

Quasimodogeniti
19 April, Anno Domini 2020
St. John 20:19-31
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In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

I imagine that it is very common to think, “How blessed are the apostles to be able to touch the marks and put their hands in Jesus’ side! My faith would be so much stronger if I could have been there in the room with Jesus and seen Him alive and touch His wounds. If only He would appear to me now.” But that’s not what Jesus says. He says “Blessed are those who have NOT seen and yet believe.” “Blessed are **you**.” That’s what Thomas and the others would say. “Blessed are you because you believed the witness that you heard concerning Jesus. We didn’t. Jesus told us on more than one occasion that the Christ had to suffer and die and rise again on the third day. The women told us about the empty tomb and the witness of the angels sitting where Jesus lay ‘He is risen! He is not here.’ Yet we still ended up in the Upper Room scared stiff. We didn’t believe. Blessed are you who hear and believe.”

That’s really what makes the Easter evening scene in the Upper Room quite ironic. There Jesus instituted the Office of Holy Ministry to preach the forgiveness of sins in Jesus’ Name and then made the first preachers men who didn’t believe the preaching! They are guilty of the very thing that is most frustrating to anyone who shares the faith - skepticism, unbelief, and rejection. “Unless I see in His hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into His side, I will absolutely never believe.” Those were Thomas’ words. “I don’t believe you. I don’t want to believe you. You are liars and so is Jesus.”

But this preaching, this sharing of the good news of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, is precisely how Jesus makes Himself known to us, creating and strengthening saving faith. “How can they believe unless someone tells them?” Only through apostolic preaching, that is preaching that is in full accord with the prophetic and apostolic witness of the Scriptures, can anyone know of and believe in Jesus. The Holy Spirit only attends faithful witness to Jesus, not half-truth witness about Jesus. That is how Jesus Himself ordered the Church. That witness, that proclamation, that Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Mary, is the Son of God

who has borne the sin and guilt of the whole world and conquered death through His cross and resurrection and that through His Word and the Means of Grace He applies redemption to each sinner, that witness is the very means by which the Holy Spirit calls sinners to faith in Christ. That's it. It's not by miracles or personal conversion testimonies or mountain top experiences. It is by hearing God's Word. It is by Christians in their various vocations sharing the good news of Jesus' resurrection with their neighbors. How can your neighbors and relatives ever believe in something they don't know? St. Paul says to the Corinthians "it pleased God though the folly of what we preach to save those who believe." (1 Cor. 1:21)

It seems simple. Maybe it seems too simple for something of such incredible magnitude. Through His Church, Jesus draws near to sinners and tells them what He has done for them. Through His Church, Christ stands in the midst of us sinners bearing the marks in His hands and feet and His pierced side and says "Peace be to you. I have done it. I have paid the whole debt of your sin; you are forgiven. I have emptied death of all its power to frighten you. Receive this gift which I have won for you. Only believe that it is as I have said." And through that invitation, through that blessed good news, the Holy Spirit creates faith, brings sinners who long for God's mercy to believe that what they are looking for is exactly what Jesus has come to give them, the peace that nothing else in all of creation can give.

But doubt and unbelief are rooted deeply within our hearts. The 10 didn't believe even though they had spent three years with Jesus, being prepared for this. God sent them witnesses, but they rejected the messengers along with their message. They made idols of their fear and so fell into unbelief. Peter denied knowing Jesus completely, even calling down a curse on himself. For 30 pieces of silver, Judas had betrayed the innocent Son of God into the hands of those who wanted to murder him. In the hour of his arrest, all the disciples abandoned Jesus and fled for their lives. And now on Easter evening, they were gathered together terrified that the Jews might be hunting them down.

Thanks be to God, He is merciful and patient. He sees how weak and frail we are, how readily we choose to act as unbelievers who have never heard the Word of God. He sees how easily overcome we are by the trials and temptations of this world. That is why He appeared in the Upper

Room. He confirmed to the apostles all that they heard. Rather than consuming them in wrath and disappointment, Jesus calms their terrified consciences by saying “Peace be to you. I am the One who was crucified, died and was buried. I am now alive. My Blood has paid for your doubt and unbelief in My Word. Peace be to you.” Jesus suffered the disciples’ weakness and comforted them. He appeared to them so that they might know that what they heard was the truth and in that truth have the joy and peace of knowing not simply that Jesus was alive but that their salvation was accomplished.

To be sure, Jesus did chastise the disciples. Their unbelief wasn’t simply okay. It condemned them. It made a liar of God and rejected the mercy which their Lord and Teacher had died to win for them. St. Mark tells us “...He [Jesus] appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at table, and He rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw Him after He had risen.” Jesus rebukes demons. Unbelief is demonic, it is of the devil because it keeps people away from their Creator and Redeemer. It robs people of God’s mercy and grace. It enslaves people to the desires of their sinful flesh and chains them to eternal death. Unbelief places us under God’s strict judgment, an invitation for God to deal with us exactly as we deserve according to the Law. That is not God’s desire. His desire, made absolutely clear in the sacrifice of His beloved Son, is the salvation of all people everywhere, no exceptions. But doubt and unbelief spurn God’s mercy. They deny what God has promised and done in Christ.

Repent. “Do not be unbelieving but believing.” You haven’t seen Jesus but you have the Holy Spirit-inspired and preserved, blood-sealed testimony of those who did so that you may believe. You have Moses and the Prophets. You have Matthew and John and Thomas and Paul. John even makes this appeal in his Gospel. He writes “He who saw it (John) has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you may believe.” And toward the end of His Gospel he also writes “This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.” The prophetic and apostolic witness all have this as their purpose—that you may not doubt and be lost, but believe in the Son of God who died and rose from the dead for the forgiveness of, not simply sins, but **your** sins. And by believing this faithful testimony, you may have the peace of Jesus, the peace of a conscience that has been washed clean in the

waters of Holy Baptism, the peace of a merciful and loving heavenly Father who hears your prayers and cries of distress and promises to care for you and deliver you. And, indeed, you do have the opportunity not only simply to touch but to eat and be strengthened in body and soul by the true Body and Blood of Jesus in the Holy Communion. Jesus Himself promises you no less “This is my Body; this is My Blood.”

Like the disciples your faith is not perfect. It suffers weakness and doubt. It wavers in the hour of affliction. But Christ is merciful. That is why He has given His Word to you. That is why He continues to ordain and send out ambassadors who bestow His forgiveness in His stead and by His command. That is why He commands fathers to be the daily preachers of their own household, speaking and teaching God’s Word for the salvation of all who are given into their charge. That is why Jesus puts His Word in your mouth so that any other sinner who crosses your path might hear of Him and the peace that He brings, the peace of His cross and His empty tomb and believe and come the Lord’s house to receive His gifts. To be sure, this witness will be met with resistance. Thomas was vehement. But his brothers didn’t give up. They kept bearing witness; kept inviting Thomas. And praise be God that the Holy Spirit caused their witness to bear fruit so that Thomas joined them a week later and saw His Lord and was restored to the number of the redeemed. May the Holy Spirit bless your witness with success for the salvation of many.

Blessed are you if you believe this witness of Holy Scripture for it is true, divinely and inerrantly true. Through it Christ bestows the forgiveness of all your sins and the blessed hope of everlasting life. Let this testimony be your daily sustenance. Hunger for it like newborn infants who simply can’t get enough of this rich, life-giving milk. Open your mouth and your ears wide, for the Lord God promises to fill you to overflowing with His mercy and His peace.

In the Name of +Jesus.