

“Jesus, Church, Scriptures” John 20:19-31

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them 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. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending 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 withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”

Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “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 never believe.” Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. 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.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

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

It wasn't an easy job. By no means. Just think about it, – to record the most important things that Jesus did and the most important words that He said. If you were present when Jesus appeared to His disciples after the resurrection, when He spoke with them.

Just imagine how much was going on, how much emotion, how much hope, how could you possibly pick what to mention and what to leave out. How to choose what are the most important things!

By God's grace and guided by the Holy Spirit John, the beloved disciple of Jesus, who Himself was present in these events as an eyewitness, has left to us his brief account of what happened.

And even if these are only a few verses that we read today, they contain so much. Today we will take a closer look at three important themes that John's account reveals and teaches us, that is – about Jesus, about the Church, and about the Scriptures.

Jesus, the Church, and the Bible. Remember? Let's start with Jesus. We quite often mention the fact that the Word became flesh, that holy and eternal God became one of us, when He became like us in every way, except without sin.

Of course, it is a mystery and we probably will never be able to understand it fully, however, in this account we can see something even more shocking. Can you think of what it is? What was Jesus like after the resurrection?

He still had a human body. The Word not only had become the flesh, but He had remained the flesh even after His resurrections. Even now reigning victorious and having received all authority in heavens and on earth, He has a human body just like ours.

When we will see the Lord Jesus in His divine glory, we will see Jesus in the flesh. God in the flesh. This is, why we have these great heavenly visions both from the Old Testament prophets, and from Jesus' disciples, where they see in the very midst of the heavenly glory someone... who is like a son of man.

Like us. This is, why you will be able to see Jesus, the Son of God face to face, for our resurrected bodies will be like His as John explains it elsewhere: "But we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is." (1 John 3:2)

Stop here and let it sink in... we will be like Him and will see Him as He is... How important we are to our God, that He not only took our flesh for a while, to reunite us with Himself, but He has become one of us forever. Forever.

There is something else John teaches us about Jesus. And what a comforting thing it is. Jesus knows what you think. That's right. He hears your doubts, He hears your concerns, He hears your worries and your fears. He knows you better than you do. And not only that, He cares to answer you and to assure you.

We see it beautifully in this example with Thomas. Thomas wasn't much different than the other disciples. When they were told by women that they had seen risen Jesus, what did they do? Yes, they disbelieved.

Similarly, Thomas couldn't believe that this could be true. "Unless I see..." He doubted, and just imagine how tormenting it must be to him. Others were rejoicing in what they had seen, they were overflowing with joy, but Thomas...

As soon as Jesus appeared to the disciples again, He turned to Thomas, and responded to his very words: "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe."

We are not told whether Thomas actually did it. But once He saw the risen Lord Jesus, He uttered the most beautiful confession of faith: "My Lord and my God." My Lord and my God.

Jesus knows your thoughts, and He wants you to trust Him completely. This is, why He comes to us and says 'peace be with you, my brothers and sisters'. Remember, God's words are His works. Whatever He says, it happens. When He speaks peace to us, He gives it to us, even in the midst of our daily struggles.

And here we come to our second theme, what was it? Right, the Church. What does John reveal and teach us about the Church? We could say that in these few verses John summarizes the most important things we need to know about the Church.

What is the most important task entrusted to the Church? If we had to put it in one word. Forgiveness. That's right, the forgiveness of sins. The forgiveness of sins on behalf of the Triune God. This is, why we are here.

"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." We should reflect on this more. God the Father sent His Son Jesus to deliver us His forgiveness. Now Jesus sends His Church, that is us, to continue His mission.

We, as messengers of Jesus are not speaking on our own, we speak on behalf, by the command, and with the authority of Jesus, as He Himself said: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."

"I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit!" We hear these words every Sunday. What a big deal? I assume that usually we don't feel anything special when we hear these words. No heavenly joy, no infinite gratitude, no anything extraordinary. At least not every time.

But these are the most important words that any human being can hear. Because to hear these words and to receive them in faith changes everything. If you receive the forgiveness that the Church proclaims on behalf of God, you are forgiven. Before God.

It means that eternal life is yours. Together with all the blessings that the Almighty God has prepared for you. But, if you despise this message, if you are not willing to repent of your sins, but want to remain in them, if you reject God's grace, your sins remain on you.

It means nothing less than eternal separation from God, Jesus calls it hell. When you hear the words of forgiveness, remember, that every Divine Service foreshadows the Last Day, where all the nations will stand before God's throne, and where these words will make all the difference. Eternally.

What a great gift God has entrusted to us. The words of eternal life. The words that has this mysterious power to transfer someone from death into life. This is, why we are here, to make it happen. To fill the Paradise with forgiven people.

There is something else in these few verses from John. Something about our Christian practices. When do we usually come together to hear the words of forgiveness and to partake in His Holy Meal? Which day is it?

Usually it is on Sunday. It is not accidental. On which day was Jesus raised and appeared to His disciples? On the first day of the week. On Sunday. On which day did He command the disciples to proclaim forgiveness?

On the first day of the week. Which day did He brake bread with His disciples on the road to Emmaus? On the first day. When did He appeared to the Twelve again? On the first day. When did the first Christians get together to hear the words of forgiveness and to celebrate the Lord's Supper? (Acts 20:7) On the first day.

You see, the reason we meet on the first day of the week, or we could say symbolically – on the first day of the New Creation, is because Jesus Himself introduced this pattern and His disciples begun to practice it from the very beginning.

As we come together on Sundays, repenting of our sins and thirsty to hear the life-giving words of forgiveness and to be fed by the Holy Sacrament, we do it together with one holy apostolic Church, throughout time and space, with all God's chosen people.

As we respond to God's invitation, Jesus Himself comes to us. Peace be with you! This is right here, where He brings us His peace. Where two or three are gathered in His name. This is where He forgives us our sins.

This is where He Himself serves us His Holy Meal. This is where we receive eternal life, that will last forever. Blessed we are that our Lord and our God Jesus has been so gracious to us and has called us by His Spirit, and may He keep us and protect us until the day that we see Him as He is.

Our third and the last theme was... yes, the Scriptures. God's love letter to His human creatures, as some say. Our book. The book of life. John writes something beautiful about the Scriptures.

"Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

We have different attitudes towards the Scriptures. On one hand, there can't be the Church without the Bible, however today many Christians neglect God who speaks to us, they don't read His message, don't learn it, don't meditate upon it.

Many who identify themselves as Christians don't even know what treasures the Bible reveals to us. That's why it is so good to reflect on what John writes about the Bible. "This is written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, and may have life in His name."

The Bible is not like the other books. It doesn't simply tell about God. It actually does things. Through this book God Himself speaks to us. Even today. Thus He gives us new hearts, hearts of flesh, thus He creates true faith in us.

Just think about it, this book actually creates faith and actually gives you life. How? When we read it, listen to it, learn it, meditate upon it, share it. So simple. Remember, our God is God who speaks.

Today He speaks to us through His written Word, and when He does it, His Spirit gives us new life. It is a mystery and it is a miracle, that the Lord has done, and we are so blessed to have this book, and to be able to listen to God Himself speaking to us. We should only pray that the Holy Spirit would never stop encouraging us to dwell in God's words, so that we have life and have it abundantly.

I think that John the beloved disciple of Jesus, has done marvellous job. He has recorded for our benefit these truth that bring us so much comfort. And even today, as we reflect on these words, on the first day of the week, Jesus Christ, our Lord and our God, He comes to us to assure and encourage us, for He knows what we need, and He speaks to us the most important words: "Peace be with you! I forgive you all your sins! Come and receive the Kingdom prepared for you before the creation of the world."

Amen.