



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA
PARISH OF ST. VASILIOS, BRUNSWICK, VICTORIA

SUNDAY
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PARISH INFORMATION BULLETIN

PROGRAM FOR 8—14 MAY 2016

SUNDAY 8 MAY <i>St John the Theologian,</i> <i>St. Arsenios</i>	Sunday of St Thomas—John 20: 19-31 • 7.30– 11.00am Orthros and Divine Liturgy SUNDAY SCHOOL FOR AGES 5 TO 17 YEARS TAKES PLACE STRAIGHT AFTER HOLY COMMUNION. CLASSES TAKE PLACE IN THE DOWNSTAIRS ROOMS BEHIND THE CHURCH. BRING YOUR CHILDREN ALONG TO LEARN ABOUT THEIR ORTHODOX FAITH AND GOD'S LOVE FOR EACH ONE OF US.
MONDAY 9 MAY	• 9.00– 10.00am Sacrament of Holy Unction • 10.00am Meeting of Elderly Citizens in Church Hall
TUESDAY 10 MAY	• 7.00pm Parishes of St Vasilios and the Presentation of our Lord, Coburg Youth Group will meet in Coburg Church Hall. The meeting will begin with the Compline Service in English.
SATURDAY 14 MAY <i>Hieromartyr St Therapon</i>	• 7.00– 9.30am Orthros and Divine Liturgy • 3.45pm Service of Vespers



Telephone Contact Numbers

St Vasilios Church
9387 7693

Fr Athanasios
9383 4151

Website:
stvasiliosbrunswick.com

Fr. Athanasios
and
Fr. Ephraim

are available
at the Church

every Monday to Friday
between
4.00 and 6.00pm

for Holy Confession and
any spiritual need.

WORDS OF THE CHURCH FATHERS

The disbelief of Thomas has done more for our faith than the faith of the other disciples..

Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. He was the only disciple absent; on his return he heard what had happened but refused to believe it. The Lord came a second time; He offered His side for the disbelieving disciple to touch, held out His hands, and showing the scars of His wounds, healed the wound of his disbelief. Dearly beloved, what do you see in these events? Do you really believe that it was by chance that this chosen disciple was absent, then came and heard, heard and doubted, doubted and touched, touched and believed? It was not by chance but in God's providence. In a marvellous way God's mercy arranged that the disbelieving disciple, in touching the wounds of his Master's body, should heal our wounds of disbelief.

The disbelief of Thomas has done more for our faith than the faith of the other disciples. As he touches Christ and is won over to belief, every doubt is cast aside and our faith is strengthened. So the disciple who doubted, then felt Christ's wounds, becomes a witness to the reality of the resurrection.

Touching Christ, he cried out: 'My Lord and my God.'

Jesus said to him: 'Because you have seen me, Thomas, you have believed.'

Paul said: 'Faith is the guarantee of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen.'

It is clear, then, that faith is the proof of what can not be seen. What is seen gives knowledge, not faith. When Thomas saw and touched, why was he told: 'You have believed because you have seen me?'

Because what he saw and what he believed were different things. God cannot be seen by mortal man. Thomas saw a human being, whom he acknowledged to be God, and said: 'My Lord and my God.'

Seeing, he believed; looking at one who was true man, he cried out that this was God, the God he could not see. What follows is reason for great joy: 'Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.'

There is here a particular reference to ourselves; we hold in our hearts One we have not seen in the flesh. We are included in these words, but only if we follow up our faith with good works. The true believer practices what he believes. But of those who pay only lip service to faith, Paul has this to say: 'They profess to know God, but they deny him in their works.'

Therefore James says: 'Faith without works is dead.'

+ St. Gregory the Great

Entering into the Joy of the Resurrection: A Homily for St. Thomas Sunday in the Orthodox Church

Christ is Risen!

On this Sunday of St. Thomas, we have only begun our celebration of Pascha, of our Lord's victory over death in His glorious resurrection on the third day. Perhaps one of the reasons that Pascha is a season of forty days is that it takes us a good while to let the good news sink in. For not only is Christ raised from the dead, we are too. The tomb is no longer a shadowy place of separation from God or a disappearance into oblivion, but an entry way to the Kingdom of Heaven where the departed are in the presence of the One Who has conquered death. Yes, the Risen Lord calls every human being to life eternal, including you and me and all our departed loved ones.

For Jesus Christ is raised with His Body as a whole, complete human being who is also God. We share in His resurrection already through our participation in His Body, the Church. We are nourished with His glorified, risen Body and Blood each Divine Liturgy in the Holy Eucharist. Our mortal selves receive the medicine of immortality when we are nourished by the One Who has conquered the grave. We put on His Body through baptism, are filled with the Holy Spirit in Chrismation, and in all the other sacraments and ministries of the Church we share ever more fully in the new life that Pascha has brought to the world. "Pascha" means Passover; Jesus Christ is our Passover from death to life; and our entire life in His Risen Body, the Church, is an ongoing participation in the new day of the Kingdom that He has begun, which should transform every dimension of our lives, seven days a week, the whole year round.

We can see something new in Christ's followers in our reading from the Acts of the Apostles. In the gospels, the disciples misunderstood the Lord and often lacked the power to minister effectively in His name. They even doubted the testimony of the women who heard of the resurrection from the angel at the tomb. But in Acts, they perform so many signs and wonders that the sick trust that they will be healed by the mere shadow of St. Peter falling on them. Multitudes of sick and demon-possessed people sought out the apostles, and they were all healed.

A confused, weak, and often divided group that included fishermen, a tax-collector, and a zealot; which collectively ran away in fear at the crucifixion; and the leader of which denied the Lord three times, is now a powerhouse of miraculous healings and bold preaching. What has happened to them?

The answer is clear: Christ has conquered sin and death in their lives. He has filled them with the Holy Spirit. He has empowered them to manifest His new life and ministry. "Peace be to you. As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." The salvation which Lord came to bring now lives in them. He lives in them. Christ is the vine, and they are the branches. They are members of the Body of which He is the Head. His victory over sin, the grave, and all human corruption is now theirs; the change in their lives is clear.

What may be less clear, however, is that the same is true of us. Even as we live and breathe and go through our routines at work, school, home, and in this parish, Christ's victory over sin and corruption are ours, too. We probably find that hard to believe. We have not seen the Risen Jesus as the apostles did, but remember what the Lord said to St. Thomas, "Because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Just as doubting and fearful disciples became faithful, bold preachers and wonderworkers, we are also called to know the power the Lord's resurrection in our lives. We may want to excuse ourselves from this high calling, however. In contrast with the brilliant light of Pascha, we may see the darkness and brokenness in our lives all too well. Christ has conquered sin and death, but we all still bear their wounds; and sometimes we wonder if this glorious news of life eternal really applies to us with all our struggles, pains, weaknesses, and failings.

But notice that when the risen Lord appears to His disciples, His glorified body still bears His wounds. He was not raised as a ghost or a spirit, but as a whole human being with a body. His horrible wounds were part of Who He freely chose to become as a human being for our sakes, and He arises victorious with them. He took these wounds upon Himself purely out of love for us and has used them to defeat death itself, which is the wages of sin.

Of course, we must not deny the truth about lives; we should not pretend that all is well when it is not. Our growth in holiness is an eternal journey, and we certainly have not yet arrived. But we must recognize that Christ rose again to bring the dead to life, to heal our wounds and transform all who are created in His image and likeness; and, yes, that includes all of us. The good news of Pascha is that we are no longer the slaves of sin and death. Evil only has the power in our lives that we allow it to have; the same is true of the fear of death, violence, suffering, and all the other works of darkness that can so easily dominate, distort, and destroy us.

When the Risen Lord breathes on His apostles and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit," we are reminded of the creation of Adam in Genesis. The divine breath gave us life to begin with, but with our sin and corruption we have rejected that life and preferred death instead. Now the same Lord Who created us has conquered death on our behalf. The Second Adam breathes on humanity again, bringing life once more to the first Adam and restoring us to our original dignity. And this time He gives us an ongoing remedy for our sins: the ministry of forgiveness through His Body, the Church. "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

This apostolic ministry continues in the Church through the Sacrament of Confession. Even though we fall away time and time again from the new life in Christ, He extends the joy of His resurrection to us by forgiving us, restoring us to the life of the Kingdom, healing our spiritual diseases, and helping us grow ever more like Him. No, Confession is not negative, for it is the good news of the Saviour's victory over death applied to us personally, to the wounds and scars of our lives that we rarely expose to anyone else. Through our humble confession, Christ conquers the evil in us and empowers us to life with the joy and confident hope of those who have passed over the slavery of sin to the glorious freedom of the children of God. No, Confession is not only for Lent, and we should all make regular and conscientious use of this Sacrament—not out of legalism or excessive guilt, but as a therapy to help us enter more fully into the joy of the Lord.

No matter how difficult our struggles are or how weak we feel before them, let us rejoice today in the resurrection of Christ. No matter how far short we have fallen from faithfulness in any way, let us embrace the new life brought to the world by the empty tomb. Let us also embrace one another, forgive all offences, and pray for and bless our enemies, for Christ's resurrection conquers death and sin, which are the very roots of all estrangement, hatred, and brokenness in relationships with other people.

Through His Body, the Church, His Body and Blood in Holy Communion, and the ministry of forgiveness, we are all enabled to pass over from death to life. The light really has overcome the darkness. Now the challenge is for each of us to live in the joy of Christ's resurrection, to make His victory ours, to participate in His resurrection to the depths of our being, and to recognize that nothing separates us from Him other than our own stubborn refusal to share in His great triumph. So I challenge you—and myself—to celebrate Pascha by not only saying "Christ is Risen," but by living the new life that His empty tomb has brought to the world and to each of us. At the end of the day, that is really the only way to enter into the joy of this blessed season. Christ is Risen!

Fr. Philip LeMasters