

Jesus in our lives. Jesus lives! He's been experienced by folks in our own congregation. He heals! Again, some among us have experienced His healing touch and its wonderful results. He has equipped us with grace and with Holy Spirit and with everything we need to accomplish His will for us.

Beloved, the older I get, the more I see an urgent need to spread the Gospel. For this is the eye-witness account of the earthly life and ministry of Jesus Christ, beginning with His birth and continuing through His death, resurrection and glorious ascension into Heaven. The Gospel is the essence of life in Christ. The world cannot live without Jesus, for without Him there can be no forgiveness for the past and no hope for the future.

The Gospel calls each of us to make choices, just as Jesus called Thomas to make a choice. Faced with the irrefutable evidence that Jesus is alive, Thomas surrendered himself to Jesus, calling Him (and *accepting* Him as) his Lord and God.

We may not be able to poke our fingers into the sacred wounds on Jesus' body, but we can experience Him in so many other ways: through what He teaches us; in the intimate encounter with Him when we receive His body and blood in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar; through answered prayers; and through the experiences of other believers.

Jesus lives. Jesus loves you and me. Jesus forgives our sins. Jesus calls us to walk actively and intentionally with Him, and He calls us to reach out to others, to let our great joy overflow into their lives, to share with them the mystery of His love and the gift of His life. May all we say and do be offered to the extension of His kingdom and in joyful response to His love.

Χάρις τῷ θεῷ, εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος. Ἀμήν

LECTIONS: Acts 2.14a, 22-32; Psalm 16; 1 Peter 1.3-9; +John 20.19-31

EASTER 2a

2014-04-27

PARISH OF GEORGINA—S. JAMES, SUTTON

Just eight days ago, we celebrated Easter day, amid great fanfare and something of a party atmosphere. The Lord is risen, we said, and then we added the ancient Hebrew word, “Alleluia!”—“Praise God!”

Concerning Jesus, S. Peter wrote: *Without having seen Him you love Him; though you do not now see Him you believe in Him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy.* [1 Peter 1.8]

The Good News that Jesus is risen from the dead is indeed cause for rejoicing with unutterable and exalted joy. It is, without a doubt, the very best news we shall ever hear. It is news, because it comes fresh to every generation. It is the best news, because to each of us comes the realization that Jesus has conquered the evil of the world, and that although evil still exists, it can no longer separate us either from the love of God in Christ Jesus, or from His fellowship in this world or from a place in His nearer Presence beyond our earthly lives. We have been given life itself, and so we rejoice.

Christians have always been associated with rejoicing. We are called to shout our faith from the mountaintops, not to hide it! Jesus lives! Praise God! For this reason, Easter is celebrated as a full season, until the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. And throughout the rest of the year (including Lent), each Sunday is kept as a mini-Easter, and we recall the glorious Good News that our Saviour lives.

We rejoice in this news because the news of the resurrection is life-giving. Jesus lives, His sacrifice on the cross of Calvary was found acceptable, our sins have been forgiven, and we are called to continue our pilgrimage with Jesus toward Heaven itself. We rejoice because of His love. We rejoice in His

fellowship. And we rejoice whenever we experience an outpouring of His grace in our lives.

The Disciples had gathered together behind closed doors the evening of Easter Day. They had effectively barricaded themselves from the world, in fear for their own safety. No doubt they were trying desperately to sort out the news they had heard from the women at the tomb, and from those of their number who had raced to the tomb only to discover that Jesus was not there. They knew they had seen Him die. They knew He had been buried, and His tomb sealed. But now Jesus wasn't there, and some of them were talking about Him being alive again. How could that be?

Into this glorious confusion, Jesus appeared, quietly. He bid them "peace" as He had so often before, and showed them His sacred wounds. And then He poured grace upon them, as He breathed on them and said, *Receive Holy Spirit: if you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.* [John 20.22-3] This was Priestly ordination at the very hands of the Master Himself! The Spirit was breathed upon the Disciples, and they were given Divine authority to forgive sins in the same manner as Jesus. *As the Father sent Me*, Jesus said, *So I send you.* [John 20.21]

And so the Resurrection of Jesus brought with it a sharing of His ministry of love and restoration to the world. Divine authority was given to His closest followers to forgive sins, as Jesus forgives sins. The message of salvation and the experience of God's great love for the world could be shared by those whom Jesus had ordained and sent. And the spread of the Gospel to the corners of the earth was now assured.

Sometimes Christians act as though we've become a little jaded with the whole business. We've heard the stories over and over again. When we're concerned about our employment, or

how we're going to pay the mortgage or put food on the table for our children, the Gospel might seem a little remote. Yet Jesus lives and promises life to us! And He equips us in our various stations and situations with Holy Spirit, with grace to continue, with purpose and direction. As well, He equips those around us with the gifts we lack, so that, together we might encourage one another; together we might struggle with the difficulties of basic survival; together as a community we might offer and receive the gift of forgiveness; together we might experience His Divine Presence; together we might teach and be taught; together we might love as He loves; and together we might rejoice with one accord in our salvation. Remember that it is our responsibility to encourage one another actively in the faith. This is one of the key purposes of the Church: to gather and to share the many gifts which Jesus in His love has given to His people. We exist to build up the rest of the body of Christ, so that together, all may rejoice in our salvation.

S. Thomas wasn't there when the Lord appeared to the other Disciples. And although they shared their experience with him, Thomas refused to believe for himself. What he said is very important: he did not say "I *cannot* believe" but rather, "I *will not* believe." No doubt he didn't want to open himself up to further disappointment. And in that respect, Thomas is like so many of us, isn't he? "I *won't* believe Jesus can heal me, in case He can't", we often say. And like Thomas, we effectively cut ourselves off from a more immediate experience of Jesus until a different time. We keep our guard up, because that involves less risk for us.

What would it take for us to let go entirely, to surrender completely to the Lord, so that we might believe without reservation that Jesus, our Lord, lives? Do we need to poke our fingers into those sacred wounds? Perhaps. But let us remember that we have the witness of the entire Church concerning the power, the mercy, and the living Presence of