

Thomas Sunday - The New Sunday

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“In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever amen.

Our beloved Church has dedicated the first Sunday after the glorious resurrection (when Jesus Christ in all His glory rose from the dead) to Saint Thomas—one of the twelve disciples—and has made this day one of the minor Lordly feasts. We are indebted to Saint Thomas, not because he doubted the resurrection, but because he gained blessings for all of us. He created a condition for belief, which was putting his hand in His palm where the nails were hammered, and in His side, where He had the stab wound. It is amazing that Christ accepted this condition. He did not scold him or blame him, but accepted this condition.

Saint Thomas suggested the condition that he would only believe if he could put his hands where the nails were, and in His side, where He was pierced.

Jesus asked him, ‘Can you do it? You are not capable of withstanding all this. You asked for something you don’t measure up to. Do you have the courage to put your hands where the nails were driven, and where I was stabbed?’

Of course, when the disciples saw Jesus for the first time, they were petrified; frightened. They were so frightened they felt extreme horror, because they saw him again after He had been buried. Seeing Him was a surprise, because the place they were hiding was completely shuttered and locked.

As you would know, if you are frightened and afraid of something, you lock yourself away, and check once, then again that you are shuttered in. You tend to think about whether you’ve locked the door or not, or wonder whether you’ve locked it.

Because the disciples were frightened of the Jews, they locked themselves securely in their hiding place; then Jesus suddenly appeared to them in their well-secured hiding place; this increased their terror and fright.

However, Jesus in His almighty glory gave them the best gift of all—the major gift of the resurrection—which is peace.

This is the gift we’ve inherited: the gift of peace, which will also drive away or evict fear.

Jesus told the disciples, 'I give you my own special peace,' so they felt calm and safe. Of course, this gift is the greatest in Christianity, because all Christians were awarded divine peace almost 2,000 years ago. But that is not quite right. Christ is not limited by time.

Until today, whenever and wherever we meet, Christ is always there, every time and all the time.

When you leave church, you find yourself full of peace and feel safe.

This peace is real peace; peace that evicts and banishes fear; peace that evicts cowardice, worries, and personal anxiety—all these issues are removed by virtue of the peace the church awards you.

Christ's resurrection created us anew, from the beginning.

One might say, 'I am afraid by nature; frightened; I am always worried; the slightest instability disturbs me.'

There is no way you should be like that. When Christ gives us His peace, it is everlasting.

Christ then breathed on the disciples and told them to receive and accept the Holy Spirit.

The Church fathers have said, 'We received the Holy Spirit over a period of time,' as we have: we received baptism, followed by holy Chrismation, followed by holy communion. So, this is the act of receiving the continuous and permanent Holy Spirit.

Then, the following Sunday, He revealed Himself with the same appearance under the same circumstances, and the doors were locked. And He stood in their midst, and Saint Thomas was with them on that occasion.

Of course, Saint Thomas—who was absent during the first appearance on the first Sunday after the resurrection—was deprived of many things. Similarly, someone who doesn't attend church is also deprived of a few things. By not attending church, you lose blessings and divine gifts.

The disciples were locked away in a secluded area; this is similar to the church.

If you don't attend church, you are deprived of many blessings and gifts.

Someone might say, 'I won't attend church.' That person loses many things, and is deprived of many things.

Your being absent and not attending is similar to Saint Thomas—missing out on sacred gifts and blessings. On the first Sunday after the resurrection, Christ appeared to the disciples, and Saint Thomas was absent. The disciples saw Christ; He awarded and graced them with the Holy Spirit and gave them His peace.

They were very happy to meet and see Him.

He asked them, 'Do you have any food? Show it to Me.' He ate with them and gave them His blessings. The apostles verified all these divine gifts.

Any absence from church deprives a person of all of those holy and divine gifts and blessings. Keep this in mind.

When Christ saw Saint Thomas, He said to him, 'Come here; put your hand in My side.' But Saint Thomas wouldn't dare do that. After the resurrection, Christ was extremely kind and forgiving to the disciples. He knows humans' weaknesses.

Like Saint Peter; Christ took Saint Peter aside and spoke with him alone. He asked, 'Do you love Me or not?'

'You know Lord; I do love You.'

Once; twice; three times. Christ asked that question three times, with great kindness and gentleness.

The fear within the disciples was removed; the doubt in Saint Thomas was also removed.

The resurrection of Christ removed all our weaknesses.

He said to Saint Thomas, 'Come here. Give me your hand; put your hand here.'

When Saint Thomas put his hand in Christ's injured side, he cried out, 'My Lord and My God!'

You have created a condition in order to believe. Now that you have fulfilled that condition, you should believe.

But no, no. This is much greater than fantasy.

Why do you think Christ left the wounds in His hands and His side? He could have risen in Godly flesh. He erased all pain and suffering, but kept wounds in His body. 'These are the signs of My love.' A prophet of ages past—who came 700 to 800 years before Christ—was

asked about similar wounds. He suggested they were 'caused in the house of my beloved, so I am keeping them.'

So, each one of us has the chance and opportunity to feel Christ's wounds. Put your hand where the nails were, in His side, and your faith will be strengthened. One might say, 'Where do I get this opportunity?'

The church elders said that the body of Christ is the church, and the injuries are church members who are suffering: the sick, the weak, the troubled, the poor, the sorrowful, the unclothed (the naked), the hungry, the thirsty, the imprisoned.

One might say, 'What is this?' These are the wounds Christ sustained.

If you want and wish to feel Christ's wounds very well, put your hands in Christ's wounds. When you do, you will cry out and experience Christ's glory, feel Him, and sense His presence. The vision will be revealed once you approach the wounds—the injured church members; weak members, are these the nail marks? Well, you might think this is very easy.

One of the church fathers, Anba Aghas, was very kind and compassionate toward the sick, to the extent that one day he asked God to exchange his own body for that of a sick person who had leprosy. Leprosy is a very serious illness, where body parts are disfigured and destroyed. The nose is destroyed; the lips become disfigured. It is very ugly to look at or observe.

In the old days, lepers would be isolated and banished. Anba Aghas asked God, 'Please...I wish I could exchange my body for a leper's.'

When the disciples approached Christ's wounds and injuries, they discovered there is great power in weakness; in Christ's wounds they discovered His theology: 'My God; My Lord.'

If one of us was weak in faith, I would advise them to go and visit many sick and unwell people. Sit next to them; comfort and touch them; don't run away and make excuses. Go; go and see the injured, the wounded, the oppressed; see them and touch them...not from a distance; no. You have to be close to them and touch the wounds. You will experience an increase in faith, and your love and adoration for Christ will be strengthened; you will want more of these gifts. The more you touch, the stronger your faith will be.

Glory be to God forever. Amen."