



My Beloved Ones,

I am so pleased that I am now able to greet you with that most beautiful and joyous of greetings,

ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΑΝΕΣΤΗ!

Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen!

Having celebrated the highest feast of our liturgical year, I pray that we were all able to experience the brightness that the feast of Pascha brings to all our lives. The Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ plays the most important role in our relationship with our God. This personal relationship between man and God is explained further in the Gospel for the first week after Pascha, Thomas Sunday; which we read, in part, on the Agape

Vespers of Pascha: when, after His Resurrection, the Lord appears to His Disciples—even from behind the door they themselves locked out of fear of the Scribes and Elders.

Our Lord says, *“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I 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; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”* (John 20:21-23) In this way, our Lord prefigures the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Helper who will come to the Apostles ten days after our Lord’s Ascension, at the Feast of Pentecost.

Now Thomas was not there to witness this blessed event, and so he remains skeptical, saying to the other ten Disciples, *“Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe”* (John 20:25).

The aspect of humanity that separates us from the rest creation, is God’s gift of the rational mind. We live our lives able to understand the wonders of God’s creation, because we can think and analyze those moments which other created beings simply experience; and this is indeed, a blessing. However, a negative aspect of this Gift is skepticism, which prioritizes proof over Faith, as Thomas has done. In spite of the fact that he heard Jesus explaining the Messiah’s self-sacrifice, and even after he witnessed countless miracles—including the raising of Lazarus—Thomas is a man who has come to rely on his own understanding, rather than simple belief, which as Lord says, can move mountains.

Eight days later, therefore, the Lord appears to *all* His Disciples, fulfilling Thomas' request. Thomas, amazed, becomes the first to proclaim our Lord's human and divine nature when He exclaims, "*My Lord and my God!*" (*John 20:28*). In Christ's dialogue with the Apostle Thomas, we witness the historical reality of our Lord's bodily Resurrection from the Dead, the proof for which Thomas asked. However, our Lord does this, not to simply grant Thomas' wish, but rather, to create an important distinction, saying, "*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe*" (*John 20:29*).

As today's Disciples, who were not blessed to live with Christ on this earth, this message is even more important. One could say that because we cannot see Him, it is not enough to simply believe in His Presence: we must truly engage in a spiritual relationship with our Lord, putting our trust, not in eyes which can deceive us, but in our immortal souls. For as St. Paul says, "*...Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures... he was buried... he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures... Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive*" (*1 Corinthians 15:3-5; 20-22*).

Therefore, as we continue to honor our Lord's Resurrection during this period of Paschal joy, we must never forget that it is through this miraculous event that we have been given the promise of our eternal life after our immortal soul shall be separated from its earthly body. As Orthodox Christians, may we continue to strengthen our spiritual relationship with our Lord, so that, having lived as He wishes us too, we may see Him, face-to-face in Paradise.

+ALEXIOS

Metropolitan of Atlanta