

New Sunday / Thomas Sunday

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Christ is risen!

In the Orthodox Church the Sunday immediately following Pascha is known by two names: Thomas Sunday and New Sunday. It is called Thomas Sunday because on this day we recall the Apostle Thomas' confession of the Risen Lord, and it is called New Sunday because this Sunday is the first of the Sundays throughout the year which pattern themselves on Pascha, each Sunday becoming in a sense a "little" Pascha.

In the Gospel reading we heard how on the first day of the week, when the disciples were gathered together for fear of the Jews, the Risen Lord Jesus appeared to them, walking through closed doors much like He had risen from the Tomb without breaking the seal.

And having showed His disciples His hands and His side, the Lord said to them, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send 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 retain the sins of any, they are retained." And then, as the Gospel records, the disciples were glad when they had seen the Lord.

Yet, as the Gospel also records, the Apostle Thomas was not with them but was absent. And even though the disciples gave him their testimony of the Lord's Resurrection, Thomas would not believe, unless as he himself said, he was granted to put his finger into the place of the nails and his hand into the place on the Lord's side.

And so after eight days, on the following Sunday, the Lord again appeared to His disciples through closed doors – this time Thomas being amongst them. And the Lord says to them again, "Peace be with you!" And to Thomas He said, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. And do not be unbelieving, but believing." And Thomas responded with the cry, "My Lord and my God!"

And to this the Lord said, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

In these resurrectional appearances, the Risen Lord is teaching the disciples many things but today we will speak of just three:

First, the Lord is of course revealing that He has truly risen from the dead, that He has conquered sin, the devil, and death, and He has completed everything which the Father has given Him to do – and for this reason He is able to give them peace from above, for as He said He has overcome the world.

Second, by showing the disciples and Thomas, the wounds of the crucifixion, the Lord is proving that He has risen not as some spirit or phantom but He has risen bodily, for as He says to them, a spirit or a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.

And third, by appearing to the disciples each time on Sunday as they were gathered together, the Lord is establishing Sunday, not only as a day of remembrance of His Resurrection, but also as the Day in which He would forever make His presence known among them.

For the Apostles, Sunday became not only the day on which the Lord rose from the dead but it also became the day on which the Lord, Whom they loved so dearly, manifested Himself to them. Think about it: how eagerly must the disciples have awaited that next Sunday and each Sunday afterwards, knowing that the Lord would be present in their midst, knowing that He would say to them, "Peace be to you!" and "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world!"

And of course, this is no different for us Christians today, who live our lives from one Sunday to the next. Each Sunday we gather to celebrate the Lord's Resurrection and to hear His voice in the proclamation of His Gospel, the Good News of Salvation. Each Sunday, the Lord opens His Scriptures to us, as He did to Luke and Cleopas as they traveled on the road to Emmaus, revealing how through His sufferings He has entered into His glory. And each Sunday, as the Lord blesses and breaks the bread which He Himself transforms into His Risen body, our spiritual eyes are opened and we recognize His presence among us in the burning of our hearts as we partake of His most pure Flesh.

Brothers and sisters, like the Apostles we have become witnesses to the Lord's Resurrection, not by touching the wounds on His Risen Body, but by experiencing His presence amongst us and within us. The Lord said to the doubting disciple, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. But blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

These words of the Lord are fulfilled each Sunday when we, who haven't seen the Risen Lord with our physical eyes, still, by the grace of God, gather to witness to the Lord's Resurrection. We gather as those blessed ones who have not seen yet have believed. Yet, as we know, when we gather the Risen Lord still manifests Himself to us, for He opens our spiritual eyes and initiates us into the mystery of resurrectional life.

The Risen Christ both accompanies us through the painful ordeal of dying to the world and He also brings us joy as we experience our rising with Him to newness of life. And in this way, the Lord already brings us into the next age, the age of the Kingdom, the age where there is neither sickness, nor sorrow, nor sighing but life everlasting.

To be sure, each of us will pass through bodily death, so that we might like the Lord receive our bodies back immortal and incorrupt. But by dying to the ways of the world and to sin, even before our biological death, we are already spiritually passing from death to life, we are already experiencing the resurrection of our own souls, and we are

already becoming partakers of the true Passover, the true Pascha, leaving the temporal earth behind and experiencing the good things of the eternal Kingdom of God.

In the very beginning of the Acts of the Apostles, St. Luke writes that after the Lord's Resurrection, during the forty days before He was carried up into heaven, the Risen Lord Jesus not only presented Himself alive to His disciples with many infallible proofs, but He also spoke to them about the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God. That is, He manifested to them His Resurrection from the dead, and he spoke to them about how they too could enter into the Kingdom, how they too could experience resurrectional life by becoming new creatures, sons and daughters of the light, children of the never-ending day of His Heavenly Father's Kingdom.

Through His death, burial, and resurrection, the Lord has inaugurated this Kingdom, He has become the first-born of the dead, and He has given us the opportunity to be sharers and joint-heirs of His Father's Kingdom.

Brothers and sisters, let us rejoice in this Paschal period, and let us set our minds and hearts on the things above, on the things of the next age, on the Kingdom which has been opened to us. And as we experience the presence of the Risen Lord in our midst, through the opening of our minds and the burning of our hearts, let us exclaim to Him with the wonder and great joy as did the Apostle Thomas, "My Lord and my God!"

And let us celebrate this bright and never-ending day of Pascha, this new and everlasting Sunday, by taking hold of that newness of life which has shown forth from the Tomb, for through Christ's Saving Resurrection, we can already enjoy the good things of the Heavenly Kingdom to which we have been called. To the Risen Lord Jesus Christ be the glory!

Christ is risen!