

The Reading is from the Holy Gospel According to St. John (20:19-31; Acts 5:12-20)

+ In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit +
Christ is Risen!

Recently my wife and I started watching a PBS documentary on the men who built America, chronicling the lives and work of Vanderbilt, Rockefeller, Carnegie, Ford, and Morgan. And one of the commentators made the assertion that what good entrepreneurs do is figure out what people need, and then to offer the solution.

Well this got me thinking: Spiritually, what do we need? And what is it that Orthodoxy offers to meet that need like nothing else? Don't get me wrong, we Orthodox are not market driven when it comes to the Gospel, but what is that we need? What is the spiritual need and what is the solution?

Vanderbilt made a fortune in the railroad industry, because he was "Jonny-on-the-spot" in realizing that the country needed a fast and reliable way to travel and move goods. He saw the need, transportation, and gave the solution, the railroad. But God, in His foreknowledge, saw that we needed to be free, and that we needed to be free from sin and death. That is our problem. So He provided the solution: the cross, and the resurrection.

Now listen to the sequence of events in John's Gospel that lead up today's reading. Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb. It's empty. She grabs Peter and the other disciple. They go to the tomb. Yes, it's empty. Mary stays and the two angels tell her that Christ is risen. She turns around and to meet who she supposes is the gardener, but it's Christ. Mary returns and tells the disciples that she has seen the Lord. Then comes today's Gospel.

It's Sunday. The doors are shut and the disciples are gathered together, and Jesus comes to stand in the midst of them. He shows His hands and His side. And what's this? Christ is alive! He is no ghost. He can talk, and be touched. What can this mean?

It means that by the cross the problem of sin and death has been solved. Humanity is defied and immortal. Our spiritual problem has been met, not buy come rich cutthroat entrepreneur who made America, but by God who has made and perfected mankind.

Do we believe this? Do we doubt this? Thomas did. Sometimes we have moments or periods of doubt.

There are two types of doubt and disbelief. The first kind of disbelief is like that of Thomas. We doubt in our minds the truth of God, the incarnation, the cross, the resurrection, even the existence of God, or some other aspect of revelation. This first kind of disbelief comes from trying to process all the information we receive from the world and fit it in with God's revelation. But it can also come from, as Elder Paisios says, from pride. "The mind," he says, "is dimmed by pride; disbelief begins and the person is deprived of the Grace of God. Or, when one is preoccupied with question of doctrine without having

the necessary qualifications and spiritual preparation he is then beset with blasphemous [i.e. disbelieving] thoughts.”ⁱ He who has ears let him hear.

The second type of disbelief looks and sounds something like this: A person who confesses Christ, but who rarely, if ever, goes to Church. Who really doesn’t live the spiritual life and practice Christian virtue. The reason they don’t do those things is because in truth they don’t believe. Listen to St. Gregory Palamas on just this type of disbelief: He says, “I will tell you, in your charity, something which has just occurred to me. I notice that Tomas lost his faith when he was absent, but when he was together with the believers his faith did not in any way fall short. So I have the idea that if only a sinner will flee the company of immoral men and associate with the just, he will never be found lacking in righteousness or the resultant [i.e. ensuing] salvation of his soul.”ⁱⁱ

It is vital to attend to Church, especially on the Lord’s Day, that day of the Kingdom. It is vital to come together to be the Body of Christ. We cannot be good Christians by staying at home, or spending time in nature. That’s not how to commune with God. We need to come together and meet the risen Lord Jesus. To commune with Him as a Body, otherwise we fall into disbelief and the loss of our soul.

But someone might say, “Oh, but only if I had been there in the room with the disciples when Christ appeared, or had seen a vision, or miracle, then I would believe and have no doubt.” Wrong.

First what does Paul say? “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen (Heb 11:1). What does Christ say? “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.” But have we not seen? We see Divine manifestations each time we gather to be the Church. A person baptized, receiving forgiveness of sins, being made a participant in the death and resurrection of Christ, being clothed with Christ; a person being Chrismated, receiving the Holy Spirit; two people becoming one flesh; a person confessing their sins is a huge sign of the invisible, but ever present Christ reconciling us back to Him. And what of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon us and the gifts of bread and wine, making them to be, showing them to be the very Body and Blood of Christ that we get to partake of?

So we see this all the time. And as we commend ourselves and each other to these things the more we grow in faith, and come, as Thomas did, to the knowledge that our humanity’s problems have been seen God, and the solution has been provided to us by Him, in Him, through Him, and we can say with Thomas, “My Lord and My God.”

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ⁱ St. Gregory Palamas, *The Homilies*, p. 41

ⁱⁱ Elder Paisios, *Spiritual Counsel*, p.142