

THE SECOND SUNDAY OF PASCHA

Thomas Sunday / Anti-Pascha

14 April / 27 April 2025

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit! Amen!

Во имя Отца и Сына и Святого Духа! Аминь!

Tone 1

Epistle: Acts 5:12-20

This morning's Epistle readings comes to us from the *Book of the Acts of the Apostles*, attributed to St Luke, and is considered to be a "continuation" of the Gospel also attributed to him. *The Orthodox Study Bible* (p. 1468) tells us that "The Book of Acts recounts the triumphant march of the Christian mission from Jerusalem throughout the Roman Empire..." The expansion of Christ's message of love to the world proclaimed through the Holy Spirit is an essential gift in this welcome reality. In this morning's reading from *Acts* we read of how the example and love of Christ and the apostles is growing in the city of Jerusalem. Luke writes that "... through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people." The divine work of the apostles, however, was constantly threatened. While many gathered at the place known as Solomon's Porch, others in fear stayed away! Numbers of believers in Christ, however, held the apostles and their followers in high esteem! Luke writes this; "And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women..." Among them were members of the sick and suffering who were brought "out into the streets" and "laid...on beds and couches." This was done for those praying "that at least the shadow of (St) Peter passing by might fall on some of them." There is a saying that the Church is a school for sinners. The Orthodox version is that it is more like a hospital. The key word in what was happening to the poor, the outcasts, the forgotten the despised, the needy is LOVE! What Luke writes is an account of what God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Trinity, One in Essence and Undivided" – was doing in real terms and real action. Talk is easy! Talk is cheap! Action is harder, but better! Luke writes that what the early Church, still in its infancy but growing ever stronger was bringing compassion, concern, healing and love to a "multitude" of people "gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem". Luke writes that instead of rejoicing, "the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him ..." and had the apostles put in prison. It must be noted, however, that the "high priest" was a Sadducee, and was watched over by the authorities of the Roman occupation! This was a futile effort! How and why? Luke provides the definite answer: "But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, 'Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.'"

GLORY TO GOD!

Gospel: John 20:19-31

This morning, we are presented with a remarkable reading from the Gospel of St John. Mary Magdalene has gone to the disciples of Jesus to tell them of the

resurrection of Jesus! He is not dead! He is alive! Our reading from St John's Gospel now tells us that on the evening of the same day, the disciples of Jesus have met secretly. For protection they gather together in a room where the doors have been closed. To their astonishment Jesus appears miraculously among them in the same room in which the doors are closed and locked! The disciples are astonished, even more so when He speaks to them, saying "Peace be with you!" The disciples are calmed by His words. He then shows them wounds from His crucifixion, specifically the wounds in His hands and in His side! St John writes that "Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord!" They know that what they see before them is real! Again, Jesus says to them "Peace to you!", adding that "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." He breathes on them, saying "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven...if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." The disciples are to continue the healing, redeeming love which Jesus has freely granted to the world. Here, however, we read that one of the disciples, Thomas, had not been present when Jesus arrived! The disciples who had been witnesses to the arrival of Jesus, tell Thomas of what they had seen. "We have seen the Lord", they say. Jesus, however, had not been present when Thomas arrived! He had departed. Thomas, therefore, does not see Jesus, and as he has not seen Him, he says this: "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." These words of Thomas have been misread and misunderstood for centuries. Because of them, Thomas has been referred to wrongly as "doubting Thomas". Eight days later, the disciples meet again. This time Thomas is with them! This time, even though the doors to the room in which the disciples meet are again closed and locked, Jesus enters! Greeting them with the words "Peace to you!", Jesus approaches Thomas and says "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." Thomas does not doubt what he sees and touches! Reality, not second hand accounts are the only proof he needs! He looks at Jesus and speaks to Him saying "My Lord and My God!" Thomas does not doubt the reality of what He has both seen and touched! Then Jesus says to him "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed." He adds, however, these words: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." St John adds some truly wonderful words of wisdom and joy to his account. Here are his own words: "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." Those words are as powerful, as noble, as inspiring when St John, disciple and Evangelist wrote them so many centuries ago!

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