

Thomas Sunday April 19, 2015

Christ is Risen!

In Truth He is Risen!

For a week now we have been basking in the light of Christ's Resurrection. What joy! But our joy must not be passive only. This wonderful Illumination grants us a very special opportunity for building up our faith. For forty days the resurrected Lord, Jesus, was physically present to His disciples, teaching and training them for their apostolic work.

My spiritual father, (of blessed memory), always encouraged us to use this time wisely; as a feast, not so much of foods, but of faith. The Church urges all of Her children to strengthen and deepen their faith at this time because all Christians have an apostolic calling to be witnesses of Christ's Resurrection. We are all called to be "salt" and "leaven" in the world.

Of course this does not mean that we must "see" Jesus physically in the way His first apostles did. Their testimony and experience is unique, and is the historical foundation for the factualness of Christ's Resurrection. They saw Him, touched Him, ate with Him and heard His teaching during the forty days between His Resurrection and His Ascension. We owe an incredible debt of gratitude to these men who, like Thomas in today's gospel, we are not exactly easy to convince. Thomas was not the only one who "doubted", and that's a good thing!

But that is not all.

Beyond our belief in the Apostles' witness, we Christians of every age and time are called upon and expected to confirm the Apostolic teaching experientially. Yes, we believe in Christ's Resurrection without seeing His physical resurrection ourselves but that does not mean that our faith cannot be experientially confirmed. Indeed, without such confirmation our faith will remain weak and our ability to witness to its truth will be feeble at best. The Church urges us to "come, taste and see that the Lord is good". This invitation to "taste and

see" is like an extension of Christ's invitation to Thomas. What will it take for us to really satisfy ourselves that Christ really is risen?

I would suggest that one of the things we had better not do it to fall into the attitude that so many do fall into after a great feast like Pascha. That's the attitude of "it's over". Of course the great fast is over and it is normal to feel some relief about that and we can appreciate the fasting-free Bright Week and the mild fasting of entire Paschal Season. Lent is over and Holy Week is over but the Liturgical life of the Orthodox Christian is definitely not over.

After His resurrection, Christ continues to teach His disciples and leads them towards the gifting of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Just as Lent as a solemn preparation for Holy Week and Pascha, the Paschal Season is a joyful preparation for Pentecost. We need to maintain our spiritual attentiveness about this even in the midst of celebration.

Let me share with you a rather amusing example of what I mean by maintaining our attentiveness even in the midst of celebration. As some of you know, our monastics read through the entire Psalter (the book of 150 Psalms), in their daily Church services, every week. During Lent they double this so as to hear it twice a week. That's a lot of Psalm reading. There is also a custom in some monasteries where, after the Paschal service the Ecclesiarch (the monk assigned the duty of organizing the services), takes the book of Psalms and (rather carefully), tosses it out into the center of the Church where it will remain, on the floor, untouched, for all of Bright Week. The Church services for Bright Week are marked by the fact that everything is sung – there is no chanting of the Psalms at all. Whereas the services of Lent and Holy Week were long to the extreme, Bright Week Vespers here at Holy Transfiguration are the shortest services of the year. But although the monks enjoy the shorter services they don't stop going to Church or abandon their monastic life.

We too, as Orthodox householders, need to learn how to maintain our spiritual lives in the Feasts as well as the Fasts. To do this another thing we must learn to avoid is the modernist tendency of compartmentalizing the different dimensions of our lives, religions, family, work, community, etc. Like the

monastics, whose whole way of life is consecrated to Christ, the Orthodox householder must also live in such a way that his or her life is consecrated to Christ in all of its dimensions, we all pray for this at the end of virtually every litany of prayers in our Church Services, "and let us commend ourselves and each other and all our life unto Christ our God". The Christian life is not something that we ever think of taking a "break" from. We may take a break from fasting but that does not mean we can just let ourselves go and indulge our passions. The fasting is only a training that is designed to help us combat the tyranny of our selfish passions and desires that turn us away from following Christ. Fasting or feasting, our lives must be consecrated to Christ.

As I said at the beginning, our joy in this time of the Resurrection must not be passive only. By all means, let us actively rejoice in this springtime of the Church's liturgical life. As it says in the Paschal hymns "Let us be illumined by the feast! Let us embrace each other! Let us call Brothers even those that hate us and forgive all by the Resurrection". This must be the spirit of our Feast – a Feast of light and of love. How much easier it is to love one another and especially to forgive all in the light of Christ's Resurrection.

So, let us not carelessly return to worldliness but rather build up our Christian way of life.

For Christ is Risen!