

John 20:19-31
2nd Sunday of Easter
23 April 2017

St. John's, Chicago, IL

In the Name of the Father and of the +Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Educational psychology speaks of a phase that infants go through, when they somehow think something or someone no longer exists if they cannot see it. The look of surprise with the smile on the baby's face is there, when mommy suddenly re-enters the room. The baby is glad that its mother once again exists. But if she leaves to get something from the kitchen, she somehow is no longer real for the child.

It's almost as if the disciples are such infants. They cannot see Jesus that first Easter Day, and do not believe the news from others, until they see Him themselves. The women came and told them that Jesus had risen. But it was too good to be true. Then, when Jesus walked through a solid door and was face to face, it is as if these men thought it was not real.

We share their doubt. Too often, like newborn babes, we join in thinking that not seeing Jesus means He doesn't really exist. The Resurrection is too good to be true. We go from simply being frightened disciples to being like disbelieving Thomas. "It's too good to be true," we join Thomas in thinking. And we end up rejecting the work of our Lord Jesus.

But even that doubting and disbelief is included in the entire burden of sin that He died to remove. Christ Jesus takes away your disbelief, and gives you comfort. He clearly shows you His victory, and His ongoing delivery of that forgiveness and salvation for you!

This is Jesus—"Divine Mercy" in the flesh—showing His ultimate glory and mercy as He reveals His precious wounds that poured out His Blood. Christ, in His compassion, does not let Thomas remain condemned in His unbelief. He has mercy on Thomas and forgives Him, giving Him the very reassurance that he needs. "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe."

Jesus shows you His wounds! His Body is risen and glorified, yet the spear gash and nail prints are still there! There our Resurrected Lord shows His love, His mercy, His glory, His victory in these wondrous wounds.

He provides the reassurance that you need. He sends His pastors to forgive your sins and He covers you in His mercy. No matter how much doubt or unbelief you have, our

Risen Savior does not leave you to remain in judgment; He forgives and gives. He forgives your sins, and gives you His pastors and His forgiveness.

The Victorious Christ stands before you today. At this moment, through these words, He is showing you His wounds, and giving you comfort. He is showing His wounds and speaking forgiveness into your ears. In a matter of moments, He will show His wounds as He places His Risen and glorified Body and Blood in your mouths.

But then there is another gift in which He displays His wounds and pours forth forgiveness and life – a gift that we often overlook. You see, this very passage records the moment when Jesus instituted Holy Absolution—the means of grace where you individually can confess to your pastor and receive absolution directly from him.

What is Confession? Confession has two parts. First, that we confess our sins, and second, that we receive absolution, that is, forgiveness, from the pastor as from God Himself, not doubting, but firmly believing that by it our sins are forgiven before God in heaven.

What sins should we confess? Before God we should plead guilty of all sins, even those we are not aware of, as we do in the Lord's Prayer; but before the pastor we should confess only those sins which we know and feel in our hearts.

Along with fellow Lutherans and various Protestants, it is easy for you to gain a certain arrogance and say, "I can confess straight to God, why would I have to confess to a pastor or priest?" Well, you don't "have to," but the Lord gives the joy and comfort of this gift to you! When you receive individual absolution, you have the treasure of forgiveness, and know from the touch of the pastor's hands on your head, and the assurance of his voice, when you are the only one there, and know that the Lord is using the pastor to free you from your sin.

Repent of your arrogance. Shed your smugness. Christ calls you to confess your sin.

Yet our Lord Christ does not leave you stuck in your sin. He does not abandon you for your unbelief.

Our blessed Savior sends you His pastor who stands ready to hear your confession. And he then speaks Christ's powerful Word that releases you from your sin, freeing you from your debt to God and forgiving your unbelief. As you admit your guilt and speak your sins into the pastor's ear, those words go into a tomb, never to go out. And from his mouth comes resurrection! Yes, as you hear those blessed words: "I forgive you all your sin, in the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit," that new creature that was given birth at Baptism is raised again! And that is a true gift of His peace.

Praise God! Our Risen Savior comes to you today, and always, giving you exactly what you need: He shows you His wounds, from which His forgiveness and love and mercy have poured forth. And He gathers His people around His pastors, that this precious gift of Absolution may continue until He returns in glory.

Dear friends in Christ, your sins are forgiven! Peace be with you! Amen.