

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth, for His word is truth. Amen

Second Sunday of Easter - Quasimodo Geniti (2022)

The Peace Christ Gives

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“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 be with you.”” (John 20:19, ESV)

St. John’s account of our Lord’s post-resurrection appearance to ten of His apostles is rich with Gospel promises. Let us pray that the Holy Spirit will open our ears and our hearts so that our faith will be strengthened as we listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit through St. John.

It is evening on the day of the Resurrection and the apostles save one are huddled together in the upper room in which they had celebrated the Passover with the Lord. The events of the day are swirling in their minds, they are at the forefront of their thoughts and conversation. Early that morning they had discovered the tomb in which their Lord’s body had been placed was empty. The body of Jesus was missing. At first, they thought someone had taken the body of Jesus away; however, later in the day Jesus appears to Simon Peter (Luke 24:34) and also to two of His disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24). Now it is evening, Peter has reported his visit by the Lord and the two disciples had returned from Emmaus with the story of their encounter with the Risen Lord. All was so confusing. But one thing was certain, ***“The Lord has risen!” (Luke 24:34, ESV)*** However, His appearance had not calmed their anxiety or fear.

The apostles and those with them are holed up in a locked room, filled with, anxiety and uncertainty brought on by the fear that the Jewish authorities would soon arrest them as co-conspirators of Jesus. They feared they would meet the same fate as their Lord. Although all the reports said that Jesus had fulfilled His promise and rose on the third day, this reality had not sunken in. They really didn’t know what to make of this knowledge; therefore, it did not give them peace. So they ask; What was the significance of our Lord’s resurrection? How would it benefit them? Would it save them from the Sanhedrin? And so forth. So many questions without answers. Questions which plagued this little band of our Lord’s followers.

As they sat and talked in that upper room, suddenly Jesus appears. From nowhere, He is now among them. Gripped with fear, the disciples are astonished. The doors were locked, how did Jesus get in? Where did He come from? But before they could ask such questions, Jesus says to them, ***“Peace be with you.” (v. 9)***

Startled and frightened, they believe they are seeing a ghost or the spirit of Jesus (Luke 24:37). Therefore, to put them at ease, Jesus shows them His hands and His feet, showing them where the nails of the crucifixion had pierced Him, and He asks, ***“Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” (Luke 24:38–39, ESV)***

These words not only put the little band at ease, but their fear is changed to joy. Look, our Lord has risen, Alleluia! To convince them even further of His resurrection, Jesus asks for something to eat, and they gave Him a piece of broiled fish and He ate it (Luke 24:41-43). Now there is no doubt, no uncertainty, Jesus has risen from the grave as He promised. Now the peace that surpasses all understanding (Phil. 4:7) flows over their hearts, bringing true peace. Alleluia!

This peace that Christ gave to these disciples is the same peace He desires that we have. It is the peace that comes from faith. But as we shall see, it is the peace that comes from a faith that has not seen yet believes.

Ten apostles are in that upper room, but one is missing: the apostle Thomas. Moreover, it seems he is completely unaware of what has happened that day. Therefore, he has no peace, and he is still in fear of the Jews. Thus, when those who witnessed the resurrected Lord tell him what they have seen, he will not believe them. For Thomas, the dead are dead, nothing can bring them to life. This seems to be an extraordinary response from Thomas for he was witness to the resurrection of the Centurion's daughter, the son of the widow of Nain, and the resurrection of Lazarus. But, so, too, were the other ten, and until they saw the resurrected Christ, they, too, were in grave doubt: Was the Christ Peter saw earlier, and the Emmaus disciples saw merely the spirit of Jesus? All of them suffered from the same human understanding, which told them, if someone says that they will rise from the dead, it will not happen. Even their Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.

This seems to be a common problem among much of Christianity today. Oh, not that our Lord Jesus was resurrected, but for them this is a onetime event meant only for Jesus. Many nondenominational Christians literally deny that the resurrection of Christ points to our resurrection on the last day. They deny that a body consisting of flesh and bone can exist in heaven, saying that the body is nothing more than a prison trapping the soul until death. At our death, the soul is mercifully freed to exist with Christ for all eternity in heaven. Thus, heaven, they say, is a place only for the soul, not the body. But such an understanding is not Christianity, it is Gnosticism.

Unbelieving Thomas is now with his brother apostles on the first day of the following week. Suddenly, just as before, in the same locked room, Jesus appears among them and offers them His peace. Thomas is shocked! Obviously, he is thinking: How? How can this be? He died, He was buried, He can't be here! In denying the resurrection Thomas had vowed, ***“Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.” (John 20:25, ESV)*** These are the very things Jesus now tells him to do. Come, put your finger in my hand and your hand in my side. But most importantly our Lord tells Thomas, ***“Do not disbelieve, but believe.” (John 20:27, ESV)***

Christ comes among His apostles and gives them peace, the same peace He gives to you and me. The peace that our Lord Jesus offered His apostles on His last night with them, saying, ***“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.” (John 14:27, ESV)*** This is the peace that comes from being in Christ. It is the peace that suppresses all understanding. It is that peace which gives peace from sin, peace from death, and peace from the devil. It is that peace won by His victory over sin, death, and the devil on the Altar of the Cross.

True, for believers in Christ our lives in this world most often do not feel like we're at peace. Our struggle with sin is a constant battle. But this should not surprise us, for as has been said, from the moment of our Baptism the struggle begins. In those blessed waters you were baptized into Christ and made a child of God; however, also from that moment Satan has dedicated his efforts to steal you away from Christ and make you a child of his. This is the constant warfare we're engaged in on this side of heaven, but it is a war in which we know the victory is ours in Christ. St. Paul makes this clear in his letter to the Romans, ***“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 8:1, ESV)*** And he clarifies his statement just two verses later, saying, ***“For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned***

sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” (Romans 8:3–4, ESV) Those who walk in the peace that Christ gives, walk in the assurance of His forgiveness. The very forgiveness He speaks of to His apostles in that upper room, saying, **“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”** Then breathing, **“on them [He] said . . . “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”” (John 20:21–23, ESV)** Here, our Lord gives the church a new ordinance and sacrament: absolution.

As we live in Christ, thereby living in the peace that Christ gives, we live daily remembering our Baptism. Remembering who we are, forgiven children of God, we live in this world subject to the temptations of this world, and all too often we fall prey to those temptations. So, we live as saints and sinners simultaneously. Although our desire to sin is hindered by the indwelling Holy Spirit given us in the waters of Baptism, we still sin daily. So we can be counted with the sinful woman who came to Jesus as He sat at dinner with a Pharisee. Approaching our Lord, she began to wash His feet with her tears and dry them with her hair. She came because her love for Jesus was greater than her fear of embarrassment. She came because she was contrite and repentant of her sin, and she sought the Lord’s forgiveness through her act of love. This display disgusted Simon the Pharisee, he thought if Jesus knew who that woman was, He wouldn’t let her touch Him. But, because of her love for Him, Jesus rebukes Simon and says to the woman, **“Your sins are forgiven . . . Your faith has saved you; go in peace.” (Luke 7:48, 50, ESV)** Like the sinful woman we, too, live lives of contrition and repentance and we, too, love Jesus. Therefore, as His children we are always turning to God seeking His forgiveness. Repentant and contrite, we confess our sins, being assured of His forgiveness for Christ’s sake. How much better to be like the woman and hear that forgiveness from Christ Himself. This is the sacrament of absolution Christ gave to the church on that resurrection evening. When the pastor declares your sins forgiven, he does so in the stead and by the command of Christ. It is Christ’s forgiveness, proclaimed by His ambassador, the pastor. It is the *Peace that Christ Gives*.

This is the peace our Lord Jesus spoke of on that first resurrection evening, peace knowing that as children of God we live under His umbrella of forgiveness won for us by His beloved Son’s atoning sacrifice upon the Altar of the Cross, peace that surpasses our understanding. This is the Gospel peace of God’s promise that will safely see us into His heavenly home. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.