

# ***St. Thomas Sunday***

## ***Paschal Homily & Reflection***

### ***What does the Resurrection mean for us?***

By Sub-Deacon Lazarus Der-Ghazarian

Given on April 23, 2017

Christ is Risen! Let us begin, in the name of the Father, Son & Holy Spirit. Amen.

When thinking of the Resurrection of our Lord, a question might arise: "What on earth just happened?" You aren't going to find out in this week's copy of Time or Newsweek. When it comes to the meaning of Christ's resurrection, the world is basically clueless.

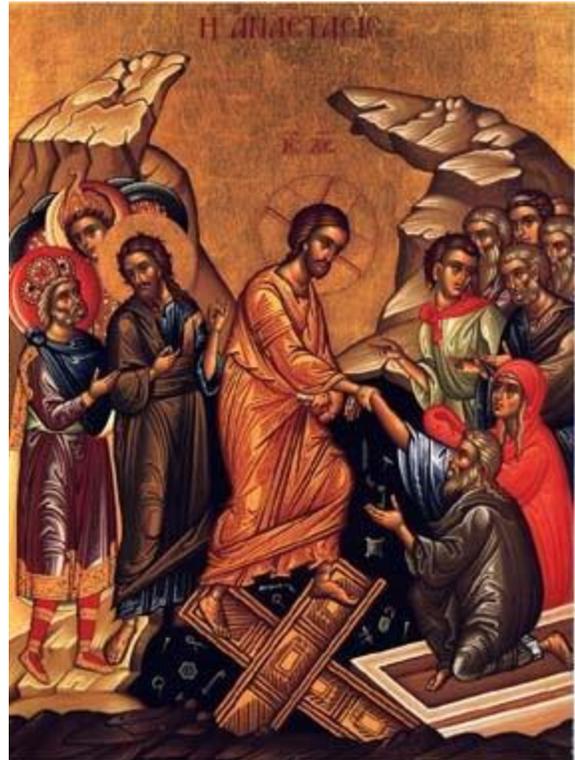
But it's crucial that we Christians understand it. As St. Paul said, "if Christ is not raised, [our] faith is in vain and [we] of all people, are most to be pitied" (1 Cor 15:19).

To understand let's review a little:

Around the age of 30, Christ began to preach. He soon gained popularity as a good preacher and a reformer. He was despised by the religious authorities. Finally He was perceived as too much of a threat to them. So He was betrayed, tortured and crucified.

It should've been the end of the story. For every other controversial religious leader who was killed, this WAS the end of their story -but not for Jesus.

What on earth just happened?



The next thing His followers are claiming He is risen. The soldiers who were charged on peril of their lives to guard the tomb can't explain it. His followers are beaten and threatened with their lives yet they won't deny that they had seen Him risen. Finally they are given the ultimate choice and they accept DEATH rather than deny "that which they had seen with their eyes [as the Apostle John writes], what they had looked upon, and what their hands had handled, concerning the Word of Life..." (1 Jn 1:1), what they knew to be as true as their own lives: HE IS RISEN.

What on earth just happened? What does it matter if He did rise? Let's explore the meaning of the resurrection:

Death was brought upon us by our first parent's sin. Mortality, the fact that we all die, was passed on to us from them. Through Sin and Death, man was torn asunder and the fear of death destroyed his inner spiritual harmony and communion with God. As it says in the Psalms, man could not deliver himself from death (Psalm 48 LXX).

In order to break death's power over us, it took an act of God. As St. Athanasius said, God partook of our humanity so that we could partake of His divinity! Christ, being the Only-Begotten Son and Word of God, shared the same Divine nature with God His Father. St. Paul states, "...in [Christ] the whole fullness of Divinity dwells bodily" (Colossians 2:9). Thus He joined His Divinity to our humanity.

St. Paul EXPLAINS this great mystery in Philippians, stating:

"...though He was in the form of God, [He] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:6-8).

But how did Christ's death destroy Death's power?

Even the Old Testament saints like Abraham, Moses & David were caught by Death and held captive by Hades. Death, in a sense, had man in a "strangle-hold," a "death-grip" so tight, he could not break free. On the one hand, man could not free himself from death. But on the other, God could not die. We needed a savior that was both Divine... and human.

Therefore the Son of God became the Son of Mary. He underwent death in our humanity so that He could break free from the clutches of Death through His Divinity. By His death and Resurrection, He crushed Death and its power over mankind. St. Paul says, Christ "tasted death for everyone" and "through death He... destroyed him who has the power of death, that is, the devil" (Hebrews 2:9 & 14).

This is why the Icon of the Resurrection shows (1) Christ pulling the O.T. saints out of Hades and (2) Christ trampling down Death (personified by an old man) AND crushing the gates of Hades.

Now if we are united to Christ through faith and Baptism, we are given the gift of eternal life. As St. Paul said, "Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead... even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we [are] united together in His death, certainly we... shall be in [...] His resurrection" (Rom 6:3-5).

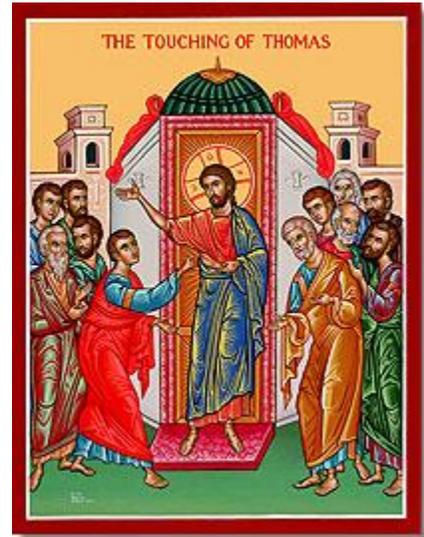
This is why, in the Paschal Liturgy, instead of the Trisagion (the Holy God), we sang, "All you who have been Baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Holy Baptism sacramentally unites us to Christ's death & resurrection and gives us the power to rise again.

St. John Chrysostom said in his famous Paschal Homily:

"Let no one fear Death, for the Savior's death has set us free. He that was taken by Death has annihilated it! [...] Death took a body and, face to face, met God!"

Christ endured death for us in our human nature and conquered it. We no longer have to fear death because Christ is Risen and has conquered death for us. He has become "the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him" (Hebrews 5:8-9).

Today St. Thomas came face to face with this reality as he met the risen Christ. Today's Gospel shows that the Apostles were realists. They saw their Master get crucified. In their minds He was gone. But their messianic dreams were marvelously revived at His resurrection.



When Jesus walked through that locked door and beckoned Thomas to come touch the holes in His hands and reach his hand into His side, the Apostles realized He was truly risen. St. Thomas' response to Jesus should be everyone's, "MY LORD AND MY GOD!"

After his conversion this doubter turned saint went farther than any other Apostle to spread the Gospel, beyond the borders of the vast Roman Empire all the way to India where he accepted martyrdom for preaching Christ. St. Thomas is a powerful example that even if we get doubts, God will help us overcome them, if put our trust in Him and the power of His resurrection.

"If Christ is not risen," St. Paul says, "our faith is in vain." What sets Christ apart from all other religious teachers, and what sets Christianity apart from all other religions, is the fact that Christ is Risen! He proved He was exactly who He said He was: the Divine Son of God and Savior of the world!

As it says in the Psalms, "GOD has worked His salvation in the midst of the earth" (Ps 73:12). THAT'S what on earth just happened & that's what the resurrection means for all of us!

In the name of the Father, Son & Holy Spirit.  
Amen. Christ is Risen!

Sub-Deacon Lazarus Der-Ghazarian