

Summary of September 23

This week we covered chapter 20 of St. John's Gospel. This chapter focused on our Lord's Resurrection from the dead! Because of the singular importance of this passage, we spent a little time contemplating the reason our Lord had to rise from the dead and a short reflection on this topic was shared (copied below). Numerous attendees again contributed excellent observations and insights through the course of the class. We contemplated several icons related to this chapter including the Visitation of the Holy Myrrh-bearers to the Tomb, the Touching of Thomas and the Harrowing of Hades by our Lord.

Q. Why did Jesus have to rise from the dead for our salvation?

Just dying for us was not enough. If Jesus would have remained dead in the tomb, this would have done us no good at all. The whole reason He became man and experienced death was to break the power of death in our human nature. Therefore, because of Christ's resurrection, death no longer has power over us. As St. John Chrysostom said, "Death took a human body and encountered God!" This was our Lord's plan along. We were caught by death and unable to deliver ourselves. He being God could not experience death. Therefore God sent His Only-begotten Son to become man, to unite our fallen nature with His Divine nature in order to heal it. He experienced death and destroyed its power by conquering death and rising again. Now if we are united to Him, if we are alive in Christ, death no longer has power over us. When our life is finished here on earth, those who have died with Him in Baptism, and have been united with Him in faith, will surely rise with Him. If Jesus had remained dead in the tomb He would have been no different than any other religious teacher like Buddha, Muhammad or Gandhi. But Jesus proved the veracity of His message by His own resurrection from the dead. As our Lord said, "I am the resurrection and the life, he that follows me, though he may die: he shall live." (Jn 11:25). -Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory to Him forever!

A. The Tomb Is Empty

Besides the excellent Eastern Christian notes in our Orthodox Study Bible here were some of the other topics covered in the study:

If reference to our Lord's resurrection on Sunday (Jn 20:1-2), we contemplated the great significance of the "Eighth Day" in Eastern Theology: "The Sabbath day (Saturday) is the seventh day. It is the day of rest in this world and the final day of the week. The next day, Sunday, is symbolic of the first day of creation, but it also is the last & eternal day of the Kingdom of God: the eighth day. So the first day is also the eighth day, the day beyond the confines of this world, the day which stands for the life of the world to come, the day of the eternal rest of the Kingdom of God. The number eight has symbolical significance in both Jewish and Christian spiritual tradition in that it signifies *more than* completion and fullness. Since seven is the number of earthly time (there are seven days in a week), eight signifies the Kingdom of God and the life of the world to come." -from Orthodox wiki

Regarding our Lord's burial clothes which were left behind (Jn 20:6-8): The burial cloths left behind are evidence of the resurrection b/c no thief would have taken the time to unwrap the corpse and fold his burial clothes neatly in the tomb. In fact Grave robbers in Jesus time usually stole the expensive grave linens and left the dead bodies. Rdr. John added a further reflection noting that he heard in a homily on the resurrection once that the folded napkin also have significance. In ancient cultures, when one was finished at a meal, he would leave the napkin unfolded, to indicate he was done. But he would leave it folded to indicate he was coming back. This could be a further indication that our is someday returning. The fulfilled scripture mentioned (Jn 20:9-10) comes from Ps. 15:10 LXX which prophesies our Lord's resurrection stating, "For You will not abandon my soul to Hades nor allow You Holy One to see corruption."

B. Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

When the angels ask Mary Magdalene, "Woman, why are you weeping" (Jn 20:15-16) this is not so much a request for information (they could guess why she was weeping) as it was a summons to rejoice." The angles are indicating that this is the time of joy and triumph for the whole world (OBS P.344). The fact that Mary recognizes Jesus when He calls her by name was a confirmation of our Lord's words in Jn 10:3-4 when Jesus said that He calls His own sheep by name and they would know His voice. When Jesus states to her that He is ascending to, "My Father and your Father" (20:17) -We are reminded that Jesus is the Son of God by nature (1:18), whereas believers are sons of God by adoption through grace (1:12) - (CCC 443, 654, ICBS).

C. Jesus Appears to Ten Disciples

The mention of "Eight days later" (20:26-27) is the second Sunday of Pascha. Again the "Eighth Day" is emphasized. "This appearance took place after eight days, by Jewish reckoning, counting each Sunday as one day. It is liturgically significant that these first Resurrection appearances took place on a Sunday. Sunday, the first day of the week, became the Christian day, "the Lord's day" (cf. Rev 1:10), the day when the defining act of Christian worship, the Eucharist, would take place. Jews might continue to meet on the Sabbath, but Christians -as Christians- met on the first day of the week to commemorate the Resurrection" (OBS, P. 352). For Christians, "the eighth day is therefore the day outside of time, outside of this age, the day of eternity, the day of the Kingdom. This Christian Sunday is the eighth day in that during this day we ascend to the Lord in our worship and enter the Kingdom, transcending the limitations of this age" (OBS, P.353).

Thomas words to Jesus, "My Lord and my God" (Jn 20:28-29), are one of the clearest recognitions of Jesus' Divinity in all of Scripture. This "Doubting Thomas," through witnessing the Resurrection of our Lord, would become "St. Thomas the Apostle" and take the Gospel farther, most probably, than any other Apostle (all the way to India!). His story is the climatic end of this chapter on Jesus' resurrection (cf. CCC 448, 644). "Here Thomas confesses Jesus not only to be his Lord, but his God as well. The confession with which John began his Gospel in 1:1 (saying the "Word was God") finds its fulfillment here in the Church's confession of this truth, when Thomas confesses that Jesus is indeed God. This is the climax of John's Gospel, the point to which all has been leading" (OBS, P. 353).

To whom does the blessing of Jesus which follows in v. 29 refer to??? If you believe in Jesus and have given your life over to Him as your Lord and your God, He is referring to you!

D. The Purpose of John's Gospel

Finally, once again, St. John mentions the "signs of Jesus" (20:30-31). There were many others which Jesus did. His miraculous signs have been a constant theme throughout John's Gospel and His resurrection is the greatest. Then there is a statement of purpose by the Evangelist: "He has written the Fourth Gospel both as history and as witness, in the hope that a factual portrayal of the Christ's life will not just inform the readers, but challenge them to accept him and his claims with true faith" (see also Lk 1;1-4, ICBS).

Your brother,
Sub-Deacon Lazarus