

SERMON - Thomas Sunday, May 5, 2019 - John 20:19-31

Christ is Risen! When the Lord was informed that His friend Lazarus was dying and Jesus was summoned to Judea, the disciples asked the Lord that they not go because the malice of the Jews against them was very strong in Bethany and their lives would be in danger if they went there. The last time they were in Judea the Jews tried to stone Jesus. When the Lord confirms that nonetheless they will return to Bethany and Judea, the apostle Thomas says, "Let us go and die with Him." This was not said with bitterness or sarcasm. In fact, quite the opposite, it was said with great faith. The intonation and *how* we say something gives all the meaning to what we say. Thomas was ready and willing to go with Jesus and was not afraid to face danger and death in Judea. It is with this spirit that Thomas spoke. The disciples, out of fear, for the most part, fled and denied Jesus when Jesus' time had come; when the Lord was arrested, judged and crucified. Afterwards, we hear in today's Gospel that the disciples remained hidden and kept the door locked for fear of the Jews. Thomas, still the courageous and faithful one, alone had the courage to go out into the town to buy provisions for the apostles. When Thomas returned, it is no wonder that he should be upset when he was informed that in his absence the Resurrected Lord had appeared to the disciples. Thomas exhibited the strongest faith and courage of them all, yet he was excluded from seeing the Lord. Being justifiably upset, he does not readily accept that the Lord had appeared to the disciples. It wasn't so much really that he didn't accept that the Lord had appeared, it was more that he himself wanted to see the Lord too, and he was hurt, upset and confused and could not understand why the Lord chose to make His appearance to the disciples while he alone was away doing a brave and good deed. The Lord does this deliberately, not for Thomas' sake, but for your sake and my sake and everyone else's sake who shall hear and read this Gospel. We are not privileged to see the Resurrected Lord with our physical eyes. We must see and understand with our spiritual eyes, with our hearts. It wasn't Thomas who doubted, but for the sake of those who hear the Gospel and perhaps do not readily accept that the Lord rose from the dead, who perhaps might still need further encouragement that the Lord had truly Risen, the Lord later appears again to the disciples, this time when Thomas is present. During His second appearance to the disciples, the Lord tells Thomas, "handle me, touch me, verify that it is really Me, put your fingers into the print of the nails, and put your hand into the wound in my side, and be not faithless and unbelieving, but believe that it is truly I and that I have truly risen from the dead." Thomas answers, "My Lord and my God!"

The entire Gospel of St. John is written like a trial. Jesus is the defendant. You and I and everyone who reads this Gospel are the jury and judge. What is on trial is the question: "Who Is Jesus Christ? Is Jesus truly the Messiah, the Christ? Is Jesus truly the Son of God? Is Jesus truly Divine? Did Jesus truly rise from the dead after He died on the Cross?" St. John provides the testimony. He repeatedly reminds us in his Gospel that he was present and that he was an eyewitness to all of the events that he relates in his Gospel. Nothing is from a secondary or third source, everything has been seen and witnessed first hand by John himself. Historians call this a "primary source." Primary sources are the most convincing and the most reliable. In addition, John describes for us seven "signs", seven events in the life of our Savior which indicate that Jesus truly is the Son of God, the Christ. For example, the first "sign" that John gives us is when Jesus turned the water into wine at the wedding in Cana of Galilee. Why does John deliberately choose to call this event a "sign"? The dictionary defines a "sign" as "an object, quality, or event whose presence or occurrence indicates the probable presence or occurrence of something else." Thus, the "signs" related by John are like signposts, pointing and indicating that Jesus is the Son of God, Divine, the Christ, the Savior of the world, the conqueror and annihilator of death, the bestower of grace, the forgiver of sins, the bestower of eternal life. The entire Gospel of John is John's eyewitness testimony as to who Jesus Christ really is and what our Lord truly did and accomplished. At the end of the Gospel the testimony is over. John reveals to us at the end of his Gospel that there are many other signs and

testimony that he could relate, but he feels that what he has given us is sufficient. It is enough. Now, whoever who reads or hears this Gospel must make a choice. No one who hears the testimony of this Gospel can walk away indifferent. We must decide and choose whether or not we are convinced by John's testimony and believe that Jesus truly is the Christ, the Son of God, or whether He is not. And if we examine and listen to John's testimony with sincerity and with an open mind, God's grace and the gift of faith will touch our hearts, and we will not be unbelieving but believing. Having faith, we must now follow through with the further ramifications of what believing in our Savior entails. Having faith, it behooves us to not only listen to the Words of Jesus but to follow them and live them. It means that we must now radically change our vision of life and struggle to live according to the Word of God. We cannot merely **say** that we are Christians, we must **be** Christians in our actions and in all of the choices that we make in our lives. This is the consequence, and the hope that St. John has for everyone who hears or reads this Gospel. When I was a teenager my Spiritual Father was Fr. Michael Koblosh. Fr. Michael gave me my first theology book, "The Vision of God" by Vladimir Lossky. One year when Fr. Michael visited us here in Watervliet, I asked him to inscribe the book for me. He wrote "Don't only read this book - but **do** it." Today I pass on these wise words of Fr. Michael to all of you here present today as well, "Don't only read this book - but **do** it." May God help all of us in this holy struggle and task. Christ is Risen!