

SAINT THOMAS CHURCH

Fifth Avenue · New York City

Sunday, April 24, 2022

The Second Sunday of Easter

Festal Eucharist

11 a.m.

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A Sermon by

The Rev. Dr. Brandt Montgomery

on

Acts 5:27-32; Psalm 150; Revelation 1:4-8; John 20:19-31

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Christ Revealed by His Visible Body to the World

“These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through His Name.”—John 20:31

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

On behalf of the Headmaster, Organist and Choir Director, faculty and students of the Choir of Saint James School of Maryland, I would like to offer thanks to your Rector and your own Organist and Director of Music for their invitation for us to sing today’s principal Festal Mass and Festal Evensong. Saint James School has been enriched throughout many years by the presence of several Saint Thomas Choir School alumni, including two current members of our School Choir and another Saint Thomas alumnus, now too a Saint James alumnus and a member of the Choir School staff, who is today singing with the Saint James School Choir for this occasion. How good and pleasant it is to be with you to offer praise to our risen Lord and to renew the special relationship between our respective schools.

Today, the Second Sunday of Easter, is traditionally called “Low Sunday,” wherein the Church “settles down” from the grand jubilations of Easter Day. Though the ceremonial may be more moderate, today’s continuation of the Easter story is just as important as last Sunday’s beginning of it. The story continues from that first Easter Day, Jesus appearing in the fullness of His body, soul, and divinity to ten of the eleven remaining disciples after appearing earlier that day to Mary Magdalene. We then go forward eight days to Jesus making not only another appearance to those ten out of eleven, but a special appearance to Thomas, the eleventh disciple who was absent at the Gospel lesson’s start. In addition to hearing today’s Gospel, you all have the good fortune to artistically see it in the large stone niche right above the High Altar. There it is: the risen Christ presenting Himself to Thomas, the disciple responding with great joy. For all the disciples, but most especially for Thomas, the words of the Psalmist, *“Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning”* (Psalm 30:5), take on a brand-new meaning.

What today’s Gospel lesson shows is just how real and transformative the Resurrection of Jesus truly is. As He did to His disciples, Jesus appears to us again and again and again. He continually comes in that He may dwell in our hearts, that we may know His love and be filled with the fullness of God.¹ Thomas helps us see this. Though there is some doubt in his response to his fellow disciples’ claim, Thomas also conveys some openness to the possibility of it being true. Into that openness Jesus is able to come. Thomas wanted the truth, and the Truth came to him.

¹ Cf. Ephesians 3:17, 19.

What Thomas saw was not only Christ risen, but the Body of Christ transformed by a new reality. Hear, again, Thomas's words: *"Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe."* Christ's Body is transformed yet still bear these marks of His Passion as signs of the very length, width, height, and depth of his love for us all. "See," John says, *"what love the Father has given us"* (1 John 3:12). Jesus' nail prints and pierced side are the marks through which He tells us, "I love you. I did this for you."

And because Jesus loves us, the Easter story continues. Through Christ's Resurrection, ascension, and His gift of the Holy Ghost, God grants to all who believe the grace to participate in His redemptive work. As Christ's physical Body dwells at God's right hand in Heaven, the grace of God forms us into Christ's visible corporate Body on Earth. It is in this identity that God equips us as He did Thomas and his fellow apostles to be witnesses bearing *"record of the Word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ"* (Revelation 1:2). By our testimony of the risen Christ and observance of His Great Commission, God still makes the whole creation new.

It is truly remarkable to think how Christ's Resurrection has empowered His visible corporate Body, the Church, to proclaim Him from age to age through which Christ still comes and saves. It is because like Christ (though not by the same means), we, in our own respective ways, bear marks of our own trials and hardships. They are physical and emotional and can be hard to bear. Jesus knows our trials and hardships because He experienced them, but even more so. But because of the Resurrection, like Jesus, we, His visible corporate Body, despite being beat down and scourged by the troubles of this world, can rise above the troubles and carry on. In this way we are, as Peter today says in Acts, *"witnesses of these things...whom God hath given to them that obey Him"* (Acts 5:32). In this way Christ through us still comes and reveals Himself to the people of this world.

To quote a popular song, "What the world needs now is love, sweet love." That love is Jesus Christ and He is greatly needed in these times. These past couple of years with the COVID-19 pandemic and now an unjust and cruel war have been like a dark tomb. But in this day of resurrection, the faith we profess and our actions in response to God's love can be the revelation of Christ as the gracious bright light this world desperately needs. Christ has been raised from death, having defeated its power once and for all. Though we cannot (for now) see Jesus physically as Thomas and his fellow disciples did, He can still be seen through the words and actions of those who truly love Him. We are Christ's hands and feet through which He seeks to make Himself known to those seeking the Truth. The Easter story continues via our Christian discipleship. Thus, there is nothing ever "low" about Easter.

Jesus tells Thomas, *"Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."* He said this having in His mind and heart you, me, and all others in the meantime of the coming ages who would not have the kind of encounter that Thomas had. That is why we have in this meantime the Holy Ghost dwelling among us, revealing God's love manifested in the resurrected Jesus. But there will come that Great Day when our limited view of Christ will become full, us seeing Him face-to-face in all His glory. On that Day we all will be like Thomas, mesmerized by the very sight of Jesus. It will be a transformative and eternal reality, us all exclaiming, "Our Lord and our God." May the revelation of our Lord and Savior resurrected and fully alive make all our hearts ready to meet Him, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, who is, was, and is to come.³

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

² Revised Standard Version.

³ Revelation 1:8.

