

## SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER (A)

John 20:19-31  
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In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.  
Alleluia! Christ is Risen! ***He is risen indeed! Alleluia!***

You may have noticed, as I have, that oftentimes whenever we are approaching a major Christian holy day or festival — usually Christmas or Easter — the popular news magazines and television programs will frequently run some cover story that has to do with a topic relating to Christianity or the Church. Typically it is sensationalized in some way. Some scholar claiming to have some new information about what Jesus was ***really*** like, or what Jesus ***really*** said and taught. Virtually always these scholars are independent academics — not responsible to any actual Christian body or faith community. And most times, there is nothing really new in the article or program. No cutting edge information or research that hasn't been discovered and publicized before. But I suspect that publishers and programers think it is good business, to go with such features right before Christmas or Easter.

Of course, from the Church's perspective, one of the real problems with such articles and such research, is that one usually finds whatever one is looking for. For instance, if an academic — or anyone — sets out with the purpose of finding some evidence that will disprove the resurrection of Jesus, well, one will almost certainly end up finding something to bolster that position. On the other hand, if one sets out with the purpose of finding supporting evidence for the truth of Christ's resurrection, one will almost certainly find something to bolster that position.

In other words, if one begins from a faith-***less*** perspective, one will end with a faith-***less*** outcome. But if one begins from the vantage point of faith, then one will see God's hand at work, and the faith is deepened and strengthened. ***Faith sees things that unbelief does not.*** Faith sees God's hand at work, where unbelief sees mere coincidence. Faith sees divine miracles, where unbelief sees blind luck or curiosities.

And the deeper problem with research which tries to factually prove or disprove the Christian faith, is that the Church's faith does not ***finally*** rest upon historical evidence. Now, of course we believe that Christ truly was raised from the dead, and that he was, and is, God's Son, the Messiah. But that faith is not based upon scientific evidence or data. That faith is not the result of somehow "nailing down" the facts. That faith rests instead upon our own experience of the risen Christ, our own encounter with him and his saving love in our lives.

Faith — by its very nature of being ***faith*** — is not something which can be proved. In the letter to the Hebrews, the apostle writes, "*Faith is the assurance of*

*things hoped for, the conviction of things **not seen***” (11:1). Likewise in today’s Second Reading, we heard the words of St. Peter,

*Although you have not seen [Christ], you love him;  
and even though you do not see him now,  
you **believe in him** and rejoice with an indescribable  
and glorious joy.”*

—1 Peter 1:8

Faith comes when God works in our hearts by his Holy Spirit to bring us his love, and to draw us to himself in trust. And that is not a scientific, or ultimately intellectual endeavor. It is rather, an endeavor of *love*.

Indeed, today’s Gospel is all about love, hope and promise. For the risen Christ comes *not* to reprimand and chastise his weak-kneed and frightened disciples. He comes rather to give them *peace*. He comes to give them his Holy Spirit. And finally, he comes to give them faith.

It is the evening of the day of Christ’s resurrection, and the disciples apparently do not believe Mary Magdalene’s announcement to them, about her encounter with the risen Christ. For they are frightened and they are meeting together behind locked doors.

Of course, fear and locked doors are no match for Jesus. He enters the room where they are. He says, “*Peace be with you,*” and then he shows them the wounds in his hands and side. Encountering the risen Christ in this way then, the disciples are moved to faith. They recognize “the Lord.” Their fear is dispelled, and they rejoice.

But one of them, Thomas, is missing from the group. The others declare to him that they “*have seen the Lord.*” But it’s just too much for him, and he refuses to believe. Thomas wants to see and feel Jesus for himself. Even as the other disciples had a hard time believing the testimony of Mary Magdalene, so Thomas has a hard time believing their testimony.

But then, even as locked doors and fear were no match for Jesus, neither is Thomas’ unbelief. For one week later, Christ again comes to his disciples, and this time Thomas is present. Again, Jesus says, “*Peace be with you.*” And then he speaks directly to Thomas *in all of his doubts*. Jesus reaches out his hands, he invites Thomas to see and feel his crucifixion wounds, and then he calls him to faith. He says, “*Do not doubt but believe.*”

And with that, Thomas’ doubts are gone. Now, he too, has encountered the risen Christ, and he doesn’t need to reach out and feel his wounds. Jesus has met Thomas in his unbelief, and he has offered himself to him. Confronted with such grace, Thomas then responds with the most powerful and complete confession of Jesus in all of St. John’s Gospel. He exclaims: “*My Lord and my God!*”

Thomas is moved to such a depth of faith, because in Jesus, he sees God revealed. In Jesus, he experiences love and grace. In Jesus he experiences victory over death, and new life. And those things are available in no one but Christ.

In response to Thomas' confession of faith, Jesus then declares:

*Have you believed because you have seen me?*

*Blessed are those who have not seen*

*and yet have come to believe.*

Inherent in that declaration from Christ, is the promise that faith will **not** be limited to **only** those who see what Thomas has seen. Faith will **not** be limited to **only** those who are eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ. Faith will also be a reality for those who aren't eyewitnesses, and **they will be blessed**.

St. John fleshes out this promise of faith for future generations in the last two verses of today's Gospel. For he writes:

*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples,  
which are not written in this book.*

*But these are written **so that you may come to believe***

*that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God,*

*and that through believing you may have life in his name.*

St. John wrote this Gospel **for you** and **for me**. He wrote this Gospel for all of us who aren't first-century eye-witnesses. He wrote this Gospel, so that **in its proclamation**, we too, might encounter the risen Christ, and so, come to faith.

You and I do not have the opportunity to **see** the risen Jesus, in the same way his first disciples did. We do not have film or digital video evidence of Jesus rising from the tomb. You can't find it on *YouTube*. And we certainly can't **prove** the miracle of the resurrection though historical research or scientific evidence.

But we do have the Gospel. And in the proclamation of the Holy Gospel, Jesus once again takes on flesh and blood. In the speaking of the Gospel Word, the risen Christ is himself once again present. When you hear the words of forgiveness spoken, those words are from Jesus himself. When we share the peace in our worship, it is truly the peace **of the Lord** which we experience. When we gather together with fellow believers, in them we genuinely see the person of Christ, for we are all members of the **Body** of Christ. Jesus promised that wherever two or three are gathered in his name, there he will be present among them (Mt 18:20). And where Christ is present, there the Holy Spirit is present as well — working to call God's people to faith.

And that is really what our Gospel this morning is all about. It is about how faith comes to the Church — years, generations, and even centuries, after Christ's Ascension into heaven. It is about how the Holy Spirit works the miracle of faith in the hearts of God's people, long after all the eyewitnesses to Christ's Resurrection are gone.

God has given us the Gospel. He has given us the Sacraments. He has given us the fellowship of believers — the Church. In and with all of them, our Risen Lord **is present**. He is here with us this morning, and he is calling you again, to faith,. May you ever believe, and always confess with Thomas, "**My Lord, and**

*my God!”*

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! ***He is risen indeed! Alleluia!***

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.