

May 4, 2019

Greetings to all the Faithful of St. Andrew's,

Christ is Risen!

Here are some thoughts on Bright Week from the Gospel of John.

The Gospel readings for the Paschal Liturgy and St. Thomas Sunday form bookends, so to say, for Bright Week. We begin and end with God's Word.

The Paschal Liturgy reading is John 1:1-17 wherein we read: In the beginning was the *Word*, and the *Word* was with God, and the *Word* was God. . . And the *Word* became flesh and dwelt among us . . .” Note that John is making reference to the written Word of Scripture (Genesis 1) where we read or hear read that God's Word brought order out of chaos at the time of creation.

The reading for Thomas Sunday is John 20:19-31 wherein at the end of the text in verses 30 and 31 we hear the following: “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the 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”.

The Word of God which brought order out of chaos is communicated to us in the Scriptural Word (Gen.1). Referring to this Scriptural Word the Psalmist says “Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105). At the beginning of time God said, “let there be light,” and in scripture he gives this same light. The Scripture is intended to take a disordered human life and bring it into conformity to God's will.

This same Word of creation and Scripture “became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14) for the purpose of once again bringing order out of chaos: “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:5). God's Word became flesh to overcome and dispel the darkness of disobedience, the stumbling of unbelief. In 1:12-13 John writes: “to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God”. These children are those who walk in God's light.

The Word which became flesh in Jesus cannot be confined, restricted, or bound to a particular locale. After his resurrection, Jesus told Mary Magdalene, "Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." (John 20:17). Jesus earlier in the Gospel spoke of the importance and the necessity of going away so he could send the Spirit (John 14:17, 26; 15:26; 16:13). The flesh which the Word became is limited, but the Word manifested through the Spirit who is “everywhere present and fills all things” makes the Word known.

In John Chapters 20 and 21 we have a movement from the reliance on Jesus' earthly presence in the flesh to the time after the Apostles, when the believer in Jesus will rely for his or her faith on the written accounts of what the Apostles witnessed. Note the following text of 1 John 1:1-4:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the *word* of life -- the life was made

manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and *proclaim* to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us -- that which we have seen and heard we *proclaim* also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are *writing* this that our joy may be complete.

John and the other apostles left us the *written* record, in what we call today the New Testament, of the teachings intended for the followers of Christ in all future generations to come. In his Farewell Discourse Jesus said, "The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (John 14:26).

After his resurrection Jesus said to doubting Thomas: "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? *Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.*" Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the 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." (John 20:27-31)

At the beginning of John's Gospel we have reference to the Old Testament Scripture in the phrase "In the beginning. . ." (Gen. 1:1) which is a reference to God's Word bringing order out of chaos then reference to God's Word entering into the world to dispel the chaos of unbelief and to bring about order through faith, whereby we become children of God who walk in the light of God's teaching. This same Word is available with the same power to dispel the darkness of unbelief. Where is this Word to be found? It is to be found in John's Gospel. The purpose and function of this Gospel, along with the rest of the Scriptural Canon, is to dispel the darkness of chaos and bring the light of faith to the human heart.

Three concluding points:

1. The written Word of God, that is Scripture, has the same creative power to bring order out of the chaos of human life as God did in the beginning of creation.
2. Therefore we should read the Bible or have it read to us regularly. We must hear it with careful attention.
3. We should allow it to do its work by living and acting according to its teaching. In other words, we should do God's will in obedience to its teaching.

As I bring this message to an end I leave with you a list of some traditional spiritual activities during the Paschal Season:

- + We say or sing the **Resurrection Troparion** every day with our devotions.
- + We continue to share the good news with the greeting, "**Christ is risen!**"
- + We read the **Book of Acts and the Gospel of John** in our family Bibles.
- + There is **no fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays**. (Communion fast continues as usual.)
- + In honor of the Resurrection, there is **no kneeling**, in Church or at home, until Pentecost.

Yours in Christ,
Fr. Herman