

Fr. Matt Jacobson  
16 April 2023  
St. Mary the Virgin, NYC

2 Easter, Year A, Sunday Solemn Mass  
Acts 2:14A, 22–32; Psalm 111; 1 Peter 1:3–9; John 20:19–31

In the First Letter of Peter, we hear that, “we have been born anew...through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” It reminds me of the passage from St. Paul at the Easter Vigil where he says that we “were baptized into [Christ’s] death” and “buried with him,” so that as “Christ was raised...we too might walk in newness of life.”<sup>1</sup>

I mentioned at the Vigil how St. Cyril of Jerusalem used this to say that being bound to Christ—by dying with him in baptism—we’re bound to him forever in a way that transcends time. So, we remain bound to him also in his resurrection. And, since we’re created in God’s image,<sup>2</sup> being bound to him also in his resurrection, we can now be said to be images of the resurrection.

So, I thought today, I would give an example of one of those images of the Risen Lord, an image who helped me when I was having one of those “doubting Thomas” moments that inevitably come from time to time. Nothing out of the ordinary. Sometimes I go through “doubting” days or weeks. It happens to us all. Not just Thomas.

This was about six years ago. I was splitting my time between Saint Mary’s and serving as a hospital chaplain at Mount Sinai, and I suppose I was a little worn out. While leaving a patient I had been referred to, another patient in the same room asked if I had a few minutes to speak. So, I sat down, and we spoke for more than just a few minutes.

It was mainly a cancer floor and I soon found out that he did indeed have cancer, but it was under control. He’d been admitted for an infection, which is pretty common given that many of the treatments for cancer patients weaken the immune system. It was a routine he’d been through before. We quickly moved on from his medical situation, as he didn’t seem particularly concerned. Like I said, he’d been through it all before.

I noticed an Orthodox prayer book on his table and soon learned that he had been a Roman Catholic priest. He left the priesthood a long time ago, got married, and now attended an Eastern Orthodox parish. If I remember correctly, his wife was from Eastern Europe.

---

<sup>1</sup> Romans 6:3-4.

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 1:26-27.

Anyway, he was interested in my story too and what led me to the priesthood. I was happy to share a bit even though that wasn't something I usually did a lot of in the hospital. But, sharing seemed right here. I felt a connection, though I can't put my finger on any one thing that was said which was especially notable. Still, there was something.

A day or two later, I passed by the same unit and stuck my head in. He let me know that our conversation had been important to him and helped renew his faith in God. There was something very calm and peaceful about him. It was striking. I can't really describe it, but his peacefulness brought me peace. Like he was an icon of holiness somehow.

This was Friday. On Monday, when I was next back in the hospital, I heard that he had been taken to the ICU over the weekend. His infection had spiraled out of control. He never regained consciousness and died soon after. Yet, and this may seem strange, even seeing him hooked up to all those machines, he was still an image of the Lord for me.

I think that Christ's Spirit was subtly working in between us and in between our words and even when there were no words.

And, it brought me peace. And, I believed.

In today's gospel, however, there was nothing subtle about the peace that Jesus brought. He was right there in the house in front of them. Jesus says to them "peace be with you" and we're told that they were "glad". I'm sure they were glad and relieved. And probably many other things too after the crucifixion.

Then Jesus again says, "peace be with you", breathes on them and tells them to receive the Holy Spirit. But, Thomas wasn't there and wouldn't believe what the others told him that they had seen. He needed to see Jesus for himself. Jesus had breathed on them and so they had Christ's peace. Maybe he just wasn't open to seeing it yet.

To be fair to Thomas, there are numerous examples across all four gospels of many disciples not believing the resurrection accounts witnessed by others. At least, not until they saw Jesus for themselves.<sup>3</sup> And, they pretty much all, including Thomas, now have "saint" in front of their names. So, I suppose, it is a reminder not just to be fair to Thomas, but to be fair to all of us (all of us who find ourselves doubting at times.)

---

<sup>3</sup> Mark 16:9-13; Matthew 28:8, 17; Luke 24:10-11, 19-24, 37-43.

In the 5<sup>th</sup> century, Cyril of Alexandria, a different Cyril, writes: “When Christ greeted his holy disciples with the words ‘peace be with you’...[His] presence always brings tranquility of soul...The peace of Christ which passes all understanding is in fact the Spirit of Christ, who fills those who share in him with every blessing.”<sup>4</sup>

Cyril was writing in the fifth century, long after these events had taken place. Yet, he still knew the peace, the tranquility, that comes with Christ’s presence through the Spirit. I imagine he experienced it through others.

The peace of Christ now comes to us in Spirit. It can comfort us just like the risen Lord comforted his initial disciples when he appeared to them.

It’s what brought me peace via that man in the hospital. Somehow through the Spirit, he lived into his role as an image of the Risen Lord, even if he most likely didn’t realize it. I also don’t doubt that Jesus is with him now, still bound to him, and that it’s even clearer now, how he’s a reflection of the Lord.

“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.” I would add, blessed are those we see along the way who help us to believe.

✠ In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

**Copyright © 2023 by The Church of Saint Mary the Virgin, Times Square, New York City. All rights reserved.**

---

<sup>4</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary of the Gospel of John*, 12.1.