is revealed to him, and according to how much he surrenders, like Thomas, to the worship of the true God with all his heart, living thereafter no longer for himself, but ‘unto Him which died for him and rose again’[17]. All the saints that wrestled with God rejoiced when they were defeated and came to know their injustice before His spotless love.

The direct assurance of the other Apostles about the Resurrection of the Lord was not enough for Thomas, who demanded to put his finger ‘into the print of the nails and thrust his hand in the Lord’s side’[18]. The Lord appeared for the sake of his

salvation and showed him the marks of the nails and his side, concluding with the exhortation: ‘Be not faithless but believing’[19]. At this, the heart of Thomas was quickened and became steadfast. He confessed the Risen Lord. The perception of grace that rejuvenates our heart, strengthens our faith and transports us ‘out of darkness into His marvellous light’[20], is the experience of the Resurrection. However faith is nothing other than spiritual vision, which continually perceives the Risen Lord and calls Him to remembrance. In this way, faith gives a hypostasis to that which is not seen, to the anticipated good things of the Kingdom of God[21]. Thus, the response of the Lord to the ecstatic confession of Thomas was, ‘Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed’[22].

It is of a surety blessed for someone to see the Lord as Saint Silouan did, but perhaps it is even more blessed when a man finds himself continually in His presence and sees Him alive in his heart with the eyes of faith. This kind of vision is secure evidence that God abides within man and, according to the Apostle Peter, the final end of this faith is ‘the salvation of souls’[23]. The great witness of the Resurrection of the Lord speaks with conviction about the ‘joy unspeakable and full of glory’ with which all who love the Lord will rejoice, without having known Him in the flesh, believing in Him, without having physically seen him[24].

When the church chants, ‘We have seen the resurrection of Christ, wherefore let us worship the Lord Jesus for He only is without sin.’ It is not lying, of course, but expressing the experience of its sanctified and perfected members. In its bosom coincides both the ontological knowledge of the Lord held by the Saints and the imperfect, yet blessed, knowledge by faith of the Risen Lord held by the remaining members. Whoever believes in Him, strives to fulfil His commandments. These are, according to Saint Sophrony: ‘the uncreated Light in which He particularly reveals Himself to us ‘as he is’’[25]. Thus whoever strives to keep the commandments, gradually sees Him more and more clearly.

The Lord is not transparently manifest to us in His creation, but only opaquely. The beauty of nature and the fact that everything operates with such perfection bears witness that it is the work of His hands, that He is the Creator and Preserver of creation. However, the Lord promises us in the Gospel that he will manifest Himself in another way, personal and from within. Thomas demanded evidence in order to believe in the Resurrection. However, when the power of the Holy Spirit overshadowed him, he knew without having to touch anything, that the Lord was wholly alive within his heart.

The Apostle Paul exhorts his disciple Timothy to remember Jesus Christ ‘raised from the dead’[26], so as to not lose the living sensation of the Risen Lord in his heart.

Burning love in the inmost part of the heart of man is irrefutable evidence of the Resurrection. ‘Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed’[27].

[1] John 20:19.
[2] Prov. 24:12.
[3] See. Rev. 7:17 and 21:4.
[4] John 1:14.
[5] Matt. 10:1.
[6] See Matt. 9:15; Mark 2:19-20; Luke 5:34-35.
[7] See Ex. 2:24.
[8] See Phil. 4:7.
[9] John 20:20.
[10] See John 20:22.
[11] Gen. 2:7.
[12] 1 Cor. 2:14.
[13] See 2 Cor. 1:21-22 and 5:5; Eph. 1:13-14.
[14] See Apolytikion of Pentecost.
[15] Luke 12:32.
[16] See Rev. 3:15-16.
[17] See 2 Cor. 5:15.
[18] John 20:25.
[19] John 20:27.
[20] 1 Pet. 2:9.
[21] See Heb. 11:1 and 27.
[22] John 20:29.
[23] See 1 Pet. 1:9.
[24] See 1 Pet. 1:8.
[25] Archimandrite Sophrony (Sakharov), We Shall See Him as He Is (Tolleshunt Knights, Essex: Stavropegic Monastery of St John the Baptist, 2004) p. 150.
[26] 1 Tim. 2:8.
[27] John 20:29.
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