

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

“Like newborn infants, Alleluia, long for the pure spiritual milk [of the Word.] Alleluia.”

Jesus lives and he speaks to you. God admonishes you today in the antiphon of the Introit, which is the name’s sake of this Sunday of the Church Year, “Like newborn infants, Alleluia, long for the pure spiritual milk [of the Word.] Alleluia.” Coming from Easter Sunday and life bursting forth from the tomb this is God teaching you how your life is not only nourished and sustained but what you are to long for and treasure as one who has been redeemed by Christ, given that new birth in the waters of your baptism. You are to long for God’s word because it gives you life, it gives peace, it gives you certain and sure consolation. That’s nothing really earth shattering for you as Christians to hear but something always worth repeating. You need that constant reminder and encouragement that God is living, and he is working in your life through his word to give you Christ and all that he has done.

In all three readings, God’s word is doing something. In Ezekiel, God uses his prophet to preach life and resurrection in that vision where God will give new life to his people, the church, and points them to that final day when he will raise the dead. All of that is seen through the Lord’s resurrection and even as he is the same Lord who breathed life into Adam, the first man. The Epistle from 1 John 5 roots you in what you have in God’s word when it says, “If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son. Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son.” God’s testimony, his Holy Scriptures, give Christ and create faith in him.

The Gospel reading shows you, by way of example, the unbelief of Thomas who would not take God at his word but wanted to make demands on God. And this is where you pause and listen to this encounter. You see what took place and learn from it what God is teaching you and what great comfort you find in Jesus in this whole event and words. Thomas said, “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.” The disciples told Thomas the Lord had risen and they had seen him and Thomas himself heard Jesus say numerous times that he would rise from the dead just as the Old Testament said he would as well. Thomas had no excuse to plead ignorance before the word of God.

Now it’s tempting to soft pedal it, but those words are demonic as they want to find, know, and see God apart from his word. They go back all the way to Garden of Eden when the devil cast doubt in the minds and hearts of Adam and Eve. Remember also in Luke’s Gospel when the rich man was trying to make demands of Abraham when he was in hell? The rich man said, “‘Then I beg you, father, to send him [Lazarus] to my father's house— for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’ But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’”

This is nothing new, then, is it? But why is this case and why does this happen in our lives as well? It’s easy for us to lose focus when it comes to the Christian faith. Maybe part of the reason for this is because we can relate a lot with Thomas in this reading. It’s easy for us to turn the Scriptures or the Christian faith into a system that is more compatible with our lives in terms of what we see and perceive with our senses. It’s easy to get caught up in the things around us and what we are doing in our lives. It’s no wonder too why something like the parable of the Sower has more than one example of people who hear the word and then get caught up in the stuff of the world and their lives and then fall away from the faith. We are people who walk through this world and depend on and are active in what our eyes see, that guides us.

Now our senses, though, are a gift of God. Think about in the explanation of the First Article of the Creed (I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth), we rightly confess that “I believe that God has made me and all

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creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them.” It’s not to say seeing is bad. In and of itself it’s not and really, we look forward to that day when the Bible tells us we will see God face to face. Job confessed this in the Old Testament reading last week. The problem is not with seeing but the sinner who is seeing and then this becomes the basis by which he views his relation to God and then, from that, the world around us. Walking by faith not by sight is letting the Scriptures define our lives and how we understand God and all things pertaining to him and then how we view the world and our lives in it.

A lot of times there isn’t too much of an issue but more and more this is the case as God’s word is attacked all around us and we are tempted to follow what we see and hear about it. Or, in another way is when something may appear to be Christian or godly but it’s trying to add something to God’s word as if it wasn’t enough. This is a common thing in Christian circles and popular Christian books or Christian movies you might see. It’s one thing to read the Bible and hear it on Sunday morning preached to us and it’s another thing when a little boy says he has had some vision of heaven. God might be dead until we can have some argument to get a leg on a college professor. We like the fluff and the fantastical more than we like God to speak, and we listen and let God’s word accomplishes the purposes for which God sends it and it is enough. Lest we forget, the devil disguises himself as an angel of light. Only God’s word is without error and will not lie to us. The great hymn, “I Know My Faith is Founded,” sums it up well, “God’s word is all sufficient and makes divinely sure and trusting in its wisdom, my faith shall rest secure.

All of this isn’t to say we limit God but what it does do is drive us back to where God has promised to be and promised to work. The Christian faith is trusting and holding on to those promises. Notice how Thomas used the word, “never” in his confession of unbelief and when he was making a demand about how he wanted God to reveal himself. Absolute terms like that only go with God’s word. In our lives we can’t put those in our vocabulary when we are talking about things in our lives and something we will or won’t do. We always add something like “with the help of God.” That’s because we know the only thing truly certain and absolutely does not waver is what God does and says in the Holy Scriptures. He and he alone can make a promise like he does in Matthew 28 when Jesus said to the disciples, “I am with you always even to the end of the age.” This is absolutely the case.

Faith then, which holds onto and receives Christ, and his benefits must have that object to which it clings, or it won’t have a leg to stand on. That’s why even as God gives you the gift of faith, he also gives you how you cling to him in this life and have absolute assurance in the work of Christ for you and his faithfulness all your days and into life everlasting. You look outside of yourself and rather than trying to say something like “unless this, I will never” you, in faith, hear God’s word and trust what God says. An example of baptism is appropriate where God tells you that you have been crucified with Christ and raised with him in baptism as he says 1 Peter 3, “baptism now saves you” you know that is absolutely and always true and it’s for you. You trust not in your own self, experiences, or ideas but rather look to Christ and his word which has given you all of this and you rest easy in the arms of your faithful Lord.

This also plays out in your life as you face times of suffering, trial, and even contemplate what it means to die in Christ as a Christian. In all those times you look to the Lord who says that you will suffer and bear crosses in this life, but you do so as one who has Jesus who has overcome the world and whose yoke is easy, and his burden is light, and he gives you rest. He will never leave or forsake you. He will never let the righteous fall. He will deliver you from every evil. Again the Epistle reading from 1 John 5 connects you to Jesus and that victory when it says, “For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” You fix your eyes on Christ and his promises of the future glory to come, that “glory beyond compare” as St. Paul calls it. And though you can’t see or touch that right now it is no less real, and you are no less an heir of it. God’s word is yours and you have what is that glory and life to come. How do you know? You are baptized. God forgives you your sin. You feast at his Supper. You have his holy word. Those are things which you have and give you hope and hope in Christ will never put you to shame.

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Let's go back, then, to Thomas. When Jesus comes again and appears to the disciples, he is now with them. The Lord speaks the same word he spoke to the others, "Peace be with you." Jesus invited Thomas to put his hand in his side. What happened next is something remarkable. "Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!'" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Jesus is risen, that is the proclamation you have this morning as you sit here in this place. Jesus tells you today that you have all that he has done. The Scriptures proclaim this resurrection to you which also proclaims that your sin has been atoned for by your crucified Lord. You see rightly, that is you see with and through the eyes of faith and you are greatly blessed. Like St. Peter says in his Epistle, you have something more sure, the prophetic word. That is to boldly say you are at an advantage over the apostles when it comes to listening to God's word. You have the blessing of knowing the story and having your Bible from Genesis to Revelation. You know what will happen next and what will happen as the apostles are sent out to preach this Gospel of Christ as the church.

One of those apostles, St. John, who saw with his own two eyes the crucifixion of Jesus and him resurrected from the dead speaks a summary word to you in those closing words of the Gospel reading, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." That is the blessing Jesus talks about to Thomas and what you have in Christ. You have life and you are new creation, a child of God. So as God's children, "Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk [of the Word.]" Treasure and take this all to heart and feast at your Lord's banquet of his holy word and sacraments. See, Jesus is crucified and risen for the Holy Scriptures testify this to you and that this is all for you. Rejoice this day with the apostles and with Thomas as he gave that great confession of Jesus that he is "my Lord and my God." Blessed are you dear saints of God who are hearers of this Easter proclamation and know that it is absolutely for you.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.