

Quasimodo Geniti (2nd Sunday of Easter): April 11, 2021

“Do Not Be Unbelieving, but Be Believing”

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

The theme for this Sunday is taken from the first words of the Introit, “Quasimodo Geniti,” which means, “Like newborn infants.” When we hear this phrase, many think of the Hunchback of Notre Dame, which as the story goes, he was abandoned as an infant and found on the steps on this Sunday, which is why he was called Quasimodo.

Today we pray, “Like newborn babes, long for the pure spiritual milk of the word.” Good food is what is needed for babies to grow up healthy and strong. If the milk is not pure, if it is diluted, then the baby will not get the full course of nutrition needed. It is the same as poisoning them, as it causes them to be weaker and sick, and if too far, can lead to death.

This is the perfect Psalm and illustration for the Apostles. Our Gospel reading begins on the eve of Easter and concludes one week later. Often we remember this day as Doubting Thomas, which really is to be understood as Unbelieving Thomas, but more on that later. It wasn't just Thomas that had trouble with the message of the resurrection.

On the evening of Easter Day, the disciples were gathered together. We quickly learn they were not together in joyful celebration of the Resurrection of our Lord. They were not rejoicing in Jesus' triumph over sin and death. This was not a gathering of faith; it was a gathering of unbelief. The disciples, who should have benefited from more than three years of the best theological training in the history of the world, were cowering behind locked doors in fear for their lives. They didn't believe the testimony of Mary Magdalene who had seen the risen Lord. They didn't believe Jesus' own words, that he would be crucified and rise again after three days. What Jesus had said stood in conflict with the reality of death. So, in spite of Peter's confession that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God, the disciples believed that death, not Jesus, was lord. They were gathered together in fear. They had seen Jesus die, and they trusted that death would have the final word. Like infants, they longed to be fed, but didn't understand where the good food was to come.

There was of course another reason for the disciples to be fearful. Jesus told them early in the Gospel of Matthew, “***Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.***”¹ Then, when the first time of persecution had come, all the disciples had forsaken Jesus and fled.

With no doubt, they remember Jesus had said, “***Whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.***”² Yet, while Judas had betrayed Jesus once, with a single kiss, Peter denied Jesus with oaths and curses, not once, not twice, but three times. Their leader, their lord, the very one whom they swore they would die with, all shown themselves to be the worst sort of disciples; scattering at His death. So, if Jesus somehow was not dead, He had every reason to be angry with them. How could they not think Jesus would be out for vengeance? The Resurrection was not good news, because they didn’t understand it. They had no place, no concept, to place this event. It had never happened before. Like newborns, this was new to them and they had to be fed and taught in order to grow rightly.

We learn they gathered in fear, “***On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace to you.’ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.***”³

The doors were locked for fear of the Jews, but locked doors don’t discriminate. They keep out all kinds of unwelcome guests – unless that guest happens to be Jesus.

Jesus doesn’t need an invitation. He doesn’t wait for the disciples to open the door and let Him in; Jesus simply comes uninvited, locks or no locks, and stands in their midst, and says, “***Peace to you.***” This is not simply a greeting. These are not empty words. Often, we say to a stranger, “How are you?” but we aren’t really asking. We don’t mean our words. It’s just a greeting. Not so with Jesus. Our resurrected Lord stands before His disciples, the scars of his battle against sin, death, and hell still visible on his hands and side and declares His victory with these words, “***Peace to you.***” These are words of

¹ Matthew 5:10–12

² Matthew 10:33

³ John 20:19–20

absolution. No doubt, the disciples were troubled by specific sins – forsaking and denying their Lord, fearing to suffer for His name, and especially, for their unbelief. Notice when they are glad; it is not until after they hear these words from Jesus and see His hands and side. He is not a ghost, this is not a ghost story, there is no need to call the ghostbusters. This is the Lord, Son of God and Son of Man, crucified and risen. The payment for sins is done, and the disciples receive this work of Christ through His very absolution spoken, “*Peace to you.*”

Brothers and sisters in Christ, there is more to this peace. We know the sins that trouble us merely flow from the source of original sin, the sin that is passed down to every man and woman since Adam in the moment of conception. In the garden, all mankind chose to believe the word of Satan over and against the Word of God. We refused to trust in God as our Father, and instead willingly became allies of Satan. When we lie, we are showing who is our father; as the father of lies, Satan himself, smiles proudly at our folly. When we believe that we can do it on our own, that we don’t need God, that He owes me a favor, we lie to ourselves that it is us whom really needs to be feared, loved and trusted above all things.

St. Paul writes, “*You were once alienated and hostile in mind,*”⁴ and, “*we were enemies [of God].*”⁵ Eating of the fruit of the tree against God’s clear direction and declaration was our declaration of war against God and His Word. It was an act that told God, “I’ve got this.” Just as an infant grows up and comes to the point of believing that they are more wise than their parents, we told God, “Hey old man, I know what I’m doing. I don’t need you to constantly watch over my back.” This is nothing but blatant unbelief. It is to make myself a god, and my Father in Heaven a child.

God, in His great love, would not allow the foolish unbelief to stand. He literally put His foot down. Enmity was placed between the Satan and the woman, between the devil’s seed and the woman’s seed. The devil would crush the Promised Seed’s heel, and the Promised would put His foot down upon the head of Satan, crushing it into the dust.

⁴ Colossians 1:21

⁵ Romans 5:10

Why go back to the Garden on this Second Sunday of Easter? Simply, there are too many connections to not go back. Adam and Eve, after their sin, in fear try to hide themselves from God; which of course, didn't work. The disciples, after their sin, in fear try to hide themselves from God, which of course didn't work. How fitting it is for Jesus to stand before the terrified disciples and proclaim the fulfillment of the promise in Genesis 3:15 to the first children now to all of God's children the fruits of the cross, the death of Jesus, ***"Peace to you."*** Jesus declares that our war against God is now over, our iniquity has been pardoned. Here was the proof. The scars in His hands, the gash in His side testified to His words. Peace with God had come at a terrible price. It cost Jesus everything – His blood, His life – and He paid this price gladly, ***"who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame."***⁶

It's no coincidence that in Jesus' first encounter with His disciples following His victory upon the cross, He proclaims to them peace and the forgiveness of sin. By the sin of one man, Adam, Satan had brought death into this world. Sin separated us from God. Sin wreaked havoc upon God's perfect creation. But now, on the first day of the new week, the eighth day of creation, Jesus had fulfilled God's promise to redeem fallen creation. In the beginning, through the power of his Word, God spoke the universe into being. With His Word he breathed life into Adam, as He also did to the dry bones in Ezekiel's vision. And now, in a parallel act of re-creation, Jesus, having conquered the curse of death, breathes life into His disciples saying, ***"If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."***⁷

This is why Christ established His Church and sent out His apostles. For even as Jesus was sent by the Father, announcing peace with God and proclaiming the forgiveness of sins, so also, Jesus sends His disciples ***"that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations."***⁸ This is the task of the church: To proclaim our Lord's death and resurrection, and in His name to forgive the sins of repentant sinners, but to withhold forgiveness from the unrepentant as long as they do not repent. Just as sin brought death into the world, so the forgiveness of sins gives life to all believers.

⁶ Hebrews 12:2

⁷ John 20:23

⁸ Luke 24:47

By the power of the Holy Spirit, the gathering of the faithless disciples became a gathering of believers. Even though their faith had been weak, or non-existent, they *had* gathered together according to Jesus' promise, "***Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.***"⁹ True to His word, He was there among them. Death could not keep Him away. The grave was powerless to hold Him. Our resurrected Lord stood among His disciples, as He stands among us today, announcing the forgiveness of sins, bestowing the Holy Spirit, and strengthening – or creating – faith. This truly is the Divine Service, where God comes to us bestowing His gifts, and we rejoice because we have seen the Lord.

But not Thomas. For whatever reason, he had forsaken the assembly of the saints. Jesus had come, and Thomas had missed him. The other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" And not just once. They told him, and kept on telling him – again and again. But Thomas would not believe. Instead, in rather crude language, he says: "***Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and jab my finger into the mark of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will absolutely never believe.***"¹⁰ Perhaps you've heard people say that Thomas got a bad rap; because poor Thomas had a single episode of doubt, he will forever be remembered as "Doubting Thomas." Look at his confession: "***I will absolutely never believe!***" This is the strongest negation possible in the Greek language. This is not doubt. This is not uncertainty. This is damnable unbelief. "Doubting Thomas" is too kind. He should instead be called Unbelieving Thomas, or Thomas the Atheist. If Christ had not been merciful, Thomas would have remained in his unbelief, and would have been damned.

This is recorded for us, because the same is same is true for you. Unless Christ had mercy, you too would have been lost. So, why do we often seek to clean Thomas up a bit, to cut him some slack? Perhaps because we know that we are Thomas. Sinful flesh doesn't want to admit the depth of its depravity. But the Scripture is clear: You were lost in sin and unbelief. You were unwilling to come to God. In fact, you were His enemy. You had nothing to contribute to your salvation – except sin and hostility toward God.

⁹ Matthew 18:20

¹⁰ John 20:25

Do you want to be numbered among the saints, among the disciples? Answer carefully, for Jesus chose forsakers, deniers, betrayers, unbelievers, persecutors, and murderers to be His disciples. Are you in this company? “Give glory to God”, as Joshua exhorted Achan, “and confess your sin.” For yes, your sin is great – but your Savior is greater.

Christ was merciful to you. You would not, could not believe. You did not desire to come to Him. Once again, the doors were locked. Yet if the grave could not hold Him in, how could locks keep Him out? He stands in your midst and says to you: “***Peace be to you. Thomas, bring your finger. Jab it into my hands. Thrust your hand into my side. Thomas, do not be unbelieving, but be believing.***”

This may sound like a rebuke, and it is; but it is also a loving and gracious word. The same God who said, “Let there *be* light” and it was so, now says to you, “*Be* believing!” and it is so. Christ is merciful to you. He comes through locked doors and conquers your unbelief. He bids you to thrust your hand into His life-giving side and take freely from His bounty. He bestows His Holy Spirit, creating and sustaining the faith by which you cry, “***My Lord and my God!***”

“***Jesus said to Thomas, ‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’***”¹¹ You are blessed indeed, for God has seen fit to pour out His gift of the Holy Spirit upon you, who have not seen, but now believe. Dear fellow newborn infants, you, who once were far off, have been brought near through the water of Holy Baptism. Your ears have heard His words. You have felt the water of baptism that flowed from His gaping side. You have seen with your eyes and tasted with your mouth the living body and blood of our Savior, who is present among us again today. He is not diluted. He is pure, holy food and pure, perfect drink. As Newborn infants in Christ, we cry,

“O sons and daughters of the King,
Whom heav’nly hosts in glory sing,
Today the grave has lost its sting!”¹²

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

¹¹ John 20:29

¹² O Sons and Daughters of the King LSB 470:1

Prayer of the Church
Second Sunday of Easter (Quasimodo Geniti)
11 April 2021

Holy Father, You raised up Your Son from the dead, that He might bestow His Holy Spirit and the forgiveness of sins on us. Grant that we may live joyfully as those who in Holy Baptism have been crucified and raised up with Christ, that we also may testify boldly of Him, His forgiveness and His peace to all who will hear. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Gracious God, Your Son appeared to His disciples in His resurrected flesh and sent them out to proclaim repentance for the forgiveness of sins in His name. Continue to raise up faithful men to serve us in the Office of the Holy Ministry, and bless their work among Your people who, with St. Thomas, confess Jesus as Lord and God. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Merciful God, remember those who have wandered from the household of faith. Faithful to Your promises, work all things in their lives to remind them of their need for Your unending grace and steadfast love, that they might return to the faith and delight in Your Son, crucified and raised for them. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, You appoint rulers and officials for the sake of order and peace. Bless those You have placed in authority over us in federal, state and local governments. Give to them the desire to serve with integrity and honor and to work for the benefit of all. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving Father, we give thanks that in Holy Baptism we receive forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil, and eternal salvation, bless those who celebrate baptismal anniversaries this week, especially, *Dale, Carmen, & Dwight*, grant that by Your Word and Spirit they may faithfully keep the covenant into which they have been called, boldly confess their Savior, and finally share with all Your saints the joys of eternal life; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, You have promised to send Your holy angels to guard and keep Your children. We thank and praise You for the gift of life and for the protection and care you have provided as *Caden, Elijah, & Elizabeth* celebrate their birthdays. Grant that they may grow in grace, continue to know Your loving-kindness, abide in the confession of Your care and protection, serve You faithfully all the days of their life and finally come to the fullness of Your joys in heaven; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, we praise Your Son's resurrection from the dead and draw strength from His ascension before You, where He ever stands for us as our own High Priest. We bring before You those who are homebound, shut-in, sick, anxious, lonely or oppressed in any way [*especially Carmen, Susan, Zoey, Floyd Doughty, and those we name in our hearts*]. Graciously receive our prayers of intercession and hear them for His sake. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, as Your Son made the disciples glad in His risen and life-giving flesh on the first day of the week and again eight days later, so let us find gladness in His wounds and His abiding presence among us each week in the blessed Sacrament. Give us a hunger for Your Word of peace in this Supper, through which His risen and life-giving body and blood are given to us. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, we thank You that out of Your indescribable grace and for the sake of Your Son You have given us the Holy Gospel and instituted the Holy Sacraments, that through them we may have comfort and the forgiveness of sin. Grant us Your Holy Spirit, that we may heartily believe Your Word, and through the Holy Sacraments establish our faith day by day, until at last we obtain eternal salvation; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**