

✠ John 20:19-31 ✠  
1 PETER 1:3-9

**IN NOMINE IESU**

For eight days Peter and his brother Andrew, James and John, the sons of Thunder, Philip, Bartholomew who is called Nathaniel, Matthew the tax collector, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Cananaean, and Simon the Zealot pleaded with their fellow disciple, Thomas, to believe their report that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead and is alive. For eight days Thomas would not believe. No matter how many times these men and the women who first visited the tomb tried to convince him. No matter how many disciples walked the Emmaus road and broke bread with the Master. Thomas would not let go his unbelief. Thomas would not repent.

But Jesus rose from the dead to bring repentance to Israel. That is, God raised Him from the dead so that Israel, and all the world, would believe that this Jesus, the One crucified under Pontius Pilate, is the One sent by the Father to redeem man from the power of sin. No longer is there a need for the Temple in Jerusalem; no longer is there a need for sacrifices of bulls and goats. Sin has been atoned for; the power of sin has been spent on the Son of Mary. He is risen.

Therefore repent, o man. Repent of your unbelief. Repent of doubting whether or not God loves you. Repent of questioning whether or not church is all that important. Repent of doubting Scripture which means to comfort you when it says that Baptism now saves you. Repent of doubting Jesus' words, "This is My body ... this is My blood." Repent of thinking you have no sins to confess. Repent of thinking that if you're not too bad, too negligent, too wasteful, too lazy, too smug, too unfaithful then you will still inherit the kingdom of heaven. Repent.

All of this, doubting God's love for you, questing the importance of attending preaching and the Sacraments, letting reason convince you that the Sacraments are mere signs and niceties and do not have the power of God, doubting that simple words affect salvation, and fooling yourself into thinking that your sin is not bad enough to confess and repent of or that you don't know when or how you sin, all of this is unbelief. Stop doubting and believe.

Thomas' unbelief is at the root of all unbelief. He did not believe that Jesus rose from the dead. He denied the foundation of our faith, which is what unbelief is. For without Jesus' rising from the dead there is no forgiveness, no mercy, no heaven, no salvation; only hell and separation from God. But the resurrection of Jesus means that man is now at peace with God. You have peace with God. There is nothing between you and God except Jesus who brings you into His Father's house. God bears you no ill will. He's not out to get you. The resurrection of Jesus brings lasting comfort and hope in the face of this life's misery and shame because we know that there awaits us a heavenly dwelling. Jesus' resurrection from the dead brings you repentance and hope.

Stop doubting that God loves you because your life has taken a turn for the worse and everything seems to be stacked against you; He is risen. His pierced hands and feet, His pierced side, show God's love for you. He makes all things new. Stop doubting. God loves you. Jesus lives!

Stop doubting that church is only nominally important or simply a nice thing to attend, rather than believing that it is here in His Word and Sacraments that God visits His people and

enlightens you with His Spirit and truth. Stop doubting and believe; for it is the risen Lord who gathers His people from the four winds and feeds them heavenly manna in the desert. It is the risen Lord who calls the elect out from among world to give them an inheritance that does not spoil or fade. Do not be unbelieving. Jesus is here for you. Jesus lives!

Stop thinking the Sacraments are mere signs, works you perform to please God or satisfy some New Testament Law. It is the risen Lord to whom all power and authority has been given. His Word affects salvation. Baptism and the Sacrament and the holy Absolution are the power of God unto salvation for they give the benefit of what Christ did on Calvary: the forgiveness of sins, the bestowal of peace between you and God, they give to you eternal life through His Word. For whatever the Word of God is attached to has the power of God, for His Word is not helpless in saving you but in fact creates faith in you. Repent and believe. Jesus lives!

Repent of thinking you have no sin that needs to be killed by confession. You want to have a bold witness to the world, O Christian? Tell them that you need to hear God's Word and receive His Sacraments because you are a sinner. Stop trying to convince the world and yourself that you've got it all figured out, for you are on life support, hooked up to God who feeds you and breaths life into you. There is nothing worse to the witness of the holy Church than a Christian who thinks sin no longer affects him or her and that just believing in Jesus will automatically make you a holy-roller. If this is true, why did God ordain an office to continue to feed you and instruct you? Why did Jesus send His apostles even as the Father sent Him: to forgive sin? Not imaginary sin, real sin. The lies we tell to make ourselves look better, the hatred we harbor toward our brother with whom we are supposed to have peace, the unbelief we keep secret. Repent.

Any and all unbelief is a denial, on some level, that Jesus is risen from the dead. His resurrection is the foundation and source of our faith. As it is written, "[God], according to His great mercy, has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

Christians who brag about their honesty even as they flaunt the fact that they do not need the Holy Spirit's gifts of hearing God's Word and partaking of the living Lord commit the greater sin. They betray our Lord by denying His resurrection. Only if Jesus did not rise would we be justified in neglecting preaching and the Sacrament. But since He did rise, if you sever yourself from His Body, His Church, then you sever yourself from Christ. It is the Lord who said that where the body is there the vultures will gather.

So gather you vultures. Feast on the body of our Lord for by it you are sustained and given strength. For the hope that is within you is guarded not by you and your ability to convince yourself what to believe or what needs to be believed, but by God Himself who guards you through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last days.

Stop doubting and believe. The Lord Himself shows you His hands and side, the stigmata of salvation. He pours for you His living blood and gives to you His resurrected flesh. In Him is life and salvation. What more is there to do but fall on your face and proclaim with Thomas, "My Lord and my God!"

It is here that the Lord comes to you and gives you peace; peace that is brought by His resurrection availed to you in His holy Supper and precious absolution. For after you have tasted and seen that the Lord is good, what doubt remains? Jesus is risen from the dead and here He gives Himself to you; freely, without cost, without payment. He is here for you, o man, here to bring you peace and hope in the face of death.

You are being guarded, O Israel, through faith that God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ gives to you by His Spirit even as you hear His Word and believe His promises. Your sins are forgiven for Christ's sake; your doubt is forgiven. Believe.

In the name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.

✠ AMEN ✠