

THOMAS SUNDAY

Early Work of the Twelve

May 12, 2013
2nd Sunday of Pascha
Revision E

GOSPEL: John 20:19-31

EPISTLE: Acts 5:12-20

Today's Gospel is commonly used today in the West also on the Sunday after Easter. It is also used in the Orthodox lectionary as one of the eleven Matins Gospels of the Resurrection that are read on a rotating basis during Sunday Matins. However, today's Epistle reading is not used in the West at all during the Church year.

Beginning today, the Orthodox Lectionary presents a seven part series that summarizes the development of the Early Church from a number of different aspects.

Table of Contents

Gospel Lesson: John 20:19-31.....	12
The Events in the Upper Room.....	13
Passing Through the Closed Doors.....	14
The Nail Holes and the Spear Wound.....	19
Peace Be With You.....	20
Christ's Sending Out of the Apostles.....	24
Thomas' Missionary Journeys.....	24
Christ Breathing on the Apostles.....	27
Forgiving and Retaining Sins.....	33
Thomas: "My Lord and My God".....	37
Not Seeing But Yet Believing.....	43
Seeing is an Impediment to Faith.....	43
Hearing and Sight Can Be Our Teachers.....	44
Believing the Resurrection.....	46
The Impact on Christianity from Thomas' Doubt.....	49
Proof of the Resurrection.....	49
Christology.....	54
Epistle Lesson: Acts 5:12-20.....	57
The Work of the Apostles.....	57
The Healing by Peter's Shadow.....	62

Gospel: John 20:19-31

From tradition, Thomas has been described¹ as having studied the Scripture and the Law of Moses diligently in his youth – so much so that he was never interested in the games the other children played. For more details see the Study² on The Apostle Thomas.

Copyright © Mark Kern 2007

¹ Lambertson et al, The Lives of the Holy Apostles, Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista, CO, 1990, p. 185.

² Mark Kern, The Apostle Thomas, St Athanasius Press, 2003.

Thomas worked as a fisherman along with Peter, Andrew, Nathanael, James and John Zebedee, and one other unnamed disciple (John 21:1-6). When the Lord passed through the region where Thomas worked as a fisherman, Thomas was immediately drawn to Jesus. Thomas never married, like many of the Twelve, but concentrated on a godly life in simplicity and poverty. This proved very useful in evangelizing the extremely poor in the regions he eventually traveled to in India. That is, he identified with the people and they with him.

Thomas' name was Judah^{3,4} at birth, but he was known primarily by his nickname during the late 20's AD. Thomas (Hebrew meaning "The Twin") or Didymus (Greek meaning "Double") was described⁵ as having a twin brother named Eliezer, who was a follower of the Apostle Peter, but who was not numbered among the Twelve or the Seventy.

From the Scriptures, there are only a few references to Thomas, and all from the Gospel of John. On one occasion, Jesus proposed to go to Judea to raise Lazarus from the dead. Thomas said, "Let us go also, that we may die with Him" (John 11:8-16). This indicates a very strong loyalty and commitment.

Thomas was also very inquisitive and wanted to understand the things of God. We see this when Jesus had just stated that He was about to return to His Father and that He was doing so to prepare a place for His disciples (and us). The place He was going to prepare is the city with solid foundations whose craftsman and maker is God. This is the same city Abraham sought (Hebrews 11:8-10), and is later described as the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:1-3). Thomas had difficulty comprehending this and asked where Jesus was going and how could he know the way (John 14:1-7). Thomas did get to understand the way in a very profound manner, and a major event⁶ of his work in India involved specific preparation of a palace for one of the kings in India.

Desiring to understand is a key to salvation. In the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:1-9), the seed sown by the wayside represents one who hears the Word of the Kingdom but does not understand it. The evil one then snatches away what was sown in our heart (Matthew 13:18-19). In Orthodox Matins, one of the things we pray for is, "let me understand Your commandments." This is not just the Ten Commandments, but every Word of the Kingdom the Lord speaks to us. Thomas knew what Moses had written, "Man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord" (Deuteronomy 8:3). Thomas was keen on understanding what the Lord said.

The Events in the Upper Room

³ Eusebius, Church History, I, 13

⁴ Roberts and Donaldson, "Acts of the Holy Apostle Thomas", Apocrypha of the New Testament, Ante Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁵ Pseudo Clement, The Clementine Homilies, II, 1

⁶ For details, see Mark Kern, The Apostle Thomas, St Athanasius Press, 2003.

The Gospel lesson covers a period of eight days beginning with the evening of the first day of the week, which was the evening after the Lord rose from the dead. The Lord had appeared at this time to Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-17), to the other Myrrh-Bearing Women on their return from the tomb (Matthew 28:9-10), to Luke and Cleopas on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-32) and to Peter (Luke 24:34).

Ten of the Eleven were huddled in the Upper Room where they had eaten the Passover meal for fear of the Jews (John 20:19), and Judas had already hanged himself (Matthew 27:3-5). Jesus appeared to the Ten that evening, passing through solid walls with His newly resurrected body. He then breathed on them saying, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22). One might note that the Greek word for breath is the same as for spirit. John Chrysostom said⁷ that this was not the same as the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, but this prepared them for Pentecost. For more discussion on what they received at Pentecost, see the study for Pentecost.

Passing Through the Closed Doors

A week later, they were gathered again in the same place and Jesus appeared to them again. Following Jesus’ appearance a week ago, Thomas had said that he wouldn’t believe these incredible and probably ecstatic accounts of Jesus’ resurrection unless he saw the nail holes and the spear cut. Thomas didn’t understand how the Lord could be raised from the dead, and required nail holes for proof. The Lord met Thomas where he was at and gave him the proof he asked for. And in doing so, He gave us further proof of the Resurrection; that is, that Jesus was in fact raised bodily and not just in spirit.

John Chrysostom asked⁸ why the Lord didn’t appear to Thomas immediately, instead of after eight days (John 20:26).

“In order that being in the meantime continually instructed by the disciples, and hearing the same thing, he might be inflamed to more eagerly desire, and be more ready to believe for the future”.

There are several other accounts of human flesh passing through solid objects, where the most obvious is that of Christ passing through solid walls to appear to the Apostles in the Upper Room. Another example of this is His Resurrection itself, where He left the weight of the “grave clothes” intact in the tomb. He had been embalmed, bound with linen strips and 100 pounds of myrrh and aloes (John 19:38-40) according to Jewish custom in what might be called a rich man’s burial. This was similar to the burial of Lazarus, where Lazarus needed to be “unbound” after he came out of the tomb (John 11:43-44). Christ wasn’t “unbound”; He just left the wrapping of the sarcophagus behind intact in the tomb, passing through the “grave clothes” and the walls of the tomb. When the angel appeared and opened the door of the tomb, it was to reveal an already empty tomb and to declare the Resurrection. When Peter and John came to the tomb at the announcement of Mary Magdalene, they saw the empty sarcophagus and believed (John 20:6-8).

⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Acts, I, vv. 1, 2.

⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXXVII, 1.

Several years earlier Jesus had angered all those in the Synagogue of Nazareth. They picked Him up, thrust Him out of the city and were about to throw Him off a cliff. But “passing through the midst of them, He went His way” (Luke 4:28-30). This same thing happened on two other occasions also (John 8:59, 10:39). These three incidents imply an ability of Jesus in His pre-Resurrection flesh to do extraordinary things. Irenaeus stated it this way⁹:

“As He was capable of being handled and touched, so again did He, in a non-apprehensible form, pass through the midst of those who sought to injure Him, and entered without impediment through closed doors. As He slept, so did He also rule the sea, the winds, and the storms.”

Even the Twelve experienced this passing through solid objects in some fashion. The Jewish leaders threw them in prison and the prison door was sealed and guarded. An angel “opened the doors” at night and let them out without disturbing the guards or the seal (Acts 5:18-20). When the Sanhedrin directed that the Apostles be brought to them, the messengers found the seals undisturbed and the guards unaware that the Apostles were not there (Acts 5:22-23).

John Chrysostom stated¹⁰ that Jesus chose the time of His appearance to the Ten Apostles very carefully to avoid grief on their part and also to create a longing for His Presence. The testimony of the women had created faith on the part of the Ten.

“Mary reported His appearance and His words, which were enough to comfort them. On hearing these things it was likely that the disciples would either not believe the woman, or if they did, would grieve that He had not counted them worthy of the vision, though He promised to meet them in Galilee. In order that they might not dwell on this in an unsettled state, He didn’t let a single day pass. Having brought them to a state of longing, by their knowledge that He was risen, and by what they heard from the woman, when they were thirsting to see Him, and were greatly afraid, which made their yearning greater. He then presented Himself before them very marvelously.”

“Why did He appear in the ‘evening’? It was probable that they would be especially fearful then. The marvel was that they did not suppose Him to be an apparition; for He entered, ‘when the doors were shut’, and suddenly. The woman beforehand had caused them to have great faith; besides, He showed His face to them clearly. He didn’t come by day in order that all might be collected together. Great was the amazement; for neither did He knock at the door, but all at once stood in their midst, and showed His side and His hands.”

Hilary of Poitiers commented¹¹ on Christ passing through solid walls, going over the details one by one. How did this occur? Hilary was addressing various heretics, whom Hilary called a critic of things invisible. Going over the details of Christ’s appearance, Hilary stated that if these heretics can’t decipher visible things, like Christ passing through solid walls, how could they make any profound statement about invisible things?

“You that would seek into the unsearchable, and in all seriousness form an opinion upon the mysteries and powers of God; I turn to you for counsel, and beg

⁹ Irenaeus, Fragments from the Lost Writings of Irenaeus, 52.

¹⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXXVI, 2.

¹¹ Hilary of Poitiers, On the Trinity, III, 20.

you to enlighten me, an unskilled and simple believer of all that God says. I listen to the Lord's words and, since I believe what is recorded, I am sure that after His Resurrection He offered Himself repeatedly in the Body to the sight of multitudes of unbelievers. He did so to Thomas who had protested that he would not believe unless he handled His wounds. His words are, 'Unless I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe' (John 20:25). The Lord stoops to the level even of our feeble understanding; to satisfy the doubts of unbelieving minds He works a miracle of His invisible power. My critic of the ways of heaven, please explain His action if you can. The disciples were in a closed room; they had met and held their assembly in secret since the Passion of the Lord. The Lord presented Himself to strengthen the faith of Thomas by meeting his challenge; He gives Thomas His Body to feel, His wounds to handle. He, who would be recognized as having suffered wounds, needs to produce the body in which those wounds were received. At what point in the walls of that closed house did the Lord enter bodily. John has recorded the circumstances with careful precision; Jesus came when the doors were shut, and stood in the midst (John 20:26). Did He penetrate through bricks and mortar, or through stout woodwork, substances whose very nature it is to bar progress? For there He stood in bodily presence; there was no suspicion of deceit. Let the eye of your mind follow His path as He enters; let your intellectual vision accompany Him as He passes into that closed dwelling. There is no breach in the walls, no door has been unbarred; yet He stands in the midst, Whose might no barrier can resist. You are a critic of invisible things; I ask you to explain a visible event. Everything remains firm as it was; no body is capable of insinuating itself through the interstices of wood and stone. The Body of the Lord does not disperse itself, to come together again after a disappearance; yet how does He get in, Who is standing in the midst? Your senses and your words are powerless to account for it; the fact is certain, but it lies beyond the region of human explanation. If, as you say, our account of the Divine birth is a lie, then prove that this account of the Lord's entrance is a fiction. If we assume that an event did not happen, because we cannot discover how it was done, we make the limits of our understanding into the limits of reality. But the certainty of the evidence proves your false understanding. The Lord did stand in a closed house in the midst of the disciples; the Son was also born of the Father. Don't deny that He stood in the midst, because your puny wits cannot ascertain how He got in there. Similarly renounce a disbelief in God the Only-begotten and perfect Son of God the Father, which is based only on the incapacity of sense and speech to comprehend the transcendent miracle of that birth."

John of Damascus emphasized¹² that our resurrected bodies will be like that of Christ as He appeared in the Upper Room. It will be similar to our bodies now, except incorruptible.

"It is clear that the resurrection of the Lord was the union of uncorrupted body and soul, for it was these that had been divided at His death. He said, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up' (John 2:19). The Gospel is a trustworthy witness that He spoke of His own body. 'Handle Me and see', the

¹² John of Damascus, Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, IV, 27.

Lord said to His own disciples, when they were thinking that they saw a spirit, ‘that it is I Myself, and that I am not changed; for a spirit does not have not flesh or bones, as you see Me have’ (Luke 24:37-39). When He had said this He showed them His hands and His side, and stretched them forward for Thomas to touch. Is not this sufficient to establish belief in the resurrection of bodies? Paul says, ‘For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality’ (1 Corinthians 15:53). And again, ‘It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown a natural body (that is to say, mortal), it is raised a spiritual body (1 Corinthians 15:42-44). It will be such as was our Lord’s body after the resurrection, which passed through closed doors, was not wearied, had no need of food, sleep, or drink. ‘For they will be’, said the Lord, ‘as the angels of God’ (Matthew 22:30, Luke 20:36); there will no longer be marriage nor procreation of children’. Paul says, ‘For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Lord Jesus, Who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body’ (Philippians 3:20-21). This does not mean a change into another form (God forbid!), but rather the change from corruption into incorruption.”

One of the heretics of Jerome’s day claimed that our resurrected bodies will be aerial and spiritual, quoting Paul, “it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15:44). Jerome answered¹³ with many examples from the Scriptures that showed that our resurrected bodies will be physical, similar to that of Christ’s resurrected body. If Christ’s body was spiritual and airy because He walked through closed doors, then Peter’s body must have been the same also because he walked on water. The key is the person’s faith and not the body type that they had.

“Thomas felt the hands of the risen Lord and beheld His side pierced by the spear (John 20:26-27). Peter saw the Lord standing on the shore (John 21:4) and eating a piece of a roasted fish and a honeycomb (Luke 24:42-43). If He stood, He must certainly have had feet. If He pointed to His wounded side He must have also had chest and belly. If He spoke, He must have used a tongue, palate and teeth. For as the bow strikes the strings to produce vocal sound, so does the tongue come in contact with the teeth. If His hands were touched, He must have had arms as well. Since He had all the members which go to make up the body, He must have had the whole body, and that not a woman’s but a man’s; that is to say, He rose in the sex in which He died. And if you ask, ‘How can a solid and material body enter in through closed doors?’, you shall receive from me this reply. Do not for this matter find fault with belief in the resurrection. This does not prove that His body was spiritual and aerial; He must have had this spiritual body even before He suffered; since, contrary to the nature of heavy bodies, He was able to walk on the sea (Matthew 14:25). The Apostle Peter must have had a spiritual body also, for he walked on the waters too” (Matthew 14:29).

“The true explanation is that when anything is done against nature, it is a revealing of God’s might and power. To show this plainly, he who by faith had walked on water began to sink for the lack of faith and would have done so had

¹³ Jerome, Letter to Eustochium, CVIII, 24-25.

not the Lord lifted him up with the reproving words, ‘O you of little faith why did you doubt?’ (Matthew 14:31) The Lord Himself said, ‘reach here your finger, and behold My hands; and reach here your hand and thrust it into My side; be not faithless but believing’ (John 20:27). And in another place, ‘behold My hands and My feet that it is I myself; handle Me and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see Me have. When he had thus spoken he showed them his hands and his feet (Luke 24:39-40). You hear Him speak of bones and flesh, of feet and hands; and yet you want to palm off on me the bubbles and airy nothings that the stoics rave about!”

“Moreover, if you ask how at what age we shall rise again seeing that we die at different ages; my only answer — an unwelcome one, I fancy — will be in the words of scripture, ‘The judgments of God are a great deep’ (Psalm 36:6), and ‘O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?’ (Romans 11:33-34) No difference of age can really affect the body. Although our frames are in a perpetual flux and lose or gain daily, these changes do not make us different individuals. I was not one person at ten years old, another at thirty and another at fifty; nor am I another now when my whole head is gray¹⁴. According to the traditions of the church and the teaching of the apostle Paul, the answer must be this: we shall rise as perfect men in the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:13). At this age the Jews suppose Adam to have been created and at this age we read that the Lord rose again¹⁵.”

Jerome stated¹⁶ that if we deny Christ’s humanity because He entered through closed doors, we must also deny Peter’s humanity because he walked on water. The proper understanding of our humanity needs a different perspective, such as those who live celibate now, and begin to experience what they will have after the resurrection.

“The substance of our resurrected bodies will certainly be the same as now, though of higher glory. For Christ, after His descent into hell, had the same body in which He was crucified, and He showed the disciples the marks of the nails in His hands and the wound in His side. If we deny the identity of His body because He entered though the closed doors (John 20:19), and this is not a property of human bodies, we must also deny that Peter and the Lord had real bodies because they walked on the water (Matthew 14:28-29), which is contrary to nature.”

“In the resurrection of the dead they will neither marry nor be given in marriage, but will be like the angels’ (Matthew 22:30). What others will then be in heaven, virgins begin to be on earth. If likeness to the angels is promised us, and there is no difference of sex among the angels, we shall either be of no sex as are the angels, or though we rise from the dead in our own sex, we shall not perform the functions of sex.”

¹⁴ Jerome was about 60 years old when he wrote this.

¹⁵ Jesus was about 30 years of age when He began His public ministry (Luke 3:23), which would make Him about 33 years of age at His Resurrection.

¹⁶ Jerome, “Against Jovinianus”, I, 36, Treatises.

The Nail Holes and the Spear Wound

Jesus showed His wounds to His disciples at least twice: once on the evening after the Resurrection, where Thomas was not present, and also a week later when Thomas was present (John 20:20, 27). The first time, the text implies that the disciples just looked at the wounds in open-jaw wonder. The second time, the text implies that Thomas actually touched the cavity of the nail holes, and the gaping hole of the spear wound. The implications of this are that if we will be raised with a body similar to the Lord's, our bodies will also show the scars of our martyrdom. Those martyrs, who were greatly disfigured in the tortures leading to their death, will be recognizable for this atrocity.

Gregory of Nyssa implied¹⁷ that the spear wound was not just a small puncture, but that it was more a deep impaling of Jesus' body.

“Behold Him Whose hands were pierced with nails! Behold Him Whose side was impaled with a spear! Pass your fingers through the print of the nails; thrust your hand into the spear-wound. You can surely guess how deep it is likely the point of the spear would reach, if you reckon the passage inward by the width of the external scar. For the wound that gives admission to a man's hand, shows to what depth within that the iron spearhead entered. If He then has been raised, well may we utter the Apostle's exclamation, ‘How do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?’” (1 Corinthians 15:12)

John Chrysostom pointed out¹⁸ a contradiction to our senses. Christ's body was so light after the Resurrection that it could pass through solid walls; but yet it was also so light before the Resurrection that it could walk on water. It's not that He had a body afterward that was of a different nature; the issue is a faith that can move mountains.

“It is worth inquiring, how an incorruptible body showed the prints of the nails, and was tangible by a mortal hand. Do not be disturbed; what took place was a matter of condescension. That which was so light as to enter in when the doors were shut, was free from all density. This marvel was shown, that the Resurrection might be believed, and that men might know that it was the Crucified One Himself, and that another didn't rise in His place. On this account He arose bearing the signs of the Cross, and on this account He ate. The Apostles everywhere made this a sign of the Resurrection, saying, ‘We ate and drank with Him’ (Acts 10:41). When we see Him walking on the waves before the Crucifixion, we do not say that body is of a different nature, but of our own. So after the Resurrection, when we see Him with the prints of the nails, we will no more say, that he is corruptible. He exhibited these appearances on account of Thomas.”

¹⁷ Gregory of Nyssa, “On the Making of Man”, XXV, 12, Philosophical Works.

¹⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXXVII, 1.

John Chrysostom stated¹⁹ that Thomas was a little slow to return from the dispersion after the Crucifixion, but that Jesus was very kind to him. He waited eight days to increase Thomas' desire to see Him; then He didn't wait for Thomas to ask, but immediately showed His wounds.

“Thomas was guilty of being overly curious and meddlesome. He didn't believe the Apostles when they said, ‘We have seen the Lord’, not so much mistrusting them, as deeming the resurrection from the dead to be impossible. He didn't say, ‘I do not believe you’, but, ‘Except I put my hand in the print of the nails — I will not believe’ (John 20:25). Why was it, that when everyone was collected together, he alone was absent? Probably after the dispersion, which had recently taken place, he had not returned even then. When you see the unbelief of the disciple, consider the loving-kindness of the Lord. For the sake of a single soul, He showed Himself with His wounds, and came in order to save even the one. Thomas sought proof, and would not even trust his own eyes. He didn't say, ‘Except I see’, but, ‘Except I handle’, in case what he saw might be an apparition. Yet the disciples, who told him these things, were at the time worthy of credit; yet, since he desired more, Christ did not deprive him even of this.”

“And why did Jesus not appear to him immediately, instead of ‘after eight days’? (John 20:26) In order that being continually instructed by the disciples, and hearing the same thing, he might be inflamed to more eagerly desire, and to be more ready to believe for the future. But how did he know that Jesus' side had been opened? From having heard it from the disciples. How then did he believe only partly? Because this thing was very strange and wonderful! Observe the truthfulness of the disciples, how they hide no faults, their own faults or others”.

“Jesus again presented Himself to them, and didn't wait to be requested by Thomas, but before he had spoken, fulfilled his desire; showing that even when he spoke those words to the disciples, He was present. He used the same words, and in a manner conveying a sharp rebuke, and instruction for the future. Having said, ‘Reach here your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand, and thrust it into My side’; He added, ‘And be not faithless, but believing’ (John 20:27). Do you see that his doubt proceeded from unbelief? This was before he had received the Spirit; after that, it was no longer so.”

When the Lord rebuked²⁰ Thomas, He said, “Because you have seen Me you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29). Chrysostom added,

“For this is of faith, to receive things not seen, since, ‘faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen’ (Hebrews 11:1). He pronounces blessed not the disciples only, but those also who after them should believe”.

Peace Be With You

There is considerable more depth to the establishing of peace as taught by Christ and the Apostles than we might initially understand. It was used to establish all the Churches; it is

¹⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXXVII, 1.

²⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXXVII, 1.

present even during tribulation; all the Apostles started their letters with peace; and this Apostolic greeting has been incorporated into the Liturgy from the beginning.

Jesus used the greeting “Peace Be With You” a number of times in different contexts. One use is an Apostolic greeting; its first use was by the angels as they “evangelized” the shepherds, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!” (Luke 2:14). The first time Jesus used this greeting was in instructing the Twelve and the Seventy as they were sent out two-by-two to evangelize Judea and vicinity. The peace of God came on the houses where the Apostles stayed, so long as the households were worthy (Matthew 10:13, Luke 10:5-6). Paul, Peter and John used this same Apostolic greeting at the beginning²¹ of most of the letters that they wrote.

In another context, just before the Crucifixion, Jesus spoke to His disciples about leaving His peace with them after He returns to the Father (John 14:27). He spoke to them at length that they might have peace, even though they might have tribulation in the world (John 16:33). His greeting, “Peace be with you” in the Upper Room on the evening following the Resurrection illustrates the Peace of God. After greeting the disciples with peace, Jesus said, “As the Father has sent Me, I also send you” (John 20:19).

Peace was also the operating theme in all the Churches that were founded by the Apostles using the Apostolic greeting. Paul said, “The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men. Therefore let us pursue the things, which make for peace” (Romans 14:17-19). And also, “For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints” (1 Corinthians 14:33). Peter stated this also, “Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless” (2 Peter 3:14). The result is that “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7).

Another context of the peace of God is at the working of miracles, since this is a touching of the work of the Churches. For example, to the woman who touched the hem of His cloak, Jesus said, “Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction” (Mark 5:34). To the woman who washed His feet with her tears and dried them with her hair, Jesus said, “Your faith has saved you. Go in peace” (Luke 7:50). In each of these contexts, it is the same Peace of God that is expressed in different ways.

This same greeting has been used in the Liturgy of the Church since the 1st Century, where the priest says, “Peace be to all”. The congregation responds with, “And with your spirit”. As such it is an Apostolic greeting, coming from the Bishops of the Church, who have inherited the role of the Apostles. It is the operating theme of the Churches, and it is what Christ has left with us when He returned to the Father. When we touch peace, we touch the work of the Churches throughout the world.

²¹ See Romans 1:7, 1 Corinthians 1:3, 2 Corinthians 1:2, Galatians 1:3, Ephesians 1:2, 6:23, Philippians 1:2, Colossians 1:2, 1 Thessalonians 1:1, 2 Thessalonians 1:2, 3:16, 1 Timothy 1:2, 2 Timothy 1:2, Titus 1:4, Philemon 3, 1 Peter 1:2, 5:14, 2 Peter 1:2, 3:14, 2 John 3, Hebrews 13:20, Revelation 1:4.

John Chrysostom stated²² that while each nation used to have its own angel, now each believer has his own angel. As a result, when we pray, we ask for the angel of peace, just like the Apostles did, to prepare the way for love. The makers and producers of peace are rightly then called “sons of God”. If we don’t cultivate peace, we fight against God. When the Bishop or Presbyterian pronounces the Peace, “Peace be to all”, and we answer, “And to your spirit”, it is monstrous if we are feuding with our brother when we say this.

“When we give thanks, we say, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to men’ (Luke 2:14). ‘Good will’ (Ephesians 2:14) is reconciliation. No longer is heaven a wall of partition. At first the angels were numbered according to the number of the nations (Deuteronomy 32:8 LXX); but now, they are numbered according to the number of believers. How is this evident? Hear Christ saying, ‘See that you don’t despise one of these little ones, for their angels always see the face of My Father which is in heaven’ (Matthew 18:10). For each believer has an angel; even from the beginning, every one of those that were approved had his angel, as Jacob says, ‘The Angel that feeds me, and delivers me from all evils’ (Genesis 48:15-16 LXX). If then we have angels, let us be sober, as though we were in the presence of tutors; for there is a demon present also. Therefore we pray, asking for the angel of peace, and everywhere we ask for peace, for there is nothing equal to this. Peace in the Churches, in the prayers, in the supplications, in the greetings. Many times, the priest, who presides over the Church, gives it, ‘Peace be to you’. Why? Because this is the Mother of all good things; this is the foundation of joy. Therefore Christ commanded the Apostles on entering the houses immediately to say this, as being a sort of symbol of the good things. He said, ‘When you come to the houses, say, “Peace be to you”; for where this is lacking, everything is useless. To His disciples Christ said, ‘Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you’ (John 14:27). This prepares the way for love. He that presides over the Church, says not just, ‘Peace be to you’, but ‘Peace be to all’. For what if with this man we have peace, but with another, we have war and fighting? What is the point? In the human body, if some of its members are at rest and others are in a state of fighting, it is not possible that health should ever be gained. This is only possible when all members are in good order, in harmony and peace. In our minds, unless all our thoughts are at rest, peace will not exist. So great a good is peace, that the makers and producers of it are called the sons of God (Matthew 5:9, 45), with reason. For this cause the Son of God came on the earth, to set at peace the things in the earth, and those in the heavens. But if the peacemakers are the sons of God, the makers of disturbance are sons of the devil.”

“When you intend to fight against your brother, remember that you are fighting against the members of Christ, and cease from your madness. But what if he is an outcast or vile or open to contempt? Jesus said, ‘It is not the will of My Father that one of these little ones should perish’ (Matthew 18:14). And again, ‘Their angels always see the face of My Father which is in heaven (Matthew 18:10). God for his sake and yours became a servant, and was slain; do you consider Him to be nothing? Surely in this respect also you fight against God, in that you deliver a judgment contrary to His. When he that presides over the

²² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Colossians, III, vv. 19-20.

Church comes in, he immediately says, 'Peace be to all'; when he preaches, 'Peace be to all'; when he blesses, 'Peace be to all'; when he greets, 'Peace be to all'; when the Sacrifice is finished, 'Peace be to all'; and again, in the middle, 'Grace to you and peace'. How then is it not monstrous if, while hearing so many times that we are to have peace, we are in a state of feud with each other; and receiving peace at the Liturgy, and giving it back, we are at war with him that gives it to us? You reply in the Liturgy, 'And to your spirit'. Do you mean to betray him outside the Church? Woe to the one that makes the majestic usages of the Church to become mere forms, and not truth. Woe to the one that makes the watchwords of this army proceed no farther than to be just words. You are ignorant of the source of the words, 'Peace be to all'. Hear what follows, what Christ said; 'And into whatever city or village you shall enter, as you enter into the house, greet it; and if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you' (Matthew 10:11-13). We are therefore ignorant, because we look upon this merely as a figure of speech, and we do not agree to the words in our minds. Do I give the Peace? It is Christ who condescends to speak by us! Even if we are void of grace at all other times, yet are we not when we preside at the Liturgy, for your sakes. If the Grace of God worked in a donkey and a diviner²³, for the advantage of Israel (Numbers 22), it is quite clear that it will not refuse to operate even in us."

John Chrysostom also noted²⁴ that the Peace Christ brought was what He had told them about earlier. To the men, this meant consolation in their truce less war with the Jewish leaders; to the women, this meant joy in their sorrow.

"By His Voice He smoothed their tossing thought, by saying, 'Peace be to you' (John 20:19). That is, 'Do not be troubled'; at the same time reminding them of the word which He spoke to them before the Crucifixion, 'My peace I leave to you' (John 14:27); and again, 'In Me you have peace, but in the world you shall have tribulation'" (John 16:33).

"The result was, 'Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord' (John 20:20). Do you see the words issuing into deeds? For what He said before the Crucifixion, that 'I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man can take from you' (John 16:22). This He now accomplished in deed; but all these things led them to a most exact faith. Since they had a truce less war with the Jews, He continually repeated, 'Peace be to you', giving them the consolation to counterbalance the war. And so this was the first word²⁵ that He spoke to them after the Resurrection, and to women He gave good news of joy, because that sex was in sorrow. Therefore He gave good news suitable to each person: to men, peace, because of their war; to women, joy, because of their sorrow. Then having put away all painful things, He told of the success of the

²³ That is, the false prophet Balaam.

²⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXXVI, 3.

²⁵ Chrysostom noted that Paul continually said, "Grace be to you and peace". See for example Romans 1:7, 1 Corinthians 1:3, 2 Corinthians 1:2, Galatians 1:3, Ephesians 1:2, Philippians 1:2, Colossians 1:2, 1 Thessalonians 1:1, 2 Thessalonians 1:2, 1 Timothy 1:2, 2 Timothy 1:2, Titus 1:4, Philemon 1:3. Peter, John and Jude did the same; see 1 Peter 1:2, 2 Peter 1:2, 2 John 1:3, Jude 1:2.

Cross, and this was the ‘peace’. ‘Since all hindrances have been removed’, He said, ‘and I have made My victory glorious, all has been achieved’”.

Christ’s Sending Out the Apostles

On the evening of the Resurrection, when Jesus appeared to the Ten Apostles in the Upper Room, He said to them a second time, “Peace to you!” Then He said, “As the Father has sent Me, I also send you” (John 20:21). John Chrysostom stated²⁶ that the authority to forgive and retain sins was like a king sending out governors, who have power to cast into prison and to deliver from it. In sending out the Apostles, Christ invests them with the same power.

Tertullian stated²⁷ that Christ sent His Apostles off on their missionary journeys as masters and teachers, where they were not ignorant of anything.

“What man of sound mind can possibly suppose that the Apostles were ignorant of anything, whom the Lord ordained to be masters, keeping them inseparable from Himself in their attendance, in their discipleship, in their society. When they were alone, He used to expound all things (Mark 4:34), which were obscure, telling them that ‘to them it was given to know those mysteries’ (Matthew 13:11), which it was not permitted the people to understand. Was anything withheld from the knowledge of Peter, who is called ‘the rock on which the church should be built’ (Matthew 16:18), who also obtained ‘the keys of the kingdom of heaven’, with the power of ‘loosing and binding in heaven and on earth?’ (Matthew 16:19) Was anything concealed from John, the Lord’s most beloved disciple, who used to lean on His chest (John 21:20) and to whom alone the Lord pointed Judas out as the traitor (John 13:25-26), and to whom He commended Mary as if he were her son in His place? (John 19:26-27) Of what could He have meant those to be ignorant, to whom He even exhibited His own glory with Moses and Elijah, and the Father’s voice from heaven? (Matthew 17:1-8) He didn’t disapprove of all the rest, but because ‘by three witnesses must every word be established’ (Deuteronomy 19:15, 2 Corinthians 13:1). Similarly after His Resurrection, as they were journeying together, ‘He expounded all the Scriptures to them’ (Luke 24:27). No doubt He had once said, ‘I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now’ (John 16:12); but even then He added, ‘When He, the Spirit of truth, shall come, He will lead you into all truth’ (John 16:13). He thus shows that there was nothing of which they were ignorant, to whom He had promised the future attainment of all truth by help of the Spirit of truth. And assuredly He fulfilled His promise, since it is proved in the Acts of the Apostles that the Holy Spirit did come down.”

Thomas’ Missionary Journeys

Thomas remained in Jerusalem with the rest of the Twelve for about one year. He was present with the other eleven for the ordination of the first seven deacons (Acts 6:2ff). After the

²⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXXVI, 3.

²⁷ Tertullian, The Prescription Against Heretics, II, I, 22.

death of Stephen, in the first year after Pentecost²⁸, the Twelve as a group are not mentioned anymore. Some of the Apostles (Acts 8:1) remained in Jerusalem while many others were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the Word. Some of those who were scattered went to Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch (Acts 11:19ff). This will be covered on the 5th Sunday of Pascha. Prior to the death of Stephen, the Apostles had divided up the known world into different regions, and then drawn lots to determine who would go where. Thomas had drawn the lot for India; he left for his missionary journeys to that region shortly after the death of Stephen.

At first, Thomas was dismayed to have to go to such a savage people, but the Lord appeared to him in a vision strengthening him and commanding him to be brave. Accounts²⁹ of Thomas' life suggest that he raised up churches all along the land route to India: Persia, Hyrcania, Parthia, Caramania, Bactria, etc. But most of the accounts of his life concentrate on what happened in India. In later centuries, many churches in this region traced their history to Thomas. One of the first things³⁰ that Thomas did was to send Thaddeus of the Seventy to heal King Abgar of Edessa (Mesopotamia) of leprosy and to baptize him and raise up churches in that area.

Thomas is most widely known for raising up a number of churches on the East and West coast of India. Many miraculous events occurred also, similar to those we see in the Scripture connected with Peter, John and Paul. For example³¹, at one time one of the local pagan priests murdered his own son and blamed Thomas for the murder. The whole city was aroused against Thomas because of this and no one could be found to speak in Thomas' defense. Thomas proceeded to raise the priest's son from the dead to testify against his father. Seeing this, the whole crowd cried out, "Great is the God whom Thomas proclaims!" And great multitudes of people were baptized.

Toward the end of Thomas' life³² in the mid 60s AD, a relative of the queen of one region heard Thomas teaching the poor folk and believed. She then converted the queen and the queen's cousin. The three women concluded that they could no longer participate in the idolatrous practices of their husbands and began to live a celibate life. The king was furious and began torturing Thomas by making him stand on red hot plates. When that had no effect, he

²⁸ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, December 27 states that the death of Stephen occurred exactly one year after Pentecost. Demetrius of Rostov, The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints, tr. Fr Thomas Marretta, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 2000, December 27 states that the death of Stephen occurred on December 27th in the year following Pentecost; this is about 9 months after Pentecost.

²⁹ Holy Apostles Convent, The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church, October 6, p. 109.

Thomas Merretta, tr., Demetrius of Rostov, The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 2000, October 6, p. 106.

Roberts and Donaldson, ed., "Acts of the Holy Apostle Thomas", Apocrypha of the New Testament, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 8, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1995, p. 535.

Each of the above three references presents a similar account of the life of the Apostle Thomas.

³⁰ For many references to this work in Edessa, See Mark Kern, The Apostle Thomas, St Athanasius Press, 2003.

³¹ Isaac Lambertsen, The Lives of the Holy Apostles, Holy Apostles Convent Press, Buena Vista, CO, p. 198. This reference draws from both the Great Synaxaristes (Greek) and from Demetrius of Rostov (Russian).

³² Roberts and Donaldson, ed., "Acts of the Holy Apostle Thomas, remaining Chapters", Apocrypha of the New Testament, Ante Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

threw Thomas into a furnace. That had no effect either so he had his soldiers take Thomas outside the city and run him through with lances; and so Thomas was martyred. This area of the gravesite of Thomas in India is a modern tourist attraction today, even though Thomas' body was later moved to Edessa in Persia.

A few years later³³, the king who ordered Thomas' execution had a son who became demon-possessed and was healed by the Christians that Thomas had established. At this the king himself repented, was baptized and was restored to his relationship with his queen.

Some apocryphal literature has grown up claiming Thomas as its source. Some of this literature is entirely bogus and was highly criticized³⁴ by the early Church Fathers; others give some interesting details of Thomas' life, where the above represents just a brief snapshot.

A Christian community (1.5 million as of the 1930's) still exists³⁵ in India that traces its roots to Thomas. Other Christians in China and Tibet do also. Most probably Thomas never got as far as China and Tibet, being martyred on the East coast of India in the Coromandel Coast area, but some of Thomas' disciples may have evangelized China and Tibet.

³³ Roberts and Donaldson, ed., "Acts of the Holy Apostle Thomas, remaining Chapters", Apocrypha of the New Testament, Ante Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

³⁴ For example, see Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, IV, 36, VI, 31 and Eusebius, Church History, III, 25.

³⁵ Thurston and Attwater, Butler's Lives of the Saints, Christian Classics, Westminster, MD, 1990, December 21

Christ Breathing on the Apostles

Some of the mysteries Church are associated with Christ breathing on His disciples. Why did He do it? What are the implications? How does this fit with the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost? Everything that Christ did in His humanity was for our benefit, but much of this is not very well appreciated within Christianity today.

When Jesus appeared to His disciples in the Upper Room on the evening following the Resurrection, He said to them a second time, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” And when He had said this, He breathed on *them*, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the *sins* of any, they are retained’” (John 20:20-23). What does this breathing on them mean? In both Hebrew and Greek, the word for breath also means “spirit”. But if they received the Holy Spirit in the Upper Room, what did they receive at Pentecost with the tongues of fire?

John Chrysostom stated³⁶ that Jesus breathed on His disciples in the Upper Room, saying, “Receive the Holy Spirit” to prepare them to receive Him at Pentecost. The consolation would not have been as great if the Holy Spirit came earlier, and the greater matters of teaching were reserved for the Holy Spirit.

“Why did the Holy Spirit come to them, not while Christ was present, nor even immediately after his departure, but ten days³⁷ after His departure? And how was it, if the Spirit had not yet come, that He said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit?’ (John 20:22) This was to render them capable and fit for His reception. For if Daniel passed out at the sight of an angel (Daniel 8:17), much more would these when about to receive so great a grace.”

“But why had the Holy Spirit not yet come? It was fit that they should first be brought to have a longing desire for that event, and so receive the grace. For this reason Christ Himself departed, and then the Spirit descended. For had He Himself been there, they would not have expected the Spirit so eagerly as they did. Because of this, He didn’t come immediately after Christ’s Ascension, but after ten days. It is the same with us also; our desires towards God are most raised, when we stand in need. Accordingly, John the Baptist chose that time to send his disciples to Christ when felt their need of Jesus, during his own imprisonment. Besides, it was proper that our human nature should be seen in heaven, and that the reconciliation should be perfected, and then the Spirit should come, and the joy should be elation. For, if the Spirit had already come, Christ then departed, and the Spirit remained, the consolation would not have been so great as it was. For in fact they clung to Him, and could not bear to part with Him; to comfort them He said, ‘It is expedient for you that I go away’ (John 16:7). On this account He also waited during those intermediate days, that they might first be despondent for a while, and be made to feel their need of Him, and then reap a full and elated delight. But if the Spirit were inferior to the Son, the consolation would not have been adequate; and how could He have said, ‘It is

³⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Acts, I, vv. 1, 2.

³⁷ That is, Christ ascended on the fortieth day, the Spirit descended “when the day of Pentecost”, that is, the fiftieth, “was fully come” (Acts 2:1).

expedient for you?’ For this reason the greater matters of teaching were reserved for the Spirit, that the disciples might not imagine Him inferior.”

Cyril of Jerusalem stated³⁸ that the disciples could not contain much of the Holy Spirit when Christ breathed on them in the Upper Room. They received the Holy Spirit in part, when Jesus breathed on them; at Pentecost, they were clothed with the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

“Christ bestowed on the Apostles the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. For it is written, ‘When He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit: whichever sins you forgive, they are forgiven; and whichever sins you retain, they are retained’ (John 20:22-23). This was the second time He breathed on man, where His first breath (Genesis 2:7) was stifled through willful sins; that the Scripture might be fulfilled, ‘He went up breathing upon your face, and delivering you from affliction’ (Nahum 2:1 LXX). The occasion of His going up was from Hades; for thus the Gospel relates, that after His resurrection³⁹ He breathed on them. But though He bestowed His grace then, He was to lavish it yet more bountifully. He said to them, ‘I am ready to give it even now, but the vessel cannot yet hold it; for a while therefore receive as much grace as you can bear; and look forward to yet more; but ‘wait in the city of Jerusalem until you are clothed with power from on high’ (Luke 24:49). Receive it in part now; then, you shall wear it in its fullness. For he who receives, often possesses the gift in part; but he who is clothed, is completely enfolded by his robe. ‘Fear not the weapons and darts of the devil; for you shall carry with you the power of the Holy Spirit’ (Ephesians 6:16, Acts 1:8). But remember what was recently said, that the Holy Spirit is not divided, but only the grace which is given by Him.”

John Chrysostom stated⁴⁰ that there are different aspects regarding what the Twelve Apostles received when Jesus breathed on them: whether they received the Holy Spirit then and again on Pentecost. They received the authority to forgive and retain sins then in the Upper Room, which prepared them to receive the power to work miracles on Pentecost.

“Why did Jesus say, ‘If I don’t go away, the Holy Spirit will not come’ (John 16:7), and yet He gives them the Holy Spirit when He breathes on them? Some say that He didn’t give the Spirit, but rendered them fit to receive It, by breathing on them. If Daniel when he saw an Angel was afraid, what would they have suffered when they received that unspeakable Gift, unless He had first made them learners? Therefore He didn’t say, ‘You have received the Holy Spirit’, but, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’”.

“Yet one will not be wrong in asserting that they received some spiritual power and grace at that time; not to raise the dead, or to work miracles, but to forgive sins. For the gifts of the Spirit are of different kinds; therefore He added, ‘Whichever sins you forgive, they are forgiven to them’ (John 20:23), showing what kind of power He was giving. But in the other case, after forty days, they

³⁸ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XVII, 12.

³⁹ That is, after His death, Christ descended into Hades before rising from the dead. For more information on Christ’s Descent into Hades, see the Study for Holy Saturday.

⁴⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXXVI, 3.

received the power of working miracles. Therefore He said, ‘You shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea’ (Acts 1:8). Witnesses they became by means of miracles, for unspeakable is the grace of the Spirit and the gift takes many forms. This came to pass, that you may learn that the gift and the power of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, is One. For things, which appear to be peculiar to the Father, are seen also to belong to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.”

John Chrysostom stated⁴¹ that not everyone cast out demons by the Holy Spirit prior to the Crucifixion; the Twelve did so by the power Christ temporarily gave them. The Old Testament Prophets worked by means of the Holy Spirit, but this grace was taken away just before the Crucifixion, and there have been no prophets in Israel since. From the time that Christ breathed the Holy Spirit on His disciples, a new grace has been given and He has been given abundantly.

“How did the Prophets prophesy and work those ten thousand wonders? For the Apostles did not cast out demons by the Spirit, but by power received from Him; as He said Himself, ‘If I by Beelzebub cast out demons, by whom do your children cast them out?’ (Matthew 12:27) And this He said, signifying that before the Crucifixion not everyone cast out demons by the Holy Spirit, but some did so by the power received from Him. So when He was about to send them out on their missionary journeys, He said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’ (John 20:22); and again, ‘The Holy Spirit came upon them’ (Acts 19:6), and then they worked miracles. But when He was sending them out two by two, the Scripture does not say that ‘He gave to them the Holy Spirit’, but that He gave to them ‘power’, saying, ‘Cleanse the lepers, cast out demons, raise the dead, freely you have received, freely give’ (Matthew 10:1, 8). But in the case of the Prophets, everyone agrees that the Gift was that of the Holy Spirit. But this Grace was stopped and departed and failed from the earth, from the day in which it was said, ‘Your house is left to you desolate’ (Matthew 23:38). Even before that day its scarcity had begun, for there was no longer any prophet among them, nor did Grace visit their holy things. Since then the Holy Spirit had been withheld, but was for the future to be poured out abundantly. The beginning of this imparting was after the Crucifixion, not only regarding its abundance, but also regarding the increased greatness of the gifts. For the Gift was more marvelous than expected, as when It said, ‘You don’t know what Spirit you are of’ (Luke 9:55); and again, ‘You have not received the Spirit of bondage, but the Spirit of adoption’ (Romans 8:15). The men of old possessed the Spirit themselves, but did not impart It to others, while the Apostles filled tens of thousands with It. Since then they were to receive this Gift, but It was not yet given, for this cause he added, ‘The Holy Spirit was not yet given because Jesus was not yet glorified’”.

John of Damascus pointed out⁴² the relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is like the ray and radiance from the sun. The sun is the source; the ray transmits the radiation to us; and the radiance is the warmth we feel. The sun (the Father) is the source

⁴¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LI, 2.

⁴² John of Damascus, Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, I, 8.

of both the ray and the radiance (the Son and the Holy Spirit). Through the ray (the Son), the radiance (the Holy Spirit) is given to us. When Christ breathed on His disciples and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit", this was the ray transmitting the radiance to us.

"The Father is one Father and without beginning, that is, without cause; for He is not derived from anything. The Son is one Son, but with beginning, that is, with cause; for He is derived from the Father. If you eliminate the idea of a beginning from time, He is also without beginning; for the Creator of times cannot be subject to time. The Holy Spirit is one Spirit, going forth from the Father, not in the manner of the Son but by procession. Neither has the Father lost His property of being un-begotten because He has begotten, nor has the Son lost His property of being begotten because He was begotten of that, which was un-begotten, nor does the Spirit change either into the Father or into the Son because He has proceeded from and is God. For a property is constant. How could a property persist if it were variable, moveable, and could change into something else? If the Father is the Son, He is not strictly the Father; for there is strictly one Father. If the Son is the Father, He is not strictly the Son; for there is strictly one Son and one Holy Spirit. Further, it should be understood that we do not speak of the Father as derived from anyone, but we speak of Him as the Father of the Son. We do not speak of the Son as Cause or Father, but we speak of Him both as from the Father, and as the Son of the Father. We speak likewise of the Holy Spirit as from the Father, and call Him the Spirit of the Father. We do not speak of the Spirit as from the Son; but yet we call Him the Spirit of the Son. 'If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His' (Romans 8:9). We confess that He is revealed and imparted to us through the Son. For He breathed on His Disciples, and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit' (John 20:22). It is just the same as in the case of the sun from which come both the ray and the radiance, for the sun itself is the source of both the ray and the radiance. It is through the ray that the radiance is given to us, and it is the radiance itself by which we are lightened and in which we participate. Further we do not speak of the Son of the Spirit, or of the Son as derived from the Spirit."

Athanasius of Alexandria wrote⁴³ that when Christ, the Word, assumed human flesh, His humanity was inferior to the Holy Spirit, and He was therefore anointed with the Spirit. We partake of that anointing in Him, and this is what the Apostles received when Jesus breathed on them. Christ's Divinity didn't change when He took on human flesh; in His Divinity, He gave the Holy Spirit; in His humanity, He received the Holy Spirit. We are the ones who needed the Spirit's grace for our sanctification, and who were enabled to receive It, when the Word became man. Because the Spirit anointed him in the flesh, His flesh was first sanctified (John 17:19); we have the result of the Spirit's grace, receiving 'out of His fullness'.

"If for our sake Christ sanctified Himself, and He did this when He had become man, it is very plain that the Spirit's descent on Him in the Jordan was a descent upon us, because of His bearing our body. It did not take place to promote the Word, but for our sanctification, that we might share His anointing, and of us it might be said, 'Do you not know that you are God's Temple, and the

⁴³ Athanasius of Alexandria, Four Discourses Against the Arians, I, xii, 47, 48, 50.

Spirit of God dwells in you?’ (1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:19) When the Lord, as man, was washed in the Jordan, it was we who were washed in Him and by Him. When He received the Spirit, we it was who by Him were made recipients of It. For this reason, He was anointed with oil, not as Aaron, David or the rest, but in another way above all His fellows, ‘with the oil of gladness’ (Psalm 45:7, Hebrews 1:9). He Himself interprets this to be the Spirit, saying, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me’ (Isaiah 61:1, Luke 4:18); as also, ‘God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 10:38). These things were spoken of Him when He came in the flesh, was baptized in Jordan, and the Spirit descended on Him. The Lord Himself said, ‘The Spirit shall take of Mine’ (John 16:14); and ‘I will send Him’ (John 16:7); and to His disciples, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’ (John 20:22). Christ, as the Word and Radiance of the Father, gives to others; He is said to be sanctified, because He has become man, and the Body that is sanctified is His. From Him we have begun to receive the unction and the seal. John said, ‘you have an anointing from the Holy One’ (1 John 2:20); and Paul, ‘you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise’” (Ephesians 1:13).

“What advancement was it to the Immortal to have assumed the mortal? What promotion is it to the Everlasting to have put on the temporal? What reward can be great to the Everlasting God and King in the bosom of the Father? This was done because of us and for us, that us, who are mortal, the Lord might make immortal, and bring into the everlasting kingdom of heaven. For when our Lord Jesus Christ had been among us, we indeed were promoted, as rescued from sin. He is the same; He didn’t alter when He became man. As has been written, ‘The Word of God abides forever’ (Isaiah 40:8 LXX). Surely, before His becoming man, He dispensed to the saints the Spirit as His own; so also when made man, He sanctifies all by the Spirit and says to His Disciples, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’ He gave to Moses and the other Seventy⁴⁴; and through Him David prayed to the Father, saying, ‘Take not Your Holy Spirit from me’” (Psalm 51:11).

“On the other hand, when made man, He said, ‘I will send to you the Helper, the Spirit of truth’ (John 15:26); and He sent Him, the Word of God being faithful. Therefore ‘Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever’ (Hebrews 13:8), remaining unalterable, and at the same time gives and receives, giving as God’s Word, receiving as man. It is not the Word then, viewed as the Word that is promoted, for He has always had all things. When He is anointed in a human respect, it is us who in Him are anointed; also when He is baptized, it is us who in Him are baptized. On all these things the Savior throws much light, when He says to the Father, ‘And the glory which You gave Me, I have given to them, that they may be one, even as We are one’ (John 17:22). Because of us then He asked for glory, and the words occur, ‘took’ and ‘gave’ and ‘highly exalted,’ that we might take, and to us might be given, and we might be exalted in Him; as also for us He sanctifies Himself, that we might be sanctified in Him.”

“What is there to wonder at if the Lord, who gives the Spirit, is said Himself to be anointed with the Spirit, at a time when He did not refuse with respect of His manhood to call Himself inferior to the Spirit? The Jews said that He cast out demons by Beelzebub; He answered them, for the exposure of their

⁴⁴ That is, Moses’ Seventy elders as opposed to the Seventy Apostles (Like 10:1-20).

blasphemy, ‘But if I through the Spirit of God cast out demons’ (Matthew 12:28). The Giver of the Spirit says that He cast out demons by the Spirit; this is said, only because of His flesh. Since man’s nature is not equal of itself to casting out demons, but only by the power of the Spirit, therefore as man He said, ‘But if I through the Spirit of God cast out demons’. He signified also that the blasphemy offered to the Holy Spirit is greater than that against His humanity, when He said, ‘Whoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him’ (Matthew 12:32). Such were those who said, ‘is not this the carpenter’s son?’ (Matthew 13:55) But they who blaspheme against the Holy Spirit, and ascribe the deeds of the Word to the devil, shall have inevitable punishment. This is what the Lord spoke to the Jews, as man; but to the disciples showing His Godhead and His majesty, and intimating that He was equal to the Spirit. He gave the Spirit and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’ (John 20:22), and ‘I will send Him’, and ‘He shall glorify Me’, and ‘Whatever He hears, that He shall speak’ (John 16:7, 13, 14). In this place the Lord Himself, the Giver of the Spirit, does not refuse to say that through the Spirit He casts out demons, as man. ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me’ (Isaiah 61:1) applies with respect to His having become flesh. We are the ones who need the Spirit’s grace in our sanctification, and who are unable to cast out demons without the Spirit’s power. When were we enabled to receive It, except when the Word became man? As John shows above, we would not have been redeemed and highly exalted, had not He who exists in the form of God taken a servant’s form. There was no other way that we could have partaken of the Spirit⁴⁵ and been sanctified, except that the Giver of the Spirit, the Word Himself, had spoken of Himself as anointed with the Spirit for us (Psalm 45:7 LXX). Therefore we have securely received it, He being said to be anointed in the flesh; for the flesh being first sanctified in Him (John 17:19), and He, as man, receiving It, we have the result of the Spirit’s grace, receiving ‘out of His fullness’” (John 1:16).

Ambrose of Milan spoke⁴⁶ of the three persons of the Trinity working together, where each person is Light. The Father is the Fount of Light and the Son is the Light and the Son

⁴⁵ Athanasius’ argument, found in others of the Fathers, is this: Our Lord became an “instrumental cause”, as it may be called, of the life of each individual Christian. One might object that there is no connection between the sanctification of Christ’s manhood and ours. How does it prove that human nature is sanctified because one specimen of it was sanctified in Him? See also John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXXII, 5. Chrysostom said, “It is necessary to understand the marvel of the Mysteries, what it is, why it was given, and what is the benefit of the action. We become one Body, and ‘members of His flesh and of His bones’ (Ephesians 5:30). In order that we may become this not by love only, but in deed, let us be blended into that flesh. This is affected by the food, which He has freely given us, desiring to show the love, which He has for us. On this account He has mixed up Himself with us; He has kneaded up His body with ours, that we might be One Thing, like a body joined to a head”, John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XLVI, 3. Gregory of Nyssa stated, “it is like we have been fed poison through the Fall. The antidote to the poison is the Body and Blood of Christ, and it needs to be consumed to be effective”, Gregory of Nyssa, The Great Catechism, Chapter 37. In all this, nothing material is implied; the mixture of His flesh with ours is a mystical connection that is explained by using similitude. This viewpoint is different from many in the West, where the Lord’s Table is not even considered important.

⁴⁶ Ambrose, On the Holy Spirit, I, xiv, 160-165.

conveys the Light of the Holy Spirit when He says, “Receive the Holy Spirit”. The Holy Spirit is not only Light, but also Fire, such as at the Burning Bush.

“The Father is Light; so too, the Son is Light and the Holy Spirit is Light? Which certainly pertains to the power of God. As John said, ‘For God is Light, and in Him is no darkness’” (1 John 1:5).

“But the Son, too, is Light, because ‘the Life was the Light of men’ (John 1:4). John, that he might show that he was speaking of the Son of God, says of John the Baptist, ‘He was not light, but was sent to be a witness of the Light. That was the true Light, which lights every man that comes into this world’ (John 1:8-9). So then, since God is Light and the Son of God is the true Light, without doubt the Son of God is true God.”

“And you find elsewhere that the Son of God is Light, ‘The people that sat in darkness and in the shadow of death have seen a great Light’ (Isaiah 9:2 LXX). What is still more clear, it is said, ‘For with You is the fountain of Life, and in Your Light we shall see Light’ (Psalm 36:9 LXX). This means that with You, O God the Father Almighty, Who are the Fountain of Life, in Your Son Who is the Light, we shall see the Light of the Holy Spirit. As the Lord Himself shows saying, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’ (John 20:22), and elsewhere, ‘Power went out from Him’” (Luke 6:19, 8:46).

“But who can doubt that the Father is Light, when we read of His Son that He is the Brightness of Eternal Light? For of Whom but of the Father is the Son the Brightness, Who both is always with the Father, and always shines with the same radiance.”

“Isaiah shows that the Holy Spirit is not only Light but also Fire, saying, ‘And the light of Israel shall be for a fire’ (Isaiah 10:17). So the prophets called Him a burning Fire, because we see more intensely the majesty of the Godhead; since (1) to sanctify is of the Godhead, (2) to illuminate is the property of fire and light, and (3) the Godhead tends to be pointed out or seen in the appearance of fire. ‘For our God is a consuming Fire’ (Deuteronomy 4:24), as Moses said.”

“For he himself saw the fire in the bush, and had heard God when the voice from the flame of fire came to him saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’ (Exodus 3:6). The voice came from the fire, and the voice was in the bush, and the fire did no harm. For the bush was burning but was not consumed, because in that mystery the Lord was showing that He would come to illuminate the thorns of our body, and not to consume those who were in misery, but to alleviate their misery. He would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with Fire (Matthew 3:11), that He might give grace and destroy sin. So in the symbol of fire God keeps His intention.”

Forgiving and Retaining Sins

In the Upper Room after the Resurrection, Jesus breathed on His disciples and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the *sins* of any, they are retained” (John 20:22-23). How does this forgiving and retaining work? The Scribes and Pharisees thought Jesus blasphemed when He forgave the paralytic his sins (Luke 5:21), thinking that only God can forgive sins. Were they incorrect; can men now forgive sins?

Almost a year earlier, after Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God (Matthew 16:16), Jesus made a similar statement about binding and loosing sins, saying that whatever they bind on earth will have been bound in heaven (Matthew 16:19). This implies a close link between what happens on earth and what is bound in heaven, as if they happen simultaneously.

Ambrose of Milan pointed out⁴⁷ what Jesus said in context: it is the Holy Spirit that forgives sins, not men. Men can request, but it is God who gives.

“The Holy Spirit forgives sins. On this point there can be no doubt, since the Lord Himself said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. Whatever sins you forgive they shall be forgiven’ (John 20:22-23). Sins are forgiven through the Holy Spirit. Men make use of their ministry for the forgiveness of sins, but they do not exercise the right of any power of their own. They forgive sins not in their own name but in that of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. They ask, the Godhead gives; the service is of man, the gift is of the Power on high.”

This is quite an honor for men to administer forgiveness of sins. John Chrysostom considered⁴⁸ the authority that has been given to priests in the Church, as more than has been given to archangels. What priests do here, the Master ratifies in heaven. Yet some actually consider that this honor is so small that the priests will despise the gift.

“Consider how great a thing it is for one, being a man, made with flesh and blood, to draw near to that blessed and pure Nature; we will then clearly see what great honor the grace of the Spirit has granted to priests. By their agency these rites are celebrated, and others not inferior to these both with respect to our dignity and our salvation. Those who inhabit the earth are entrusted with the administration of things, which are in Heaven; they have received an authority, which God has not given to angels or archangels. For it has not been said to the angels, ‘Whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in Heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven’ (Matthew 18:18). The kings of the earth rule on earth and have indeed authority to bind, but only the body; this binding lays hold of the soul and penetrates the heavens. What priests do here below God ratifies above, and the Master confirms the sentence of his servants. It is all kinds of heavenly authority, which He has given them when He says, ‘Those sins you forgive they are forgiven, and those sins you retain they are retained?’ (John 20:23) What authority could be greater than this? ‘The Father has committed all judgment to the Son’ (John 5:22). But I see it all put into the hands of these men by the Son. For they have been conducted to this dignity as if they were already translated to Heaven, had transcended human nature, and were released from the passions to which we are liable. Moreover, if a king should bestow this honor on any of his subjects, authorizing him to cast into prison anyone whom he pleased and to release them again, he becomes an object of envy and respect to all men. But he who has received from God an authority as much greater as heaven is more precious than earth, seems to some to have received so

⁴⁷ Ambrose of Milan, On the Holy Spirit, III, xviii, 137.

⁴⁸ John Chrysostom, Treatise on the Christian Priesthood, III, 5.

small an honor that they will despise the gift. Away with such madness! It is transparent madness to despise so great a dignity, without which it is not possible to obtain either our own salvation, or the good things, which have been promised to us. No one can enter into the kingdom of Heaven except he is born through water and the Spirit, and he who does not eat the flesh of the Lord and drink His blood is excluded from eternal life. If all these things are accomplished only by means of those holy hands, I mean the hands of the priest, how will anyone, without these, be able to escape the fire of hell, or to win those crowns which are reserved for the victorious?”

Cyprian of Carthage, addressing⁴⁹ the Baptism of heretics, stated that the authority of God was given only to the Church and that nothing can be bound or loosed outside the Church.

“It is clear where and by whom remission of sins can be given; that is, that which is given in baptism. First of all the Lord gave that power to Peter, upon whom He built the Church, and from this He appointed and showed the source of unity — the power, namely, that whatever he loosed on earth should be loosed in heaven. After the resurrection, He spoke to the Apostles, ‘As the Father has sent me, even so I send you’. And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit! Whichever sins you forgive, they are forgiven to them; and whichever sins you retain, they are retained’ (John 20:21-23). From this we perceive that only they who are set over the Church, established in the Gospel Law, and in the ordinance of the Lord, are allowed to baptize and to give remission of sins. Outside the Church, nothing can either be bound or loosed, and there is no one who can either bind or loose anything.”

Cyprian of Carthage wrote⁵⁰ to Bishop Firmilian, who was dealing with an outspoken, but heretic Bishop Stephen. Heretics do not administer forgiveness of sins, and they may perish, as did Korah in his rebellion against Moses.

“The greatness of Pope Stephen’s error, and the depth of his blindness, who says that remission of sins can be granted in the synagogues of heretics, and does not abide on the foundation of the one Church, which was once based by Christ on the rock, may be perceived from this. Christ said to Peter alone, ‘Whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven’ (Matthew 16:19). Again, in the Gospel, when Christ breathed on the Apostles alone, saying, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit! Whichever sins you forgive they are forgiven to them, and whichever sins you retain they are retained’ (John 20:22-23). Therefore the power of forgiving sins was given to the Apostles, and to the Churches, which they established, being sent by Christ, and to the bishops who succeeded to them by ordination. But we, who have succeeded the Apostles, encounter enemies of the one Catholic Church. Our adversaries assert for themselves, in opposition to us, unlawful priesthoods, and set up profane altars. What else are they than Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, profane with a like wickedness, and about to suffer the same punishments which

⁴⁹ Cyprian, Epistle to Jubaianus, LXXII, 7.

⁵⁰ Cyprian of Carthage, Epistle to Bishop Firmilian, LXXIV, 16.

they did (Numbers 16:1-33), as well as those who agree with them, just as their partners and abettors perished with a death like theirs?”

John Cassian, speaking against the Nestorian heretics, stated⁵¹ that the Church was given the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. They cannot enter that gate to which that key belongs if they deny the faith of this key.

“What are the words, with which He commends Peter? ‘I say to you, that you are Peter and upon this rock I will build My Church’ (Matthew 16:17-18). Do you see how the saying of Peter is the faith of the Church? He then must be outside the Church, who does not hold the faith of the Church. ‘And to you’, said the Lord, ‘I will give the keys of the kingdom of heaven’ (Matthew 16:19). This faith deserved heaven; this faith received the keys of the heavenly kingdom. You cannot enter the gate to which this key belongs, if you have denied the faith of this key.”

“‘And the gates of hell shall not prevail against you’ (Matthew 16:18). The gates of hell are the belief or rather the mistaken belief of heretics. For as widely as hell is separated from heaven, so widely is he who denies from him who confessed that Christ is God.”

“‘Whatever you shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth, shall be loosed also in heaven’ (Matthew 16:19). The perfect faith of the Apostle somehow is given the power of Deity, that what it should bind or loose on earth, might be bound or loosed in heaven. You then, who come against the Apostle’s faith, as you see that already you are bound on earth, it only remains that you should know that you are bound also in heaven.”

John Chrysostom spoke⁵² of the Levitical priesthood as serving as an example and shadow of the things in the Church, where the Church does heavenly things. We sing in concert with the angels and the priest forgives sins in concert with God. Moses was admonished to make all things according to the pattern shown him on the mountain; the pattern he saw was the Church.

“We must apply our minds attentively, and consider the Apostolic wisdom; for Paul shows that the Levitical Priesthood, ‘serves the example and shadow of heavenly things’ (Hebrews 8:5). The heavenly things he speaks of here are the spiritual things. Although they are done on earth, yet they are worthy of the Heavens. Consider what has happened in establishing the Church”:

- Our Lord Jesus Christ lies slain as a sacrifice (Revelation 5:6, 9, 12; 13:8),
- The Spirit is with us (Romans 8:26),
- He who sits on the right hand of the Father is here (Romans 8:34),
- Sons are made by the Washing (Titus 3:5),
- They are fellow-citizens of those in Heaven (Ephesians 2:19),
- We have a country, a city, and citizenship there (Hebrews 11:16), and
- We are strangers to things here (Hebrews 11:9, 13).

⁵¹ John Cassian, Seven Books on the Incarnation, Against Nestorius, III, 14.

⁵² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, XIV, 3.

“How can all these be other than ‘heavenly things’? Are not our Hymns heavenly? Do not we, who are below, sing the same things in concert with the divine choirs of bodiless powers above? The altar is also heavenly, since it has nothing carnal on it, and all spiritual things become the offerings. The sacrifice does not disperse into ashes or smoke; it makes the things placed there on the altar splendid. How can the rites, which we celebrate, be other than heavenly? Christ says, ‘whichever sins you retain, they are retained; whichever sins you forgive, they are forgiven’ (John 20:23 paraphrase); when the priests have the keys of heaven, how can everything be other than heavenly?”

“Moses was admonished by God, when he was about to make the tabernacle, ‘that you make all things according to the pattern shown to you on the mountain’ (Exodus 25:9, 40; Hebrews 8:5). Similarly Christ showed His disciples everything, since our hearing is less ready to apprehend than our sight; the things, which we hear, we do not lay up in our soul, as those, which we see with our eyes. Moses spoke of the Temple, ‘making all things according to the pattern shown on the mountain’. Was it then only what concerned the furniture of the Temple that he saw, or was it also what related to the sacrifices, and all the rest? One would not be wrong in saying this; for the Church is heavenly, and is nothing else than Heaven.”

Jerome mentioned⁵³ some practical aspects regarding forgiving sins, “The clergy are the successors of the Apostles, who with holy words consecrate the body of Christ, and who make us Christians. Having the keys of the kingdom of heaven, they judge men to some extent before the Day of Judgment, and guard the chastity of the bride of Christ.”

Thomas: “My Lord and My God”

The context of Thomas’ recognition of the risen Christ was a week following the Resurrection. Thomas was not with the others when Jesus came on the evening following the Resurrection.

“The other disciples therefore said to him, ‘We have seen the Lord’. So he said to them, ‘Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe’. After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, ‘Peace to you!’ Then He said to Thomas, ‘Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand *here*, and put *it* into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing’. And Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’” (John 20:24-28)

One of the hymns for Vespers considers Thomas’ unbelief and irreverence: “What miraculous wonder, that lack of faith became conviction of faith. What miraculous wonder, that grass should touch fire and be safe.” All this demonstrates the Lord’s patience with each of us.

Thomas’ words of recognition have been used many times by the Church Fathers to defend the Faith against various heresies that denied the Deity of Christ. This was especially

⁵³ Jerome, Letter to Monk Hellodorus, XIV, 8.

true during the Christology controversies of the 4th Century. Following are some examples of how Thomas' confession played a key part in the Christology arguments by Hilary, Athanasius, Basil and John Cassian.

Hilary of Poitiers addressed⁵⁴ the heresies of Sabellius, Arius and Photinus by pointing out that the Son is God, from His eternal generation, and not just a property of God or a title of God. At Thomas' confession, it dawned on him what Christ had been saying about the Oneness of Father and Son. Christ accepted as His own the Name, which belongs to the nature of the Father.

“The Word is God the Only-begotten, and yet the Un-begotten Father is never without His Word. The nature of the Son is not that of a sound, which is uttered. He is God from God, subsisting through a true birth; God's own Son, born from the Father, indistinguishable from Him in nature, and therefore inseparable. This is the lesson, which His title of the Word is meant to teach us. In the same way Christ is the Wisdom and the Power of God; not that He is the inward activity⁵⁵ of the Father's might or thought, but that His Nature is indicated by these names. For an object, which has by birth an existence of its own, cannot be regarded as a property; a property is necessarily inherent in some being and can have no independent existence. It was to save us from concluding that the Son is alien from the Divine Nature of His Father that He has had Himself revealed to us under these names of properties. Thus He is nothing else than God. When I hear the words, ‘And the Word was God’, they do not merely tell me that the Son was called God; they reveal that He is God. In those previous instances, where Moses was called God (Exodus 4:16, 7:1) and others were styled gods (Psalm 82:6), there was the mere addition of a name by way of title. Here a solid essential truth is stated; the Word was God. That was no accidental title, but an eternal reality, a permanent element of His existence, an inherent character of His Nature.”

“And now let us see whether the confession of Thomas the Apostle, ‘My Lord and My God’ (John 20:28), corresponds with this assertion. We see that he speaks of Him, Whom he confesses to be God, as My God. Now Thomas was undoubtedly familiar with those words of the Lord, ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is One’ (Deuteronomy 6:4 LXX). How then could the faith of an Apostle become so oblivious of that primary command as to confess Christ as God, distinct from the Father, when life is conditional upon the confession of the Divine unity? It was because, in the Light of the Resurrection, the whole mystery of the faith had become visible to the Apostle. He had often heard such words as, ‘I and the Father are One’ (John 10:30), and, ‘All things that the Father has are Mine’ (John 16:15), and, ‘I in the Father and the Father in Me’ (John 14:11). Now he can confess that the Name of God expresses the Nature of Christ, without peril to the faith. Without breach of loyalty to the One God, the Father, his devotion could now regard the Son of God as God, since he believed that everything contained in the Nature of the Son was truly of the same Nature with the Father. No longer need he fear that such a confession as his was the

⁵⁴ Hilary of Poitiers, On the Trinity, VII, 11-12.

⁵⁵ That is, this is what Sabellius taught.

proclamation of a second God, a treason against the unity of the Divine Nature; for it was not a second God Whom that perfect birth of the Godhead had brought into being. Thus it was with full knowledge of the mystery of the Gospel that Thomas confessed his Lord and his God. It was not a title of honor; it was a confession of Nature. He believed that Christ was God in substance and in power. The Lord, in turn, shows that this act of worship was the expression not of mere reverence, but of faith, when He said, 'Because you have seen, you have believed; blessed are they which have not seen, and have believed' (John 20:29). Thomas had seen before he believed. But, you ask, 'What was it that Thomas believed?' It is expressed in his words, 'My Lord and my God'. No Nature but that of God could have risen by its own might from death to life; and it is this fact, that Christ is God, which Thomas confessed with the confidence of an assured faith. Shall we, then, dream that His Name of God is not real, when that Name has been proclaimed by a faith based upon certain evidence? Christ accepts as His own the Name, which belongs to the Nature of the Father. And He teaches that they are blessed who, though they have not seen Him rise from the dead, yet have believed, on the assurance of the Resurrection, that He is God."

The Arians taught that Jesus was a creature, created by the Father, but greater in glory than the angels. Athanasius refuted⁵⁶ this notion, showing how it conflicts with many things in the Scripture, including Thomas's confession.

"If, as the heretics hold, the Son was a creature, but not as one of the creatures, because of His excelling them in glory, Scripture would describe Him by a comparison in His favor with the other creatures. For instance, it would say that He is greater than Archangels, more honorable than the Thrones, brighter than sun and moon, and greater than the heavens. But he is not in fact thus referred to; but the Father shows Him to be His own proper and only Son, saying, 'You are My Son' (Psalm 2:7), and 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased' (Matthew 3:17). Accordingly the Angels served Him, as being one beyond themselves; they worship Him, not as being greater in glory, but as being someone beyond all the creatures, beyond themselves, and alone the Father's proper Son according to essence. For if He was worshipped as excelling them in glory, each subservient things ought to worship what excels itself. But this is not the case; for creature does not worship creature, but servant worships Lord, and creature worships God. Thus Peter the Apostle hinders Cornelius who would worship him, saying, 'I myself also am a man' (Acts 10:26). And an Angel, when John would worship him, hinders him, saying, 'See that you do not do that; for I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the Prophets, and of those that keep the words of this book. Worship God!' (Revelation 22:9) Therefore to God alone belongs worship by nature, and this the Angels know, that though they excel other beings in glory, yet they are all creatures and not to be worshipped, but they worship the Lord. Thus the angel hindered Manoah, the father of Samson, who wished to offer sacrifice to him. He said, 'Offer not to me, but to God' (Judges 13:16 paraphrase). On the other hand, even the Angels worship the Lord; for it is written, 'Let all the Angels of God worship Him' (Hebrews 1:6, Deuteronomy

⁵⁶ Athanasius of Alexandria, Four Discourses Against the Arians, II, xvi, 23-24.

32:43 LXX). Again by all the Gentiles, ‘The labor of Egypt and merchandise of Ethiopia and of the Subeans, men of stature, shall come over to you, and they shall be your servants. They shall fall down to you, and shall make supplication to you, saying, Surely God is in you, and there is no God beside You’ (Isaiah 45:14 LXX). He accepts His disciples’ worship, and certifies to them who He is, saying, ‘You call Me Lord and Master, and you say well, for so I am’ (John 13:13). When Thomas said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God’ (John 20:28), He allows his words, or rather accepts him instead of hindering him.”

“But He would not have been thus worshipped, nor been thus spoken of, were He a creature merely. But now since He is not a creature, but the proper offspring of the Essence of that God who is worshipped, and His Son by nature, therefore He is worshipped and is believed to be God, is Lord of armies, in authority and Almighty, as the Father is. He has said Himself, ‘All things that the Father has, are Mine’ (John 16:15). For it is proper to the Son, to have the things of the Father, and to be such that the Father is seen in Him, and that through Him all things were made, and that the salvation of all comes to pass and consists in Him.”

In his personal letters, Athanasius also answered various arguments of the Arians, who said that Christ was not really God, by saying that Paul and Thomas testify that they are mistaken. Christ Himself said He was God and inanimate creation acknowledged this. Christ’s Body was filled full of the Godhead, even while He was suffering on the Cross.

“From now on⁵⁷, they will keep silence, who once said that He who proceeded from Mary is not really Christ, or Lord, or God. For if He were not God in the Body, how did He, upon proceeding from Mary, come immediately to be called ‘Emmanuel, which is translated God with us?’ (Matthew 1:23) Why again, if the Word was not in the flesh, did Paul write to the Romans, ‘of whom is Christ after the flesh, Who is above all God blessed forever?’ (Romans 9:5) Let them therefore confess, even they who previously denied that the Crucified was God, that they are mistaken. For the divine Scriptures invite them, and especially Thomas, who, after seeing on Him the print of the nails, cried out, ‘My Lord and my God!’ (John 20:28) For the Son, being God, and Lord of glory (1 Corinthians 2:8), was in the Body which was ingloriously nailed and dishonored. But the Body, while it suffered, being pierced on the tree, had water and blood flow from its side; yet because it was a temple of the Word, It was filled full of the Godhead. For this reason it was that the sun, seeing its Creator suffering in His outraged body, withdrew its rays and darkened the earth. But the body itself being of mortal nature, beyond its own nature rose again by reason of the Word, which was in it. It has now ceased from natural corruption, and, having put on the Word which is above man, has become incorruptible.”

“If they are in doubt⁵⁸ whether He is God at all, let them reverence Thomas, who handled the Crucified and pronounced Him Lord and God (John 20:28). Or let them fear the Lord Himself, who said, after washing the feet of the disciples, ‘You call Me Lord and Master, and you say well, for so I am’ (John

⁵⁷ Athanasius, “Letter to Epictetus”, Personal Letters, II, lix, 10.

⁵⁸ Athanasius, “Letter to Maximus”, Personal Letters, II, lxi, 2.

13:13). But in the same body in which He was when he washed their feet, He also carried up our sins to the Tree (1 Peter 2:24). He was witnessed to as Master of Creation, in that the Sun withdrew his beams and the earth trembled and the rocks were split, and the executioners recognized that the Crucified was truly Son of God. For the Body they saw was not that of some man, but of God, who even when crucified, raised the dead. Accordingly it is a no-good venture of theirs to say that the Word of God came into a certain holy man. This was true of each of the prophets and of the other saints; if that were true of Christ, He would clearly be born and die like each one of them. But this is not so. Once for all, ‘at the end of the ages, to put away sin’ (Hebrews 9:26), ‘the Word was made flesh’ (John 1:14) and proceeded from Mary the Virgin, Man after our likeness. As He said to the Jews, ‘You seek to kill Me, a man that has told you the truth?’ (John 8:40) And we are deified not by partaking of the body of some man, but by receiving the Body of the Word Himself.”

Basil the Great, speaking⁵⁹ against the Arians, stated that if the Arians are correct, both the Father and the Son are created beings; the result of their heresy is that many things in the Scriptures would be false.

“If when the Son was born (from Mary), He was then made wisdom, it would have been untrue that He was ‘the power of God and the wisdom of God’ (1 Corinthians 1:24). In fact, His wisdom did not come into being when He was born of Mary, but existed always. And so, as though of the Father, it is said by David, ‘Be to me a protecting God’ (Psalm 31:2 LXX), and again, ‘You have become my salvation’ (Psalm 118:21), and so Paul, ‘Let God be true, but every man a liar’ (Romans 3:4). Thus the Lord ‘from God became for us wisdom, sanctification and redemption’ (1 Corinthians 1:30). Now when the Father was made defender and true, He was not something created; and similarly when the Son was made wisdom and sanctification, He was not something created. If it is true that there is one God the Father, it is assuredly also true that there is one Lord Jesus Christ the Savior. According to the Arians, Jesus is not God, nor the Father Lord, and the following are written in vain,”

- ‘The Lord said to my Lord’ (Psalm 110:1).
- ‘Therefore God, your God, has anointed you’ (Psalm 45:7)
- ‘The Lord rained from the Lord’ (Genesis 19:24)
- ‘God created man in His own image’ (Genesis 1:27)
- ‘Who is a God except our God’ (Psalm 18:31 LXX)
- ‘The Word was with God and the Word was God’ (John 1:1).
- The words of Thomas of the Son, ‘my Lord and my God’ (John 20:28)

“The distinctions, then, ought to be referred to creatures and to those who are falsely and not properly called gods, and not to the Father and to the Son.”

John Cassian stated things a little more emphatically in dealing with the Nestorian heresy. Cassian used⁶⁰ the example of Thomas’ handling of Christ’s flesh to declare that Christ was God

⁵⁹ Basil the Great, “On Proverbs 7:22”, in Prolegomena, Trouble in the Closing Years, 10.

⁶⁰ John Cassian, On the Incarnation of the Lord, III, 15.

in the flesh. As Thomas touched Christ's flesh, He addressed Christ as God. Nestorius separated God from Christ's body, and said that Christ was to be honored because of Him who He had received into Himself. Cassian stated that this account just can't be twisted to fit Nestorius' ideas.

“I want to add one more testimony from an Apostle for you, that you may see how what followed the Passion corresponded with what went before it. When the Lord appeared in the midst of His disciples, when the doors were shut, and wished to make clear to the Apostles the reality of His body, when the Apostle Thomas felt His flesh and handled His side and examined His wounds, what was it that he declared, when he was convinced of the reality of the body shown to him? ‘My Lord and my God’ (John 20:28). Did he say what you say, that it was a man and not God? Christ and not Divinity? He surely touched the body of his Lord and answered that He was God. Did he make any separation between man and God? Did he call that flesh Theotokos, to use your expression, i.e., that which received Divinity? Did he, after the fashion of your blasphemy, declare that He whom he touched was to be honored not for His own sake, but for the sake of Him whom He had received into Himself? The Lord's teaching was amply sufficient, and he knew nothing whatever except what he learned from the instruction of the Lord! His words contain heavenly doctrine; his faith is a Divine lesson. He had never learned to separate, as you do, the Lord from His body; he had no idea how to tear God apart from Himself.”

“What then did the Apostle Thomas touch when he drew near to handle his God? Certainly it was Christ without any doubt. But what did he exclaim? ‘My Lord and my God’. Now, if you can, separate Christ from God, and change this saying, if you are able to. Make use of all the prudence of this world, and that foolish wisdom which consists in wordy subtlety. Turn yourself about in every direction, and draw in your horns. Do whatever you can with ingenuity and art. Say what you like, and do what you like; you cannot possibly get out of this without confessing that what the Apostle touched was God.”

“Even now he who then bore his witness, the Apostle Thomas, proclaims to you, ‘Jesus, whom I touched, is God. It is God whose limbs I handled. I did not feel what was incorporeal, not handle what was intangible. I didn't touch a Spirit with my hand, so that it might be believed that I said of it alone ‘It is God.’ For ‘a spirit,’ as my Lord Himself said, ‘doesn't have flesh and bones’ (Luke 24:39). I touched the body of my Lord. I handled flesh and bones. I put my fingers into the prints of the wounds, and I declared of Christ my Lord, whom I had handled, ‘My Lord and my God’. For I don't know how to make a separation between Christ and God, and I cannot insert blasphemous distinctions between Jesus and God, or tear my Lord apart from Himself. I don't know that Christ is other than God. This faith I held together with my fellow Apostles; this I delivered to the Churches; this I preached to the Gentiles; this I proclaim to you also, Christ is God, Christ is God. A sound mind imagines nothing else; a sound faith says nothing else. The Deity cannot be separated from Itself. And since whatever is Christ is God, there can be found in God none other than God.”

Not Seeing But Yet Believing

After Thomas' recognition of Jesus, Jesus gave some words of encouragement to everyone. "Then Jesus said to Thomas, 'Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand *here*, and put *it* into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing'. And Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed *are* those who have not seen and *yet* have believed'" (John 20:27-29). There are several aspects of Jesus' encouragement.

Seeing is an Impediment to Faith

If everything that we needed to know was shown to us, and no effort on our part was required, we would tend to get lazy. No faith would be required because everything would be handed to us.

John Chrysostom stated⁶¹ that many miracles were done during the times of the Apostles due to the enormity of the task facing them. In the 4th Century (and now), many miracles are not worked so that we might be more blessed by believing without having the opportunity to see for ourselves as Thomas did. This is like the reaction of all unbelievers to the spectacle of the Second Coming of Christ, where everyone will believe because they see Him for themselves. However, this will be no credit to their faith when this happens.

"Someone may say, 'For what reason are signs withheld now?' They were done in the days of the Apostles at a time when they were chased, persecuted, trembling, in chains, having become the common enemies of the world, with no possessions of their own. With all things against them, they set themselves against whole commonwealths, with a message to declare; how did they achieve conviction? Their precepts brought much labor, and their doctrines many dangers. Those that heard had been brought up in luxury, drunkenness and in great wickedness. Where did they get their credibility? Then signs were usefully worked; so now they are no longer so useful."

"How is it that signs were expedient then, and now not expedient? Consider a case. When Christ comes and all the angels with Him, and is clearly God, and all things are made subject to Him; will not even the Greeks believe? It is quite plain that they will also fall down and worship, and confess Him to be God, though their stubbornness exceeds all expectations. At the sight of the heavens opened and Him coming on the clouds, all the heavenly powers spread around Him, rivers of fire coming on, all standing by and trembling, who will not fall down before Him, and believe Him to be God? Shall that adoration and knowledge be accounted to the Greeks for faith? No; this is not faith. Necessity and the evidence of the things seen has done this; it is not choice, but by the vastness of the spectacle, the powers of the mind are dragged along. It follows that by how much more obvious and overpowering the course of events, by so much is the part of faith cut short. For this reason miracles are not done now."

"And that this is the truth, hear what Christ said to Thomas, 'Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed' (John 20:29). In proportion to the

⁶¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, VI, 4-5.

evidence by which the miracle is set forth is the reward of faith lessened. So that if now miracles were also worked, the same thing would result. Then we would no longer know Him by faith, as Paul has shown, ‘For we walk by faith, not by sight’ (2 Corinthians 5:7). As at that time, although you believed, it would not be credited to you, because the thing is so tangible. For when we accept things, which in no way can be deduced by reasoning, then it is faith.”

John Chrysostom also pointed out⁶² that believing without seeing, like showing love without the presence of signs, is the best way.

“Just as, ‘blessed are those that have not seen and yet have believed’ (John 20:29), so are those that believe without seeing signs. Jesus said, ‘Unless you see signs, you will not believe’ (John 4:48). We lose nothing by lack of miracles, if we will but pay attention to ourselves. We have the sum and substance of the good things; through baptism we received remission of sins, sanctification, participation of the Spirit, adoption, eternal life. What more would we want? Signs come to an end (1 Corinthians 13:8). You have ‘faith, hope, love’, the lasting things; these are greater than signs. Nothing is equal to love. For ‘greater than everything is love’” (1 Corinthians 13:13).

John Chrysostom responded⁶³ to those who wished that they could have lived to see Jesus’ miracles for themselves. The Apostles did exhibit faith on their part, but more blessed are those who are required to exhibit more faith.

“After Thomas said, ‘My Lord, and my God’, Jesus said, ‘Because you have seen Me, you have believed; blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed’ (John 20:28-29). This is faith, to receive things not seen; since, ‘Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen’ (Hebrews 11:1). He pronounced blessed not the disciples only, but those also who after them should believe. ‘Yet’, someone said, ‘the disciples saw and believed’. Yes, but they sought nothing of the kind, but from the proof of the napkin (John 20:6-7), they immediately received the word concerning the Resurrection, and before they saw the body, they exhibited faith. When anyone in the present day says, ‘I wish that I had lived in those times, and had seen Christ working miracles’, let them reflect, that, ‘Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed’”.

Hearing and Sight Can Be Our Teachers

Contained within the Orthodox Liturgy are a number of means whereby we can learn of the things of God from our various senses. By hearing, we discern some of the insight of the Church Fathers in the ancient hymns as well as current instruction and encouragement from the homily. By sight, we see in the icons examples of those who have already been tested and have been proven faithful. From the sense of smell, we discern in the incense the prayers of the saints ascending to the Throne of God. With the sense of taste, we partake of the Lord’s body and blood; and with the sense of touch, we venerate the Gospel Book.

⁶² John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XL.

⁶³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXXVII, 1.

Gregory of Nyssa stated⁶⁴ that both hearing and sight could be our teacher regarding the mysteries of Christ. The Cross as a mystery is at the center of Christian understanding, and to our sight, the projections of the Cross begin the explanation. Even unbelievers must admit that the events subsequent to the Cross lead to a proper understanding of God.

“Since all creation looks to Christ, and is about, around Him and through Him in being coherent with itself, it was right that not by hearing only we should be conducted to the full understanding of the Deity, but that sight also should be our teacher. It is from sight that Paul starts when he initiates the people of Ephesus in the mysteries, and pervades them through his instructions with the power of knowing what is that ‘width, length, depth and height’ (Ephesians 3:18). He designates each projection of the Cross by its proper name. The upper part he calls height; the lower, depth; and the side extensions, width and length. Elsewhere he makes his thought still clearer, ‘that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth’ (Philippians 2:10). He includes in one name the center and projecting arms, calling ‘things in earth’ all that is in the middle between things in heaven and things under the earth. Such is the lesson we learn in regard to the mystery of the Cross.”

“The subsequent events follow so appropriately that even unbelievers must admit that there is nothing in them adverse to the proper conceptions of God. That Christ did not stay dead, that the wounds which His body had received from the iron of the nails and spear offered no impediment to His rising again, that after His resurrection He showed Himself as He pleased to His disciples. When He wished to be present with them He was in their midst without being seen, needing no entrance through open doors. He strengthened the disciples by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and that He promised to be among them; no partition wall should intervene between them and Him. In their sight He ascended to Heaven, while to the mind He was everywhere.”

John Chrysostom stated⁶⁵ that true faith and understanding draws us closer to God. There were many people who saw Jesus’ miracles, but whom Jesus would not commit Himself to. Seeing and hearing did not teach them anything; His words and His teaching meant nothing to them and they soon drifted away. His disciples, on the other hand, were drawn to Him and didn’t need miracles to be attracted, He called them “friends”.

“Of the men of Jesus’ day some clung to their error, others laid hold on the truth; of these last, some retained it for a little while and again fell away from it. Alluding to these, Christ compared them to seeds that were not sown deeply, but had their roots on the surface; He said that they would quickly perish. ‘When He was in Jerusalem, at the Passover, many believed on Him, when they saw the miracles which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them’” (John 2:23-24).

“The more perfect among His disciples came to Him not only because of His miracles, but through His teaching also. The less knowledgeable sort were attracted by the miracles, but those who reasoned better were attracted by His

⁶⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, “The Great Catechism”, 32, [Apologetic Works](#).

⁶⁵ John Chrysostom, [Homilies on John](#), XXIV, 1.

prophecies and doctrines; those, who were taken by His teaching, were more steadfast than those attracted by His miracles. Christ also called them ‘blessed’, saying, ‘Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed’ (John 20:29). That the others were not real disciples is apparent for, ‘Jesus did not commit Himself to them’. Why? ‘Because He knew all things, and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man’” (John 2:24-25).

“The meaning is of this kind. He who dwells in men’s hearts, and enters into their thoughts, does not listen just to outward words. Knowing well that their warmth was but for a season, He didn’t place confidence in them as in perfect disciples, or commit all His doctrines to them as though they had already become firm believers. Now, to know what is in the heart of men belongs to God alone, ‘who has fashioned their hearts alone’ (Psalm 33:15 LXX), for Solomon said, ‘You alone know the hearts of all the children of men’ (1 Kings 8:39). Jesus didn’t need witnesses to learn the thoughts of His own creatures, and so He felt no confidence in them because of their temporary belief. Men, who know neither the present nor the future, often entrust everything without any reserve to persons who approach them deceitfully and who shortly will fall away from them; but Christ did not do so, for well He knew all their secret thoughts. And many such there are now, who have the name of faith, but are unstable, and easily led away. Christ does not commit Himself to them, but conceals from them many things; and just as we do not place confidence in mere acquaintances, but in real friends, so Christ does also. Hear what He said to His disciples, ‘No longer do I call you servants, you are My friends’. Why is this? ‘Because all things that I have heard of My Father I have made known to you’ (John 15:15). And therefore He gave no signs to the Jews who asked for them, because they asked tempting Him. The asking for signs is a practice of tempters both then and now; for even now there are some that seek them and say, ‘Why don’t miracles take place also at this present time?’ If you are faithful, as you ought to be, and love Christ as you ought to love Him, you have no need of signs; they are given to the unbelievers.”

Believing the Resurrection

John Chrysostom noted⁶⁶ that the Resurrection is not that hard to believe since a similar process occurs with plants every day. Resurrection has to do only with the body, since the soul does not die or experience corruption and decay. The heretics can’t have thought through all the implications of what they claim about the Resurrection.

“What sort of excuse will they have who disbelieve the Resurrection, when the action is practiced each day, in seeds, in plants, and in the case of our own generation? First it is necessary that the seed die, and that the generation takes place. But when God does anything, reasoning is of no use; for how did He make us out of nothing? This I say to Christians, who say that they believe the Scriptures; but I shall also say something else drawn from human reasoning. Some men live in vice, others in virtue; and of those who live in vice, many have attained to extreme old age in prosperity, while many of the virtuous do the same after enduring the contrary. At what season shall each receive his rewards?

⁶⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXVI, 3.

Listen to Paul, saying, ‘This corruptible must put on incorruption’ (1 Corinthians 15:53). He speaks not of the soul, for the soul is not corrupted; moreover, ‘resurrection’ is said of that which fell, and that which fell was the body. But why do the heretics have it that there is no resurrection of the body? It is proper that the corruptible, which shared the toil and death, should share the crowns also. If this were improper, it would not have been created at the beginning, and Christ would not have taken the flesh after the Resurrection. But to show that He took it again and raised it up, hear what He said, ‘Reach your fingers here’ (John 20:27); and, ‘Behold, a spirit does not have flesh and bones’ (Luke 24:39). Why did He raise Lazarus again, if it would have been better to rise without a body? Why does He do this, classing it as a miracle and a benefit? Why did He give nourishment at all? Don’t be therefore deceived by the heretics, beloved. For there is a Resurrection and there is a Judgment, but they deny these things, who desire not to have to give account of their actions. For this Resurrection must be such as was that of Christ, for He was the first fruits, the first born of the dead.”

Jerome addressed heretics who claimed that the Resurrection would be spiritual and not physical. Jerome described⁶⁷ the Resurrection as glorious clothing that adorns the body, but doesn’t eliminate it. Enoch and Elijah now live in Paradise in the same flesh they had when they were translated. The Patriarch Job spoke of this long before Christ’s Incarnation and expected to see God in his flesh.

“The true confession of the resurrection declares that the flesh will be glorious, but without destroying its reality. When Paul says, ‘This is corruptible and mortal’ (1 Corinthians 15:53), his words denote this same body; that is, the flesh, which was then seen. But when he adds that it puts on incorruption and immortality, he does not say that that which is put on, that is the clothing, does away with the body. It makes that body glorious, which before lacked glory. When the more worthless robe of mortality and weakness is laid aside, we are clothed with the gold of immortality, and, so to speak, with the blessedness of strength as well as virtue. We do not wish to be stripped of the flesh, but to put on over it the clothing of glory, and desire to be clothed with our house, which is from heaven, that mortality may be swallowed up by life.”

“Certainly, no one is clothed who was not previously clothed. Accordingly, our Lord was not so transfigured on the mountain that He lost His hands and feet and other members, and suddenly began to roll along in a round shape like that of a ball. Instead the same members glowed with the brightness of the sun and blinded the eyes of the Apostles. Because of this, His clothing was changed, but so as to become white and glistening, not aerial. His face shone like the sun (Matthew 17:2); but when mention is made of His face, I reckon that His other members could be seen as well. Enoch was translated in the flesh; Elijah was carried up to heaven in the flesh. They are not dead; they are inhabitants of Paradise; and even there retain the members with which they were translated. What we aim at in fasting, they have through fellowship with God. They feed on heavenly bread, and are satisfied with every word of God, having Him as their food, who is also their Lord. Jesus said, ‘My flesh rests in hope’ (Psalm 16:9).

⁶⁷ Jerome, “To Pammachius Against John of Jerusalem”, 29-30, Treatises.

And elsewhere, 'His flesh did not see corruption' (Acts 2:31). And again, 'All flesh shall see the salvation of God' (Isaiah 40:5 LXX). And must you be forever making the body a twofold thing of separate body and soul? Rather quote the vision of Ezekiel, who joins bones to bones and brings them out of their sepulchers; making them stand on their feet, He binds them together with flesh and clothes them with skin" (Ezekiel 37:1-11).

"Listen to those words of thunder which fall from Job, the vanquisher of torments. As he scrapes away the filth of his decaying flesh with broken pottery, he comforts his miseries with the hope and the reality of the resurrection. 'Oh, that my words were written! Oh, that they were inscribed in a book with an iron pen, and on a sheet of lead, that they were engraved in the rock forever! For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the last day I shall rise from the earth, and again be clothed with my skin, and in my flesh I shall see God, Whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. This my hope is laid up in my bosom' (Job 19:23-27). What can be clearer than this prophecy? No one since the days of Christ speaks so openly concerning the resurrection as he did before⁶⁸ Christ. He wishes his words to last forever; and that they might never be obliterated by age, he would have them inscribed on a sheet of lead, and engraved on the rock. He hopes for a resurrection; rather he knew and saw that Christ, his Redeemer, was alive, and at the last day would rise again from the earth. The Lord had not yet died, and the athlete of the Church saw his Redeemer rising from the grave. When he says, 'And I shall again be clothed with my skin, and in my flesh see God', I suppose he does not speak as if he loved his flesh, for it was decaying and putrefying before his eyes. But in the confidence of rising again, and through the consolation of the future, he makes light of his present misery. Again he says, 'I shall be clothed with my skin'. What mention do we find here of an ethereal body? What of an aerial body like breath and wind? Where there is skin and flesh, where there are bones and tendons, and blood and veins, there assuredly is fleshy tissue and distinction of sex. 'And in my flesh', he says, 'I shall see God'. When all flesh shall see the salvation of God, and Jesus as God, then I, also, shall see my Redeemer and my God. But I shall see him in that flesh which now tortures me, which now melts away for pain. Therefore, in my flesh shall I behold God, because by His own resurrection, He has healed all my infirmities'. Does it not seem to you that Job was then writing against Origen, and was holding a controversy similar to ours against the heretics, for the reality of the flesh in which he underwent tortures? For he could not bear to think that all his sufferings would be in vain. While the flesh he actually bore was tortured as flesh, it would be some other spiritual kind of flesh that would rise again. Therefore he emphasizes the truth, and puts a stop to what might lie hidden in an artful confession, by speaking out plainly, 'Whom I shall see for myself and my eyes shall behold and not another'. If he is not to rise again in his own sex, if he is not to have the same members, which were then lying on the dunghill, if he does not open the same eyes to see God with which he was then looking at the

⁶⁸ Job was a descendant of Esau and lived in Arabia during the early part of the 400 years that Israel was in Egypt, from c. 1900 BC to 1500 BC. See Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, May 6.

worms, where will Job then be? You do away with what constituted Job, and give me the hollow phrase, 'Job shall rise again'. It is as if you were to order a ship to be restored after a shipwreck, and then were to refuse each particular thing of which a ship is made.”

The Impact on Christianity from Thomas' Doubt

The impact on Christianity over the last 2000 years from the simple doubt of the fisherman Thomas has been huge. Many of the Church Fathers quote this account to prove beyond doubt that some of the key teachings of the Church are correct. One key teaching of the Church that gets very strong emphasis from the account of Thomas' doubt is the Resurrection, and some of the details surrounding the Resurrection.

Proof of the Resurrection

Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, stated⁶⁹ that Christ descended into our estate in order that He might promote us to His. He considered the weakness of His followers during His Passion and gave ample proof of His Resurrection afterward. In all this we acknowledge that the properties of His Divine and Human Nature remained undivided⁷⁰; He is just one Son. In His Resurrection, His flesh was altered, but it remained human flesh. Those who knew Him before His Passion now relate to Him differently. The impact for us is that our nature is uplifted and we already possess what we believe.

“Christ descended into our estate that He might promote us to His, by assuming not only the substance but also the conditions of sinful nature, and by allowing the Godhead, which cannot suffer pain, to be affected by all the miseries of human life. In order that the minds of the disciples might not be racked by prolonged grief, He shortened the three days' delay which He had announced, that by joining the last part of the first and the first part of the third day to the whole of the second, He cut off a considerable portion of the period, and yet did not lessen the number of days. Christ's Resurrection therefore did not long keep His soul in Hades, nor His flesh in the tomb. So speedy was the quickening of His uncorrupted flesh that it bore a closer resemblance to slumber than to death. The Godhead did not depart from either part of the Human Nature which He had assumed (i.e. body and soul), and reunited by Its power that which Its power had separated.”

“There followed many proofs, on which authority the Faith was to be preached through the whole world. From the rolling away of the stone, the empty tomb, the arrangement of the linen cloths, the angels narrated the whole deed by themselves and fully built up the truth of the Lord's Resurrection. Yet He often appeared plainly to the eyes both of the women and of the Apostles not only talking with them, but also remaining and eating with them, and allowing Himself to be handled by the eager and curious hands of those whom doubt attacked. To this end He entered when the doors were closed to the disciples, and gave them the Holy Spirit by breathing on them. After giving them the light of

⁶⁹ Leo the Great, Sermons, LXXI, 2-4.

⁷⁰ See also Leo the Great, Letter to Flavian, XXVIII, 5.

understanding, He opened the secrets of the Holy Scriptures, and Himself showed them the wound in the side, the prints of the nails, and all the marks of His recent Passion. By this it might be acknowledged that in Him the properties of the Divine and Human Nature remained undivided, and we might know that the Word was not just what the flesh is, as to confess God's only Son to be both Word and Flesh."

"Paul agrees with this belief when he says, 'even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know Him so no more' (2 Corinthians 5:16). For the Lord's Resurrection was not the ending, but the changing of the flesh, and His substance was not destroyed by His increase of power. The quality altered, but the nature did not cease to exist; the body was made invulnerable, where it had been possible to crucify it; it was made incorruptible, though it had been possible to wound it. And properly did Paul say that Christ's flesh was not to be known in that state in which it had been known, because nothing remained vulnerable in it, nothing weak, so that it was both the same in essence and not the same in glory. Small wonder if Paul maintains this about Christ's body, when he says of all spiritual Christians 'henceforth we know no one after the flesh'. From now on, he says, we begin to experience the resurrection in Christ, since all our hopes are guaranteed to us. We do not hesitate in timidity, we are not under the suspense of uncertainty, but having received a down payment of the promise, we now with the eye of faith see the things which will be, and rejoicing in the uplifting of our nature, we already possess what we believe."

In Orthodox tradition, Lent traces the journey of mankind from the expelling of Adam from Paradise after the Fall, to the return to Paradise at Pascha (Western Easter) as a result of the Resurrection. Anticipating the return to Paradise, everyone traditionally fasts for the 40 days of Lent.

Leo the Great also put⁷¹ the events following Christ's Resurrection in perspective. These days were extremely important in that they turned timid, fearful disciples into bold, fearless Apostles. They came to a firm grasp of Who Christ really is, and the proofs of the Resurrection were important. They came to understand that they were already possessors of Paradise, and that they had gained greater things than Adam had lost at the Fall when he was driven from Paradise.

"Those days which intervened between the Lord's Resurrection and Ascension did not pass by in uneventful leisure, but great mysteries were ratified in them, deep truths revealed. In them the fear of death was removed, and the immortality not only of the soul but also of the flesh was established. Through the Lord's breathing upon them, the Holy Spirit was poured upon all the Apostles, and to the blessed Apostle Peter beyond the rest the care of the Lord's flock was entrusted, in addition to the keys of the kingdom. The Lord joined the two disciples as a companion on the way; sweeping away of all the clouds of our uncertainty, He reproved them with the slowness of their timid hearts. Their enlightened hearts caught the flame of faith; lukewarm as they had been, they were made to burn while the Lord unfolded the Scriptures. In the breaking of

⁷¹ Leo the Great, Sermons, LXXIII, 2-4.

bread also their eyes were opened as they ate with Him (Luke 24:13-31). How far more blessed is the opening of their eyes, to whom the glorification of their nature is revealed than that of our first parents, on whom fell the disastrous consequences of their transgression.”

“In the course of these and other miracles, when the disciples were harassed by bewildering thoughts, the Lord appeared in their midst and said, ‘Peace be to you’ (Luke 24:36, John 20:19). In order that what was passing through their hearts might not be their fixed opinion (for they thought they saw a spirit not flesh), He refuted their thoughts that were so discordant with the Truth. He offered to the doubters’ eyes the marks of the cross that remained in His hands and feet, and invited them to handle Him with careful scrutiny, because the traces of the nails and spear had been retained to heal the wounds of unbelieving hearts. Not with wavering faith, but with most steadfast knowledge, they might comprehend that the Nature which had been lain in the sepulcher was to sit on God the Father’s throne.”

“Throughout this time which elapsed between the Lord’s Resurrection and Ascension, God’s Providence had this in view: to teach and impress upon both the eyes and hearts of His own people that the Lord Jesus Christ might be acknowledged to have truly risen, as He was truly born, suffered, and died. The Apostles and disciples, who had been both bewildered at His death on the cross and backward in believing His Resurrection, were so strengthened by the clearness of the truth that when the Lord entered the heights of heaven, not only were they affected with no sadness, but were even filled with great joy. And truly unspeakable was their cause for joy, when in the sight of the holy multitude, above the dignity of all heavenly creatures, the Nature of mankind ascended. It passed above the angels’ ranks, rose beyond the archangels’ heights, and had its uplifting limited by no elevation until it was received to sit with the Eternal Father. It should be associated on the throne with His glory, to Whose Nature It was united in the Son. Since Christ’s Ascension is our uplifting, where the glory of the Head has gone ahead, let us exult with worthy joy and delight in the loyal paying of thanks. For today not only are we confirmed as possessors of Paradise, but also we have in Christ penetrated the heights of heaven, and have gained greater things through Christ’s unspeakable grace than we had lost through the devil’s malice. For us, whom our enemy had driven out from the bliss of our first abode, the Son of God has made members of Himself and placed at the right hand of the Father.”

Gregory of Nyssa started⁷² with the evidence of the Resurrection shown by the nail holes in Christ’s hands, and then asked what form the Resurrection will take. Will it be just as we are – an old man will still be an old man and a cripple will still be a cripple? Or will we be changed into a person that we don’t even recognize? The first possibility is a calamity, with defects in our humanity frozen for eternity. The second is puzzling in that it is not the real me that rises. Gregory concludes that the Resurrection is ‘the reconstitution of our nature in its original form’. Without any effects from the passions or evil, it is hard to say what we are really like. The true explanation of this is still stored up in the hidden treasure-rooms of Wisdom.

⁷² Gregory of Nyssa, “On the Soul and the Resurrection”, Philosophical Works.

“We understand how Christ was pierced through with the nails and spear, and brought the print of those nails and the spear-wound to witness to the Resurrection. Most people agree that there will some day be a Resurrection, and that man will be brought before the incorruptible tribunal. But still the question remains: Are the states, which we are to expect, like the present states of the body? If so, then men had better avoid hoping for any Resurrection at all. For if our bodies are to be restored to life again in the same sort of condition as they are in when they cease to breathe, then all that man can look forward to in the Resurrection is an unending calamity. What spectacle is more pitiful than when in extreme old age our bodies shrivel up and change into something repulsive and hideous, with the flesh all wasted by the length of years? The skin is dried up about the bones till it is all in wrinkles, the muscles are in a spasmodic state from being no longer enriched with their natural moisture, the whole body is consequently shrunk, the hands on either side are powerless to perform their natural work and shake with an involuntary trembling. What a sight again are the bodies of persons after a long illness! They differ from bare bones only in giving the appearance of being covered with a worn-out veil of skin. What words could describe the unsightly disfigurement of lepers? Gradually rottenness spreads over all their limbs and devours them. What words could describe that of persons who have been mutilated in earthquake or battle, and live on in such a plight for a long time before their natural deaths? Or those who after an injury have grown up from infancy with their limbs crooked! What can one say of them? What is one to think about the bodies of newborn infants who have been strangled, if they are to be brought to life again just such as they were? Are they to continue in that infantile state? Or are they to come to the flower of their age?”

“If our bodies are to live again in every respect the same as before, this thing that we are expecting is simply a calamity; whereas if they are not the same, the person raised up will be another than he who died. For instance, a little boy was buried, but a grown man rises again. Conversely, how can we say that the dead is actually raised up, when he has had someone substituted for him by virtue of this difference in age? Instead of the child, one sees a grown man. Instead of the old man, one sees a person in his prime. In fact, instead of the one person another entirely appears. The cripple is changed into the able-bodied man; the leper into a man whose flesh is firm; and so on for all possible cases. If, then, the body will not come to life again exactly as it was when it died, that dead body will be formed into another man. How, then, will the Resurrection affect myself, when instead of me someone else will come to life?”

“The true explanation of all these questions is still stored up in the hidden treasure-rooms of Wisdom, and will not come to the light until that moment when we shall be taught the mystery of the Resurrection by the reality of it; and then there will be no more need of phrases to explain the things which we now hope for.”

“The Resurrection is ‘the reconstitution of our nature in its original form’. But in that form of life, it is reasonable to believe that age, infancy and any of the sufferings from our present various infirmities were not present. God was the Creator of none of these things, but man was a thing divine before his humanity

got within reach of the assault of evil. Then, with the inroad of evil, all these afflictions broke in on him. Accordingly a life, that is free from evil, is under no necessity of being affected by the things that result from evil. When a man travels through ice, he will get his body chilled; when he walks in a very hot sun, he will get his skin darkened. If he has kept clear of the one or the other, he escapes these results entirely. Our nature, affected by the passions, encounters all the results of a life of passion; but when it gets back to that state of passionless blessedness, it will no longer encounter the inevitable results of evil tendencies. All the infusions of the life of the brute into our nature were not in us before our humanity descended through the touch of evil into passions. When we abandon those passions, we shall abandon all their visible results. If a man, who was clad in rags, divested himself of the rags, he no longer feels its disgrace on him. So we too, when we have cast off those dead unsightly rags, we shall, along with it, fling from us all the belongings that were around us. Such things are sexual intercourse, conception, childbirth, impurities, nursing, feeding, evacuation, growth, prime of life, old age, disease, and death. If those rags are no longer around us, how can their resulting consequences be left within us? It is folly, then, when we are to expect a different state of things in the life to come, to object to the doctrine of the Resurrection on the ground of something that has nothing to do with it.”

Justin Martyr addressed⁷³ the heretics of his day who said that Christ had no human flesh and that there is no resurrection. Anticipating this, Christ took special time after the Resurrection to prove that their opinions were not true.

“If Christ had no need of the flesh, as the heretics suggest, why did He heal it? And what is most forceful of all, why did He raise the dead? Was it not to show what the resurrection should be? How then did He raise the dead, in their souls or in their bodies? Clearly both! If the resurrection were only spiritual, it was necessary that He, in raising the dead, should show the body lying apart by itself, and the soul living apart by itself. But He didn’t do this; He raised the body, confirming in it the promise of life. Why did He rise in the flesh in which He suffered, unless it was to show the resurrection of the flesh? Wishing to confirm this, when His disciples did not know whether to believe He had truly risen in the body, and were looking on Him and doubting, He said to them, ‘You don’t have faith yet; see that it is I’ (Luke 24:39); and He let them handle Him, and showed them the prints of the nails in His hands. When they were by every kind of proof persuaded that it was Himself, and in the body, they asked Him to eat with them, that they might still more accurately ascertain that He had in truth risen bodily; and He ate honeycomb and fish. When He had thus shown them that there is truly a resurrection of the flesh, wishing to show them this also, that it is possible for flesh to ascend into heaven, ‘He was taken up into heaven while they watched’ (Acts 1:9). He had said that our dwelling-place is in heaven (Psalm 90:1, 91:9), and now He was in the flesh in heaven. If after all that has been said, anyone demands demonstration of the resurrection, he is in no respect different

⁷³ Justin Martyr, “On the Resurrection”, 9, Fragments of the Lost Work of Justin.

from the Sadducees. The resurrection of the flesh is the power of God, is above all reasoning, is established by faith, and is seen in works.”

Christology

Many of the heretics of the first few centuries of the Church stated that Christ was not really a man⁷⁴. Simon Magus was very instrumental in spreading this heresy, and stated that he was the Christ, but that it only appeared that he was crucified. He said it was really only an illusion⁷⁵. One of the events in the Scriptures used to combat the teachings of Simon and his followers was the account of Thomas’ doubt and the appearance of Jesus to answer his questions. Christology is the study of the person and attributes of Christ; this became an important area of study during the many heretical attacks on the Church during the 4th Century.

Athanasius of Alexandria spoke out⁷⁶ against some heretics of his day, who said that the Word of God was changed into flesh and bones. Athanasius said that the Word took on human flesh and dwelt in the Body; but there was no mingling of His Deity and His humanity. Jesus did not suffer human pain in His Deity; only in His humanity. If the Word in Christ was only imaginary, salvation and resurrection are only imaginary also. Thomas’ touching Christ’s wounds dispels any concept of imaginary.

“If the Word was changed into bones and flesh, there would be no need of a tomb, for the Body would have gone by itself to preach to the spirits in Hades. But as it was, He Himself went to preach in Hades, while Joseph wrapped the Body in a linen cloth, and laid it away at Golgotha. From this all can see that the Body was not the Word, but Body *of the* Word. It was this that Thomas handled, when it had risen from the dead, and saw in it the print of the nails, which the Word Himself had undergone, seeing them fixed in His own Body, and though able to prevent it, did not do so. On the contrary, the incorporeal Word made His own, the properties of the Body, as being His own Body. When the Body was struck by the attendant, as suffering Himself He asked, ‘Why do you strike Me?’ (John 18:23) And being by nature intangible, the Word said, ‘I gave My back to the stripes, and My cheeks to blows, and hid not My face from shame and spitting’ (Isaiah 50:6 LXX). What the human Body of the Word suffered, this the Word, dwelling in the body, ascribed to Himself, in order that we might be enabled to be partakers of the Godhead of the Word (2 Peter 1:4). Truly it is strange that He it was Who suffered and yet didn’t suffer. He suffered, because His own Body suffered and He was in it; He didn’t suffer, because the Word, being by Nature God, is not subject to pain. While He, the incorporeal, was in the Body, the Body had in it the impassible Word, which was destroying⁷⁷ the weaknesses inherent in the Body. This He did, in order that Himself taking what

⁷⁴ Ignatius, “To the Trallians”, 10-11, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 1.

Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, VI, 14.

Irenaeus, Against Heresies, II, ix, 1.

Irenaeus, Against Heresies, III, Preface.

⁷⁵ For more information on the life of Simon Magus, see Mark Kern, Simon Magus the Heresiarch, St Athanasius Press, 2003.

⁷⁶ Athanasius of Alexandria, “Letter to Epictetus”, Personal Letters, LIX, 6-7.

⁷⁷ That is, the weaknesses of the body will be gone after our bodily resurrection, and will therefore be “destroyed”.

was ours and offering it as a sacrifice, He might do away with it, and conversely might invest us with what was His. This caused Paul to say, ‘This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal put on immortality’” (1 Corinthians 15:53).

“This did not come to pass in imagination, as some have supposed, but Jesus really became Man; the salvation of the whole man was brought about. For if the Word were in the Body in imagination only, it follows that both the salvation and the resurrection of man are imaginary also. That which was born of Mary was human by nature, and the Body of the Lord was a true one; because it was the same as our body, for Mary was our sister inasmuch as we all are from Adam. No one can doubt this. After He had risen from the dead, when some thought that they did not see the Lord in the body derived from Mary, but were beholding a spirit instead, He said, ‘See My hands and My feet, and the prints of the nails, that it is I Myself; handle Me and see; for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see Me to have. And when He had said thus, He showed them His hands and His feet’ (Luke 24:39). From this they can be refuted who have ventured to say that the Lord was transformed into flesh and bones. He did not say, ‘As you see Me to be flesh and bone’, but ‘as you see Me to have’, in order that it might not be thought that the Word Himself was changed into these things, but that He might be believed to have them after His resurrection as well as before His death.”

Leo the Great, Bishop of Rome, wrote⁷⁸ to monks in Palestine to beware of “Christians” who claim that Jesus didn’t have a real fleshly body. Leo stated that Christ had two natures, but there was no confusion between them, and both natures concurred in everything He did.

“From that beginning in the Virgin’s womb, ‘the Word became flesh’, no sort of division ever arose between the Divine and the human substance. Through all the growth and changes of His body, the actions were of one Person the whole time. Yet we do not by any mixing of them up confound those actions, which were done inseparably (flesh and spirit together). From the character of His actions, we perceive what belonged to either form. For neither do His Divine actions affect His human, nor His human actions affect His Divine. Both His human and divine actions concur in this way that in their operation His twofold qualities are not absorbed the one by the other; His individuality was not doubled either. Therefore let those Christian phantom-mongers tell us, what nature of the Savior’s it was that was fastened to the wood of the Cross, that lay in the tomb, and that on the third day rose in the flesh when the stone was rolled away from the grave? What kind of body did Jesus present to His disciples’ eyes, entering when the doors were shut? To drive away the beholders’ disbelief, He required them to inspect with their eyes and to handle with their hands the still open prints of the nails and the flesh wound of His pierced side. But if in spite of the truth being so clear, their persistence in heresy will just assure their position in darkness. Let them show how they promise themselves the hope of eternal life, which no one can attain to, except through the mediator between God and man, the man Jesus Christ.”

⁷⁸ Leo the Great, Letter to the Monks of Palestine, 124, 6.

Early Work of the Twelve

May 12, 2013
2nd Sunday of Pascha
Revision E

Epistle: Acts 5:12-20

Today's Epistle lesson gives us a glimpse of the work of the Twelve before Thomas and the others began their missionary journeys abroad. Some characteristics of this time are listed below. Since Stephen was stoned less than one year after Pentecost⁷⁹, we have a time period that is well established during which all this took place:

- The Twelve were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch at the Temple (Acts 5:12).
- The people esteemed them very highly (Acts 5:13).
- None of the rest, meaning the priests and Pharisees, dared to join them (Acts 5:13).
- A little later this changed and many of the priests were obedient to the faith (Acts 6:7).
- By the time of the Council in Jerusalem⁸⁰, some of the sect of the Pharisees had believed also (Acts 15:5).
- Multitudes of men and women were increasingly added to the Lord (Acts 5:14).
- People laid the sick on beds in the streets so that Peter's shadow might fall on them and heal them (Acts 5:15).
- Multitudes gathered from surrounding cities to bring in the sick and demon possessed to be healed (Acts 5:16).

Thomas was present during all this. When everyone was scattered after the death of Stephen, Thomas continued to perform similar miracles during his travels abroad. While the Scripture records just the stoning of Stephen in the year after Pentecost, in actuality, two hundred others were also stoned that same day, including deacon Nicanor⁸¹. Thus, people were leaving town to avoid a major bloodbath organized by the Jewish leaders.

The Work of the Apostles

The life of the Church developed very quickly after Pentecost. It was only one year after Pentecost that Stephen was stoned and the Church was scattered. Yet well before that there had developed an amazingly mature life of the Church. John Chrysostom characterized⁸² the Early Church after Pentecost as full of wonder, from the character of the Apostles, but also from the virtuous character of the people. It was like earth had become a heaven, even though there was danger from their enemies.

“Observe how, while to their own people they are strict; against the unbelievers they do not exercise their power. ‘But the people magnified them’

⁷⁹ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, December 27 states that Stephen martyred one year after Pentecost. Demetrius of Rostov, The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints, tr. Fr Thomas Marretta, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 2000, December 27 states that Stephen was martyred on December 27 (i.e. his Feast Day) in the year following Pentecost.

⁸⁰ That is c. 48 AD or about 18 years later.

⁸¹ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, July 28.

⁸² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Acts, XII.

(Acts 5:13). Luke had mentioned their being ‘in Solomon’s porch’, and that you may not wonder how the multitude allowed this, he tells us that they did not dare even to approach them, for ‘no man dared join himself to them’ (Acts 5:13). ‘But believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women, so much that they brought out the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them’ (Acts 5:14, 15). This was great faith, surpassing what had been shown in the case of Christ. How did this come about? Because Christ declared, ‘Greater works than these shall they do, because I go to My Father’ (John 14:12). These things the people did while the Apostles remained there, before they started moving about from place to place. From other places they were all bringing their sick on beds and couches; and from all quarters fresh tribute of wonder accrued to them. They came from those that believed, from those that were healed, from him that was punished; from their boldness of speech towards their adversaries, from the virtuous behavior of the believers! The effect produced was certainly not due to the miracles only. Though the Apostles themselves modestly ascribe it all to this cause, declaring that they did these things in the Name of Christ, yet at the same time the life and noble conduct of the men helped to produce this effect. ‘Believers were added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women’ (Acts 5:14). Observe, how Luke now no longer tells the number of them that believe; at such a rate was the faith making way even to an immense multitude, and so widely was the Resurrection proclaimed. So then ‘the people magnified them’, but they were now no longer being despised as they once were; for in a moment, at a single turn of the scale, such have been the effects produced by the fisherman and by the publican! Earth had become a heaven, for manner of life, for boldness of speech, for wonders. Like angels, they were looked upon with wonder: all unconcerned about ridicule, about threats, about peril: they were compassionate, and benefited everyone. Some of them they aided with money, some with words, and some with healing of their bodies and souls; they accomplished every kind of healing.”

Cyril of Jerusalem quickly summarized⁸³ the working of the Holy Spirit in the Early Church. The healing from Peter’s shadow was not an isolated event, but represented the spirit of the times.

“In the power of the Holy Spirit, by the will of Father and Son, Peter stood with the Eleven, and lifting up his voice⁸⁴, captured in the spiritual net of his words, about three thousand souls. So great was the grace which worked in all the Apostles together, that out of the Jews, those crucifiers of Christ, this great number believed, were baptized in the Name of Christ, and continued steadfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine and in the prayers (Acts 2:42). In the same power of the Holy Spirit, Peter and John went up to the Temple at the 9th hour of prayer (Acts 3:1), and in the Name of Jesus at the Beautiful Gate healed the man, who had been lame for forty years from his mother’s womb. Then it was fulfilled which

⁸³ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XVII, 21-22, 25-27.

⁸⁴ Lift up your voice with strength, you that bring good tidings to Jerusalem ()

was spoken, ‘Then shall the lame man leap as a hart’ (Isaiah 35:6). And thus, as they captured in the spiritual net of their doctrine five thousand believers at once, so they confuted the misguided rulers of the people and the chief priests. This was not through their own wisdom, for they were unlearned and ignorant men (Acts 4:13), but through the mighty power of the Holy Spirit; for it is written, Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them (Acts 4:8). So great also was the grace of the Holy Spirit, which worked by means of the Twelve Apostles in them who believed, that they were of one heart and of one soul’ (Acts 4:32). Their enjoyment of their goods was common; the possessors piously offered the prices of their possessions, and no one among them lacked anything (Acts 4:34); while Ananias and Sapphira, who attempted to lie to the Holy Spirit, underwent their fitting punishment” (Acts 5:1-11).

“So great was the spiritual grace shed around the Apostles, that gentle as they were, they were the objects of dread (Acts 5:13). The streets were filled with the sick on their beds and couches, that as Peter passed by, at least his shadow might fall on some of them (Acts 5:15). The multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to this holy Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed in this power of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 5:16).

“Philip also in the city of Samaria drove away the unclean spirits, and healed the paralyzed and lame, and brought to Christ great multitudes of those that believed (Acts 8:5-8). To whom Peter and John came down, and with prayer, and the laying on of hands, imparted the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, from which Simon Magus alone was declared an alien (Acts 8:14-20). At another time Philip was called by the Angel of the Lord on the road, for the sake of that most godly Ethiopian, the Eunuch. He instructed the Eunuch, and baptized him (Acts 8:26-36), and thus sent into Ethiopia a herald of Christ, as it is written, ‘Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hand to God’ (Psalm 68:31). He was caught away by the Angel, and preached the Gospel in the cities in succession.”

“With this Holy Spirit Paul also had been filled after his calling by our Lord Jesus Christ. Godly Ananias came as a witness in Damascus to what we say. Immediately the Spirit’s mighty working changed the blindness of Paul’s eyes into newness of sight; and made him a chosen vessel to bear the Name of the Lord who had appeared to him, before kings and Israel (Acts 9:12-18). He rendered the former persecutor an ambassador and a good servant, one who from Jerusalem, and even to Illyricum, fully preached the Gospel (Romans 15:19), and instructed even imperial Rome. He carried the earnestness of his preaching as far as Spain (Romans 15:24, 28), undergoing conflicts innumerable, and performing signs and wonders.”

“In the power of the same Holy Spirit Peter also healed Aeneas the paralytic at Lydda (Acts 9:32-35), which is now Diospolis, and at Joppa raised from the dead Tabitha, rich in good works (Acts 9:40). On the housetop in a trance, he saw heaven opened, and he learned plainly to call no man common or unclean, though he should be of the Greeks (Acts 10:9-16). And when he was sent for by Cornelius, he heard clearly the Holy Spirit Himself saying that those

of the Gentiles, who believe, are also partakers of the grace of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 10:45).

We get a glimpse of what life in Jerusalem was like prior to the bloodbath that occurred with the death of Stephen. The events of Acts 5:17-42 is summarized below:

- The high priest and the Sadducees hauled the Apostles into prison publicly (Acts 5:17).
- An angel let them out and told them to go teach in the Temple (Acts 5:19).
- Meanwhile, the high priest chairing the Sanhedrin told the officers to bring the Apostles (Acts 5:21).
- The officers found the prison still secure, sealed just like the tomb had been sealed, but no one inside. The guards didn’t realize anyone was gone (Acts 5:22).
- This left the Sanhedrin wondering at what would happen if it was proclaimed that the Apostles walked through the walls of a secure prison, a very embarrassing situation for the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:24).
- Then someone came and told the Sanhedrin that the Apostles were teaching in the Temple openly (Acts 5:25).
- So the high priest sent an entourage to the Apostles to ask them nicely to come, so that the people wouldn’t stone the officers from the high priest for countermanding an obvious act of God (Acts 5:26).
- When the Apostles testified boldly, the Sanhedrin was furious, literally cut to the heart, and wanted to kill them (Acts 5:33).
- Then Gamaliel, the most respected rabbi, persuaded the Sanhedrin to leave them alone (Acts 5:35-39).
- So the Sanhedrin scourged them according to the custom for law-breakers and let them go (Acts 5:40).
- And the Apostles went back to the Temple to teach (Acts 5:42).

John Chrysostom comments⁸⁵ on this to say that the Sanhedrin didn’t even consider asking, “Who are these people?”, that have just done something that is not humanly possible. They seem to have no clue at all regarding what’s happening.

“These priests ought to have asked as their first question, ‘How did you get out?’ Instead of this, as if nothing had happened, they ask, ‘Did we not strictly command you not to speak?’ (Acts 5:28). Observe, by the report of others, they are advised about all the circumstances; they saw the prison remaining safely closed, and the guards standing before the doors.”

“A twofold security this was; as was the case at the Sepulcher, where there was both the seal and the men to watch. See how they fought against God! Did it occur to them whether this was of man’s doing that happened to them? Who led them out when the doors were shut? How did they come out with the keepers standing in front of the door? Truly the Sadducees must be mad or drunken to talk like this. Here are men whom neither prison, nor bonds, nor closed doors have been able to keep in; and yet they expect to overpower them? Such is their childish folly!”

⁸⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Acts, XIII.

Later when they brought the Apostles to the Sanhedrin, they feared the multitude (Acts 5:26). Chrysostom continued⁸⁶:

“Why? How had the multitude helped the Apostles? When they ought to have feared God Who was continually delivering them like winged creatures out of their power; instead of that, ‘they feared the multitude!’ The Apostles might have said, ‘Who are you that you countermand God?’ But what do the Apostles say? Very mildly, they answer, ‘We ought to obey God rather than man’” (Acts 5:29).

Already, the Twelve were getting a very strong reaction from the Sanhedrin. Chrysostom noted⁸⁷ that the Sanhedrin thought that the Apostles were bloodthirsty and bent on revenge for Jesus’ crucifixion. “You have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this Man’s blood on us” (Acts 5:28). But yet the Apostles did not answer with defiance (Acts 5:29), even with the whole city backing them (Acts 5:26) and being endowed with so great Grace at Pentecost. Instead they pleaded with them that they, too, might obtain forgiveness (Acts 5:31). Hearing this “they were furious and plotted to kill the Apostles” (Acts 5:33). Yet what was there that was deserving of death? Such was their intoxication; they did not even see what had taken place.

John Chrysostom stated⁸⁸ that it is good to notice the ups and downs of life in the Early Church, and how their life was mutually dependant on one another.

“Now I would have you observe the way in which their whole life is interwoven. First there was despondency on account of Christ being taken from them, and then came joy because of the Spirit descending upon them. Again, dejection came because of the scoffers (Acts 2:13), and then joy in the result of their own apology (Acts 2:37). They had become conspicuous, and God made revelations to them, so there was gladness; however in that they had cut off some of their own company (Ananias and Sapphira), there was sadness. Again there was gladness from their success (Acts 4:23-31), and again sadness by reason of the High Priest (Acts 5:17). But let us notice again, ‘They sold their possessions and brought the sale price, and laid them down at the Apostles’ feet’ (Acts 4:34-37). Instead of leaving the Apostles to sell the possessions, they themselves sold, and presented the prices to them.”

Chrysostom also noted⁸⁹ that the early Christians possessed an unusual gladness that words can’t express, even in the face of losing their property and their lives. And it was not just the miracles; a greater factor was the voluntary giving up of the possession of riches.

“When there is such excess of joys, that people are delighted when in bonds, think what must be the greatness of that joy! For like those who are high in office, whatever evils may happen, they don’t feel the effect of them, but continue in their enjoyment; so did these all the more rejoice on account of these evils. For it is impossible in words to express how great pleasure they feel, who suffer for Christ’s sake; they rejoice in their sufferings, rather than in their good things.

⁸⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Acts, XIII.

⁸⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Acts, XIII.

⁸⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Acts, XII.

⁸⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Acts, XIII.

Whoever loves Christ, knows what I say. And who, if he were ever so rich, could have escaped so many dangers, traveling among many different nations, for the sole purpose of bringing about a reformation in their manner of life? For it was just as if by royal mandate that they carried everything abroad; but a human mandate could never have been so effective as their words were. For a royal edict compels by necessity, but these drew men willingly and spontaneously, and with hearts thankful beyond measure. What royal edict would ever have persuaded men to part with all their property and their lives, to despise home, country, kindred, and even self-preservation? Yet the voices of the fishermen and the tent-maker did this. They were both happy, and more powerful than everyone. ‘Yes’, you say, ‘those of course were, for they worked miracles’. But what miracles did those who believed work? The three thousand, and the five thousand passed their time in gladness also. And well they might; for the possession of riches, which is the groundwork of all discomforts, was done away with.”

About a year after Pentecost, when Stephen got into a dispute with the Freedmen (Acts 6:9), he testified also before the Sanhedrin. Only Gamaliel could not hold the rage back this time. [Gamaliel later became a Christian, perhaps because of these things]. In all this there is a major conflict between light and darkness. Some people whose deeds are evil love darkness more than light (John 3:19). The more light that is present, the stronger the reaction of darkness! All Twelve Apostles encountered this all their lives. And it is something we encounter also as we walk in the Light as children of light.

The Healing by Peter’s Shadow

The healing of many people by Peter’s shadow is similar to the use of “holy relics” in many parts of the world. We in the West are largely unaccustomed to dealing with this, but it is illustrated by an account of a man being raised from the dead by touching the bones of Elisha (2 Kings 13:20-21). In this account, the raising from the dead was completely unintentional; no faith at all existed on the part of the burial crew. However, the relics of Elisha had been sanctified by the power behind the life of Elisha, and even though Elisha had departed, there was still power in his relics. Similarly during the two years that Paul was in Ephesus on his Third Missionary Journey, handkerchiefs and aprons that touched Paul’s body were used to heal diseases and cast out evil spirits (Acts 19:12). The principle here is that one thing sanctified another.

John Cassian focused⁹⁰ on Elisha’s use of his staff. The staff is the Cross⁹¹, and it is useful against the demons that we encounter. Just as Peter’s shadow (Acts 5:14-15), Paul’s aprons (Acts 19:11-12) and even Elisha’s bones (2 Kings 13:20-21) had power because of the effect of the Cross on their owner, so relics of the saints have power to one who believes.

“Elisha teaches that there is a usefulness to carrying a staff; as he says to Gehazi, his servant, when sending him to raise the woman’s son to life. ‘Take my staff and run and go and place it on the lad’s face that he may live’ (2 Kings 4:29). And the prophet would certainly not have given it to him to take unless he

⁹⁰ John Cassian, *Institutes of the Coenobia*, I, 8.

⁹¹ The meaning of the word translated “Cross”, in the 1st Century context, does not necessarily imply a crossbar, as we picture it today. A simple “Cross” was just a straight pole, like a staff.

had been in the habit of constantly carrying it about in his hand. And the carrying of the staff spiritually teaches that one ought never to walk unarmed among so many barking dogs of faults and invisible beasts of spiritual wickedness. From this, the blessed David, in his longing to be free, says, 'Deliver not to the beasts, O Lord, the soul that trusts in You' (Psalm 74:19 LXX). But when these beasts of faults attack them, they ought to beat them off with the sign of the cross and drive them far away. When the beasts rage furiously against them they should annihilate them by the constant recollection of the Lord's passion and by following the example of His life".

Cyril of Jerusalem pondered⁹² how Elisha raised the dead twice, once when he was alive, once when he was dead. In the second case, it was due to a virtue that resides in his relics due to its close association with his righteous soul for many years.

"I speak of Elisha, who raised the dead twice; once in his lifetime and once after his death. When alive he worked the resurrection by means of his own soul. Not only the souls of the just are honored, but also in the bodies of the just there lies a power. The corpse, which was cast into the sepulcher of Elisha, when it touched the dead body of the prophet, was raised (2 Kings 13:20-21), and the dead body of the prophet did the work of the soul. That which was dead and buried gave life to the dead, and though it gave life, yet it continued itself among the dead. Why? If Elisha should rise again, the work might be ascribed to his soul alone. This also shows that even though the soul is not present, a virtue resides in the body of the saints, because of the righteous soul, which has for so many years dwelt in it, and used it as its servant. And let us not foolishly disbelieve, as though this thing had not happened. For if handkerchiefs and aprons, which are from without, touching the bodies of the diseased, raised up the sick (Acts 19:12), how much more should the actual body of the Prophet raise the dead?"

Ambrose of Milan noted⁹³ that in both cases where Elisha raised the dead, it occurred after close contact with his physical body. This foreshadowed the raising of the dead after the death of Christ (Matthew 27:51-53).

"Elijah, then, raised the dead, but he prayed; he did not command. Elisha raised one to life after laying himself upon the dead body (2 Kings 4:34-35), in accordance with its posture. And, again, the contact with Elisha's corpse gave life to the dead (2 Kings 13:20-21), that the prophet might foreshadow the coming of Him, Who, being sent in the likeness of sinful flesh, should, even after His burial, raise the dead to life" (Matthew 27:51-53).

Another use of "holy relics" comes from the healing of the woman's hemorrhage, where we have an example of the use of physical objects for spiritual purposes. Jesus taught that one thing sanctifies another. Here power went out from Him (Luke 8:46) via a touch of the hem of His garment. The Master sanctified the garment and the garment sanctified the hem. Jesus had criticized the scribes and Pharisees for saying that whoever swears by the Temple, it is nothing;

⁹² Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XVIII, 16.

⁹³ Ambrose of Milan, Exposition of the Christian Faith, III, iv, 30.

but whoever swears by the gold of the Temple, he is obliged to perform it. Jesus pointed out: “Which is greater, the gold or the Temple that sanctified it?” (Matthew 23:16-17) Thus, one thing sanctifies another. This is also the case with icons, holy water, holy oil and many instances of relics of the saints. The Scribes and Pharisees concentrated only on what had material value.

John Chrysostom stated⁹⁴ that there are special characteristics about the saints, such as Paul, Peter and Elijah. Even their clothes and shadows are powerful! There is also a proper boldness about righteousness, just as there is cowardice to sin. Chrysostom compared the saints to lions, but more powerful; when the lions roar, all the other animals run for their lives.

“The nature of sin is such that it condemns while no one accuses; it makes the sinner a timid being; one that trembles at a sound; while righteousness has the contrary effect. Hear how the Scripture describes this cowardice of sin, and the boldness of righteousness. ‘The wicked flee when no man pursues’ (Proverbs 28:1). How does he flee when no man pursues? He has within an accuser in his conscience; and this he carries about everywhere. Just as it would be impossible to flee from himself, so neither can he escape the persecutor within; but wherever he goes, he is scourged, and has an incurable wound! But not such is the righteous man. ‘The righteous is bold as a lion!’ (Proverbs 28:1) Such a man was Elijah. He saw, for instance, King Ahab coming towards him, and Ahab said, ‘Why is it that you pervert Israel?’ Elijah answered, ‘I don’t pervert Israel, but you and your father’s house do’ (1 Kings 18:17-18 LXX). Truly, the just man is as bold as a lion, for Elijah stood up against the king just as a lion does against some barking dog. Although the one had the purple, the other had the sheepskin; which was the more venerable garment of the two? For that purple brought on the grievous famine (1 Kings 17:1), but this sheepskin liberated the world from that calamity! (1 Kings 18:41-45) It also divided the Jordan (2 Kings 2:8) and made Elisha a twofold⁹⁵ Elijah! How great is the virtue of the Saints! Not only their words; not only their bodies, but even their clothes are always esteemed venerable by the whole creation. The sheepskin of this man divided the Jordan! The sandals of the Three Children trampled down the fire! (Daniel 3:20-25 LXX) The word of Elisha changed the waters, so that it made them float the iron on their surface! (2 Kings 6:6) The rod of Moses divided the Red Sea and cleft the rock! (Psalm 78:13-16) The garments of Paul expelled diseases! (Acts 19:12) The shadow of Peter put death⁹⁶ to flight! (Acts 5:15) The ashes of the holy Martyrs⁹⁷ drive away demons! For this reason they do all things with authority,

⁹⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Statues, VIII, 3.

⁹⁵ See John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Statues, II, 26. Elisha received the sheepskin from Elijah as the greatest inheritance. Elijah was then a twofold person: living with Christ in heaven never having died, and also working miracles in the person of Elisha on earth.

⁹⁶ Luke’s account in The Acts of the Apostles doesn’t say specifically that Peter’s shadow actually raised a dead man, but Chrysostom mentions this a number of other times. For example:

John Chrysostom, Two Homilies on Eutropius, II, 14.

John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Statues, IV, 6.

John Chrysostom, Commentary on Galatians, Chapter 1, vv. 1-3.

John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXIII, 3.

John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, III, 9-10.

⁹⁷ See also John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Statues, I, 5.

even as Elijah did. For he did not look on the crown, nor the outward pomp of King Ahab, but he looked on the soul clad in rags, squalid, dirty, and in a more wretched condition than that of any criminal. Ahab was the captive and slave of his passions; Elijah despised his power. He saw King Ahab, but did not see a real king. For what was the advantage of outward abundance, when the poverty within was so great? And what harm could outward poverty do for Elijah, when there was such a treasure of wealth within? Paul was also just such a lion; for when he had entered into the prison, and only raised his voice, he shook the entire foundation. He gnawed the fetters in pieces, employing not his teeth, but words; on which account it were fitting to call such men not merely lions, but something more than lions. A lion, often after he has fallen into a net, is taken; but the Saints when they are bound, become still more powerful. This is what Paul did in the prison, having loosed the prisoners, shaken the walls, bound the keeper, and overcome him by the word of godliness. The lion utters his voice, and puts all the wild beasts to flight. The Saint utters his voice, and drives away the demons on every side! The weapons of the lion are a hairy mane, pointed claws, and sharp teeth. The weapons of the righteous man are spiritual wisdom, temperance, patience, and contempt of all present things. Whoever has these weapons shall not only be able to deride wicked men, but even the adverse powers themselves.”

Chrysostom also stated that the miracles of the Apostles testify to the Resurrection of Christ in that His disciples worked greater miracles in His Name after His Ascension than He did Himself before the Crucifixion.

“A great blessing truly is faith⁹⁸, and one which makes those great who hold it rightly with good living. By this men are enabled to do the things of God in His Name. Well did Christ say, ‘If you have faith you shall say to this mountain, move, and it shall move’ (Matthew 17:20). And again, ‘He that believes on Me, the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do’ (John 14:12). The greater works are those miracles, which the disciples worked, after this. For even the shadow of Peter raised a dead man; and so the power of Christ was the more proclaimed. Since it was not so wonderful that He while alive should work miracles, as that when He was dead others should be enabled to work in His Name greater than He worked. This was an indisputable proof of the Resurrection; if everyone had seen the Resurrection, not everyone would have believed it. Some men might have said that it was an appearance; but one who saw that by His Name alone greater miracles were worked than when He conversed with men, he could not disbelieve unless he were truly senseless. A great blessing then is faith when it comes from glowing feelings, great love, and a fervent soul. It makes us truly wise; it hides our human inferiority. Leaving reasoning aside, it philosophizes about things in heaven; or rather what the wisdom of men cannot discover, it abundantly comprehends and succeeds in.”

⁹⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXIII, 3.

“The working of miracles⁹⁹ by someone’s shadow had not occurred in the history of Christ; but here what He had told them actually came to pass, that ‘those which believe on Me, greater works shall they do’” (John 14:12).

Yet Chrysostom counseled¹⁰⁰ his people to be humble regarding the gifts that God had given to them. While some gifts are greater than others, such as raising the dead using shadows and napkins like Peter and Paul, yet still the greatest gift is love, and everyone can have that. Love demonstrates its owner to be a Christian, whereas the other gifts are entirely of God’s grace and show nothing about our own merit.

“You don’t know yourself as God knows you. When God dispenses, let us not demand an account of Him; for this is the uttermost impiety. We are slaves, and slaves far removed from our Master, knowing not even the things which are in front of us.”

“Let us not then busy ourselves about the counsel of God, but whatever He has given, this let us guard, though it be small, though it be the lowest, and we shall be completely approved. Or rather, none of the gifts of God are small. Tell me then, which would you rather do: raise the dead with shadows and napkins (Acts 5:15, 19:12), or have the gift of teaching? Doubtless you will say the former, to raise the dead with shadows and napkins. If then I should show you that there is another gift far greater than this, and that you do not receive it when it is in your power to receive it, are not you justly deprived of those others? This gift everyone may have. I know your mouths are open wide and you are amazed at hearing that it is in your power to have a greater gift than raising the dead, and giving eyes to the blind, doing the same things which were done in the time of the Apostles. And it seems to you unbelievable.”

“What is this gift? Love! Believe me; the word is not mine, but Christ’s speaking by Paul. ‘Earnestly desire the best gifts; and yet I show you a more excellent way’ (1 Corinthians 12:31). What is this, ‘yet more excellent way’? What he means is this. The Corinthians were proud over their gifts, and those having tongues, the least gift, were puffed up against the rest. He said, therefore, ‘Do you desire gifts? I show you a way of gifts not merely excelling but far more excellent’. Then he said, ‘Though I speak with the tongues of Angels, and don’t have love, I am nothing. And though I have faith so as to move mountains, and don’t have love, I am nothing’” (1 Corinthians 13:1, 2).

“Earnestly desire this gift! This is greater than raising the dead. This is far better than all the rest; that it is so, hear what Christ Himself said, speaking with His disciples, ‘By this shall all men know that you are My disciples’ (John 13:35). Showing how everyone will know, He mentioned not the miracles, but ‘If you have love for one another’ (John 13:35). And again He said to the Father, ‘Hereby shall they know that You have sent Me, if they are one’ (John 17:21 loosely). He said to His disciples, ‘A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another’ (John 13:34). People who do this are more venerable and glorious than those who raise the dead, and with reason. Working miracles are wholly of God’s grace, but this is of your own earnestness also. This is an

⁹⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Acts, XII.

¹⁰⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, III, 9-10.

example of one who is truly a Christian; this shows the disciple of Christ as a man that has nothing common with earth. Without this, not even martyrdom is profitable.”

Cyril of Alexandria stated¹⁰¹ that many people and things bear witness concerning Christ. Among the “things” that bear witness are the Jordan River and the Sea of Tiberias, the wind, the five loaves, Peter’s shadow and the wood of the Cross, that has been spread throughout the world. Also bearing witness are the darkened sun, the hill of Golgotha and the Mount of Olives.

“His former enemies bear witness, of whom the blessed Paul is one, having been a little while His enemy, but for a long time His servant. The Twelve Apostles are His witnesses, having preached the truth not only in words, but also by their own torments and deaths. The shadow of Peter bears witness, having healed the sick in the Name of Christ. The handkerchiefs and aprons bear witness, as in like manner by Christ’s power they wrought cures of old through Paul. Persians and Goths, and all the Gentile converts bear witness, by dying for His sake, whom they never saw with their eyes. The demons, who to this day are driven out by the faithful, also bear witness to Him.”

¹⁰¹ Cyril of Alexandria, Catechetical Lectures, X, 19.