

John 20:19-31(Quasimodo Geniti)
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
April 24, 2022

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

The Sunday after Easter is called Quasimodo Geniti. You might be familiar with the name already because of Victor Hugo's famous work, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. The hunchback's name is Quasimodo because he was abandoned in Notre Dame cathedral in Paris on the Sunday after Easter, Quasimodo Geniti Sunday. The name of this Sunday comes from the first line of our Introit, taken from 1 Peter 2:2: Quasimodo geniti infantes - like newborn infants. "Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good." Peter tells us to long for spiritual milk, to long for the pure Word of God. The message of this Sunday was historically directed especially at those baptized at the Easter Vigil, the infants in the faith. You have tasted that the LORD is good, so long for the pure spiritual milk of God's Word. Open your mouth wide that the LORD may fill it, satisfying you with honey from the Rock. Become like children, like infants, in receiving God's Word that you might enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt 18:3).

In this morning's Gospel Lesson, Thomas does not receive the Word of God as a child. Instead he demands proof. That's why he's traditionally been given the nickname: "doubting Thomas." But sometimes we forget that the women who first came to the empty tomb had their doubts. The apostles, too, doubted the truth of what had just occurred. We today wrestle with our own doubts. Jesus appeared in the upper room where the disciples were, locked away for fear of the Jews. Could they show any more doubt than that? Yet Jesus comes to the disciples and shows

them His pierced hands and the hole in His side to prove this really was Jesus Christ, crucified and on the third day raised from the dead.

But Thomas was not with them. Thomas only had the other disciples' word: "We have seen the Lord." But Thomas wanted proof, the same proof Jesus already gave to the others: "Unless I see in His hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into His side, I will never believe." Thomas spent three years with Jesus, soaking up the message that the Son of Man would be handed over to the authorities, beaten, crucified, and on the third day raised from the dead. But Thomas would not believe the words of the Apostles until he himself experienced the crucified and risen LORD. The Word alone was not enough for Thomas, as the Word alone was not enough for the other disciples either. Thomas and the others did not long for the pure Word as newborn infants long for pure spiritual milk. They wanted something more.

Eight days later, that next Sunday, Jesus again stood among the disciples despite the locked doors. He presented the same evidence to Thomas that He presented to the other disciples, the wounds in His hands and His side. Doubting Thomas came to believe. Doubting Thomas exclaimed: "My Lord and my God!" Thomas saw the crucified Lord risen from the dead with His very eyes and so He believed. Jesus responds with a question for Thomas and for us: "Have you believed because you have seen me?" What Jesus is getting at is that faith deals with belief, not sight. We are saved by faith alone, and the nature of faith is to trust God's Word even when all evidence appears to contradict it. The nature of faith is to trust God's Word even when our own reason and feelings appear to contradict it. The Word of God is more powerful than our doubts, so powerful that it can overcome our doubts.

How often do we, like Thomas, not receive the Word of God as newborn children longing for spiritual milk? We don't simply trust the Word. We want something more. We want God to prove something to us. We expect a sign from Heaven to confirm us in our beliefs. Or at least for Him to touch our lives for the better even in a small way, a "God moment" as they say. We want to feel the Lord's presence. Then we would really know that He's out there. Sometimes you hear people ask: "If there really is a God, then why doesn't He just reveal Himself? Then everyone would believe!" Such childish thinking about the metaphysical is becoming more common as people lose the ability to think critically. Already in Scripture we are told that: "The fool says in His heart: 'There is no God'" (Ps 14:1). And Jesus says that even if someone were to rise from the dead, that wouldn't make a person repent if they don't already believe Moses and the prophets, if they don't already believe the written Word of God (Luke 16:31). Belief and unbelief are matters far beyond merely seeing physical evidence or not. Seeing is not necessarily believing. We walk by faith, not by sight (2 Cor 5:7).

That's why Jesus continues: "Blessed are those who have *not* seen and yet have believed." Here Jesus is talking about you, about all those who have *not* actually seen the crucified and risen LORD yet have believed on account of the apostolic word. These are the people Jesus prayed for in the High Priestly prayer: "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word" (John 17:20). Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. Blessed are you who believe in the crucified and risen Christ despite your feelings or earthly reason. Blessed are you because faith does not come from what is seen. Faith comes from what is heard. As the Apostle Paul says: "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Rom 10:17). It was necessary for Christ to prove His resurrection to the disciples. Eyewitnesses are necessary. But now, since the time of the apostles,

the Holy Spirit creates faith through their account of our Lord's crucifixion and resurrection from the dead, an account proclaimed throughout the entire world. This is a message to be received in childlike faith, longed for as infants long for milk and receive it completely passively. It is the sustenance we need in this life, the Word of God that feeds us unto life everlasting.

Blessed are you because the Holy Spirit has given you faith through that Word of God, because you believe the Word of God about who Jesus is and what He came to do. Blessed are you even though you were not there at the cross or in the upper room, or even at the empty tomb. Blessed are you who hear the apostolic testimony and believe what Jesus did for you by dying on the cross for your sins and rising from the dead for your justification before God. Blessed are you who receive the Holy Scriptures as newborn infants longing for their mother's milk. All good things from God are received in childlike faith, the faith that instinctively trusts in the giver. It is the Holy Spirit who through God's Word works that faith in you and it is the Holy Spirit who will bring that faith to completion at the day of Jesus Christ, the day that you are fully grown up into salvation.

It is no accident that St. John concludes his account of Thomas encountering the crucified and risen LORD by summarizing the entire purpose of the Holy Scriptures: "these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." John says: "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book." God is working all the time, all over the world, and throughout history to gather His people to Himself. Our Lord is doing so much more behind the scenes than we could ever imagine. Even Jesus in His earthly ministry did more than we could wrap our minds around. As John says at the end of his Gospel: "Now there are also many other

things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” (John 21:25).

The Bible is not there to entertain us or fill us in on the hidden will of God and the precise reasons for why things are the way they are. No, there is a more definite purpose. These things are written “so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.” Some theologians have said it like this: “We don’t interpret Scripture. Scripture interprets us.” Proper interpretation of the oracles of God is necessary, but a proper interpretation recognizes the purpose of Scripture. The purpose of the Bible is that we recognize our own sins and shortcoming that we might believe Jesus is the Christ, the anointed one, our Savior from sin, death, and the Devil. The Bible reveals who we really are and who Christ really is that we might turn to Him in faith. The purpose of the Scriptural accounts is to create faith in us that we might have life in the name of Jesus, life here and life in the age to come.

“Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.” Long for the simple and pure Word of God, which speaks not only of your sinfulness, but also of your sinless Savior. Cry out for God’s clear Word and cling to it even when doubts assail you. You have tasted that the Lord is good, so come, feed on the Word of life, the Word made flesh, who again feeds you this day with His body and blood. Open your mouth wide that the Lord may fill it. Taste and see that the Lord is good. In the name of Jesus, Amen.