

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Peace is a big thing in the Christian Church. We begin every sermon with a prayer for peace. Here, in our Gospel, Jesus chooses to speak a blessing of peace upon His disciples as the first thing He says when He appears to them the first time following His resurrection from the grave. The content of the Gospel is, when it is boiled down to it, the blessing of peace. Our theme this morning is, Peace be with you.

Our Gospel takes place on the first Easter. It is the first day of the week, a Sunday. The disciples were huddling together in an upper room for fear that they might be next on the ‘hit’ list of the enemies of Jesus. They had undoubtedly heard the stories about Jesus’ resurrection. They had run to the tomb. John and Peter had seen the empty place where the body had been laid. We are told by John earlier in this chapter that Peter and John had run to the tomb, and looked in, and seeing the body missing had believed, we just don’t know what they were believing. They had hopes and yet they still had fears.

Then Jesus appeared. The doors were locked, but still, suddenly, He was there among them as though He had just walked into the room through a doorway. He spoke, “Peace be with you.” Then He showed them the wounds in His hands and side. He proved to them that it was Jesus, the crucified One. Then they were happy. Somehow, Jesus had risen from the dead! It was outstanding news!

Of course, Thomas, known as “The Twin” (that is what “Didymus” meant), was not present on that day. I think he was absent that day by the design of God for your sakes. Naturally, the disciples couldn’t help but share the good news! We have seen the Lord! He is really risen

from the dead! Just like any one of us, Thomas was just a wee bit skeptical. "Unless I shall see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

I said that I think he was absent for your sakes, because he asked the question that any reasonable person would, just as if you were confronted by the incredible claim that someone had risen from the dead! Thomas was not about to just take their word for something so unbelievable as that. He had to see for himself — and for us, as it turns out.

Thank God for old Doubting Thomas! The next Sunday, Jesus appeared to His Apostles again. This time, Thomas was there. Jesus waited, again, for the doors to be shut tight and locked. He wanted Thomas to see it just like the others had. First, Jesus greeted them again with the bidding of Peace be with you. Then Jesus said, ‘Touch Me.’ “Reach here your finger, and see My hands; reach here your hand and put it into my side, and be not unbelieving but believing.” There was no sense of scolding here. It was our invitation to see for ourselves — through the eyes of Thomas. He was invited to put his fingers (and ours) into the nail holes and see that they were real. This wasn’t just “seeing” with his eyes — eyes can play tricks on you. This was seeing with his eyes and his touch and his ears!

Thomas was overwhelmed! “My Lord and my God!” Not words of profanity or an overstatement by a man who had just been shocked by seeing what he could not even imagine was true when he was told about it. This was a confession of faith. Jesus is Lord and God — proven by His rising from the dead.

Then Jesus said something remarkable! He said - “Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see,

and yet believed.” Those words refer to us. They tell us also that Jesus doesn’t intend to go around “proving it” to everyone. Thomas was our test case. Jesus is also telling us that Thomas is to be our eyes into this event. Thomas did not believe a story - nor did any of the other disciples. They believed what they saw, and what they saw transformed them from men huddling in fear to Apostles boldly going out to proclaim, and to forgive sins, even in the face of the threat of death. You are blessed when you see through the eyes of Thomas and believe what caused this doubting man to become a humble confessor.

John then tells us that his book does not tell us everything about Jesus, or what He did, but it tells us what it does so that we, too, might believe, because it is by believing that we have life eternal in the name of Jesus Christ. It is by faith that we possess what Christ has won for us. By trusting in the promises of God that what Jesus did took sin out of the equation, and that all that God has promised - forgiveness, life everlasting, and salvation - is ours because of and in connection with Jesus Christ, we receive it all.

Because of the greatness of the promises of Jesus, we should be eager to learn more clearly and completely what is promised, and what our God is like. Every Christian has this eagerness, but some resist it, succumbing to the distractions of this world. That is why the Apostle Peter wrote, “like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.”

That verse is the one from which this Sunday of the Church Year draws its name – Quasi modo geniti, Latin for “just like a new-born baby”. We are those new-born babies. We are born of water and the Word unto everlasting life. We are kept by the power of God for salvation, and not our own. We are fed by the Lord’s Supper for faith and salvation and immortality. We are strengthened and built up by the

Holy Spirit through the hearing of the Word of God. Our sixty or eighty years are nothing in the face of eternity, so we all remain but "new-born babes." God has given us everything we need for salvation.

And knowing that is comforting, and trusting in that with all your heart - as Proverbs 3:5 says - is peace. It is the peace of knowing we are secure. It is the peace of knowing God will not let us go. It is the peace of sins forgiven. And it is the peace of the child who knows that his or her Father is there, so nothing can go wrong. It is the peace of faith in Jesus Christ, and all that He has done, and all that He has won - in short, the Gospel. It is a peace which begins when we can confess with Thomas, "My Lord and my God!" May that peace, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen