

Behind Closed Doors

Christ is Risen! Today the Church brings us to the gathering of the frightened disciples of our Savior (John 20: 19-31):

Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the LORD. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained. But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the LORD. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My LORD and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed. And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.

Despite being prepared and instructed by our Saviour for three years, and given precise details of what to expect, reinforced by witnessing extraordinary miracles of healing and resurrection, (and 3 of whom beheld the Glory of our Lord on Mount Tabor), the disciples nevertheless succumbed to their fears and hid themselves. They locked themselves behind closed doors "for fear of the Jews". The Jewish leaders made no secret of wanting to kill Jesus as well as the newly resurrected Lazarus. After succeeding in convincing Pilate to crucify our Lord, they were emboldened to search out His followers. Peter, as prophesized by our Lord, fearful for his life, also denied Christ thrice. The disciples feared personal harm, and death.

Our Saviour, the Knower of all minds and hearts, had on numerous occasions acknowledged the weaknesses of His disciples. "The spirit is indeed willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41). Our Saviour was patient with their weaknesses, persevering in His efforts to guide, enlighten and support His disciples. He never gave up on them.

Our Lord granted His disciples the gift of His peace well before His crucifixion: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither **let it be afraid**" (John 14:27). Of course, our Lord was aware of their distress and fear that overwhelmed them after the crucifixion, a manifestation of weakened faith. Miraculously bringing Himself back into their midst, our Saviour restored their peace, (which was displaced by personal fear, anxiety and fractured faith). The peace of Christ is more than a reprieve from stress and hardship... it is

an eternal peace, a peace of the soul , a peace that is a partaker of the Grace of Christ. This peace comes with renewed faith, which banishes fear and anxiety.

As we ponder on this extraordinary sight of the disciples immersed in fear behind locked doors, what does this remind us of? In the current COVID-19 crisis, how many of us are hiding behind locked doors, for fear of harm, or death... from a virus? Only the eternal peace of Christ can truly displace fear and anxiety. Our Saviour is eager to penetrate the walls of our hearts, softened by humility, to restore this peace.

The Holy Fathers teach that doubt is a snare of the enemy. When our forefather Adam was given a single commandment, which was designed to maintain his path towards deification, the evil one ensnared Adam with doubt, convincing him of an alternative way, **outside of obedience to God**. Doubt was the precursor of sin, and the resultant estrangement from God, which is the evil one's firm prerogative. St. Isaac the Syrian writes that the means of abolishing doubt is through humility. The Fathers further teach that it is through humility, the process of self-emptying, that the Holy Spirit is drawn and rests. The Holy Spirit guides, strengthens and empowers one to endure trials and be protected from temptations, as seen in the lives of a myriad of saints and martyrs. Our Lord's granting His disciples an infusion of the Holy Spirit helps to maintain their faith and courage in future struggles.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, as we are suffering the trauma of threat to our bodily health and livelihood, let us humbly reach out for the true and lasting peace of Christ, Who "trampled on death by death!" Let us be uplifted in faith, knowing that our loving and all-merciful Lord is near:

For though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou are with me. (Ps. 22)

In St. Basil's pre-Communion prayer, we read:

I know, O Lord, that I partake of Thine immaculate Body and Precious Blood unworthily, and that I am guilty, and eat and drink judgment to myself, not discerning the Body and Blood of Thee, my Christ and God. **But trusting in Thy compassions, I take courage and approach Thee...**

In the midst of our fear-provoking trials, let us remain humble and open our hearts to the penetrating and infinite love of our Savior, and take courage in His boundless love and compassion for us!

Truly He is Risen! In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.