

Easter 2C – Thomas Sunday (4/11/10 – *The Peace of the Risen Christ Be with You*)

In the Name JESUS. [Amen]

The Peace of the Risen Christ Be with You! That is the message for this *Second Sunday of Easter* – also referred to as *St. Thomas Sunday*, for obvious reasons. Christ your crucified but risen Lord comes into your midst this morning with His comforting words: ***Peace be with you*** [JN 20.19]. No matter what your circumstance, this Word of Christ is for you.

Are you like the disciples who hid themselves behind locked doors – cowering in fear? Maybe it's because you're uncertain of your immediate future. Economic ... academic ... medical ... work stresses have you worried – sinfully worried – about how things are going to turn out for you ... or your family? We hold these things in – and try to take care of them ourselves ... apart from God ... apart from the certain knowledge that in Christ we have already won the victory. And we become worried ... fretful ... fearful – refusing to embrace the life God has given us ... missing the opportunities to see the gracious blessings God would pour out into our earthly lives.

It's not just a matter of safety. There's a difference between being cautiously safe and fearfully cowering behind locked doors. The one is in keeping with the *Fifth Commandment* ... protecting the life that God has given – and in accord with God's Word to the Israelites in DEUTERONOMY 6.16 ... the Word that Jesus quoted to satan when the evil one told our Lord to cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple: ***You shall not put the Lord your God to the test*** [LK 4.12]. But of those who would persecute the disciples, Jesus said: ***have no fear of them ... do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul*** [MT 10.26, 28], for ***after that [they] have nothing more that they can do*** [LK 12.4]. No, we are to *fear, love, and trust in God above all things*, as Luther taught. That is in keeping with the *First and foremost Commandment*.

Indeed, Holy Scripture says through St. Paul that ***God gave us a spirit NOT of fear but of power and love and self-control*** [2TI 1.7]. And St. Peter by inspiration writes: ***Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for***

what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy [1PT 3.13-15]. And St. John declares: *There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love* [1JN 4.18]. Here is where we learn, then, that the disciples' fear – and our own – can at times fall into the category of sin. It is a lack of perfect trust in God. It is a lack of letting the love of God in Christ Jesus have its way with us. It is because of the weakness of our faith – or even lack of proper faith, as in the case of Thomas – that we fear men and circumstances rather than placing our trust completely in the One Who lived and died and rose again for us and for our eternal salvation ... all in order that He might also bestow upon us His life and His peace.

Do we not – quite often – fear that which can only hurt or harm our bodies ... maybe even only temporarily? Are we not more afraid of death than we are joyful at the Good News that Christ is risen **indeed** from the grave and lives and reigns to all eternity over us in love? Do we not at least act as if we believe more in and fear what can kill this temporal body ... while on the other hand doubting God's merciful care of our eternal souls? Do we not live out our lives as if we disbelieve the resurrection of Christ ... and that He will raise us up on the Last Day and give us perfect, sinless, immortal bodies in the perfect image of His Own? O ye of little faith!

In the *Holy Gospel* for this Sunday – specifically, in the disciples – we see ourselves. And in the Word of the risen Savior to the disciples, we hear His gracious, loving Word ... **also to us**. Note that there is no reprimand – not to Peter who had denied Him three times ... not to the whole crowd of cowering disciples who had left Him in the Garden. There is no denial or scorn or wrath even for Thomas – who doesn't show up until **eight days later** [JN 20.26]. Here is what we hear from the mouth of our resurrected and ever-living Lord Jesus Christ: **Peace be with you** – not once, or twice, but three times [20.19, 21, 26]. **Peace be with you** – the peace of God in Christ Jesus ... the peace of sin forgiven ... the peace of satan cast down and rendered powerless over you ... the peace of hell conquered and death

defeated! ***Peace be with you!*** Your sins are forgiven – all of them ... even all of your denials by thought, word, or deed ... even all your cowering fear in the face of people and things that ultimately can do you no lasting harm ... even all your disbelief in the works and promises of God. **All** of your sins are forgiven – ***Peace be with you!*** You have been delivered from the evil one – ***Peace be with you!*** Hell can no longer terrorize you – ***Peace be with you!*** Your grave has been turned into merely a resting place for the body until the resurrection of the dead ... your death has been turned to life by Him Who is Victor over death and grave – ***Peace be with you!***

Do your sins – your nagging sins ... your horrible sins ... your persistent sins – distress you ... cause you to cower in fear behind the closed and tightly locked door of your heart? ***Peace be with you!*** Christ your risen Lord and Savior has breathed out His Holy Spirit upon His Church and upon His called & ordained servants of the Word, bestowing His Own authority to forgive sins in His Name – because of His life and death and resurrection – in the words of Holy Absolution. ***Peace be with you!*** Marvel and give glory to **God, Who ha[s] given such authority to men** [MT 9.8]. Not that it is their own ... but in the stead and by the command of **CHRIST** ... because of **HIS** work and **HIS** breathing out of the Holy Spirit ... and in view of the forgiveness of sins **HE** purchased for **all** people once-for-all by His death on the Cross ... and His glorious resurrection from the tomb.

Let us consider carefully the record set before us by the inspired pen of St. John – the beloved disciple and eyewitness of these things – that we, too, may be encouraged in the midst of our own trials ... and receive from the resurrected Christ His peace that surpasses our human understanding. Let us ponder this Word so that ***we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing [we] may have life in His Name*** [JN 20.31].

Put yourself in the place of the disciples – Peter, James, John ... one of the women ... or even, and perhaps especially, Thomas. Behold how your living and loving Savior comes to you this day. He does not come to remind of fear ... or threefold denials. He does not chide or chastise failures. His first greeting to this band of cowering, disbelieving disciples is pure Gospel: ***Peace be with you!*** He does not reprimand for not believing what the eyes

did (or did not) see ... for faulty memory ... for forgetting the promises of God reiterated by Him Who fulfills **all** of God's promises. Is your faith weak? Do your senses doubt? Does your intellect find it unbelievable that One Who was crucified should rise again? ***When He had said this*** – namely, ***Peace be with you – He showed them His hands and His side*** [20.20a]. Christ showed them His nail-marked hands ... and His pierced side from which flowed the water and the blood – so that His bones were not broken ... in accord with Scripture [Exo 12.16; PSA 22.17]. ***Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord***, our text says [20.20b]. No more did those gathered there that Resurrection Sunday evening continue to doubt. An empty grave – well, they couldn't be sure ... maybe His body was merely stolen. The testimony of mourning women – well, it could have been the wishful thinking of their overly-tender hearts. But now they heard the Savior's voice as He stood visibly before them ... and saw His hands and feet and side still bearing the marks of His atoning sacrifice. They believe! ***We have seen the Lord!*** – that's what they tell Thomas later [20.25].

It's the same the following Sunday – the ***Second Sunday of Easter***. Now Thomas is with them. And ***although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then He said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see My hands; and put out your hand and place it in My side. Do not disbelieve, but believe."*** [20.26b-27] And Thomas – who had vowed never to believe unless He could do just those things – responds with God-given faith: ***My Lord and my God!*** [20.28].

Your risen Savior comes also today, saying: ***Peace be with you***. And though you do not see Him, you hear His voice. For Christ has placed His living Voice in the message of the Gospel of forgiveness ... and sent out His Apostles and disciples and Church and pastors to forgive the sins of all who are penitent with this promise: ***As the Father has sent Me, even so I am sending you. ... Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them.*** Dear sinner/saints, **your** sins are forgiven. You have the Word of the crucified and resurrected Christ on it. ***The Peace of the Risen Christ Be with You!***

In the Name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]