

2nd Sunday of Easter C

Gospel

[Jn 20:19-31](#)

On the evening of that first day of the week,
when the doors were locked, where the disciples were,
for fear of the Jews,
Jesus came and stood in their midst
and said to them, "Peace be with you."
When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side.
The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.
Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you.
As the Father has sent me, so I send you."
And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them,
"Receive the Holy Spirit.
Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them,
and whose sins you retain are retained."

Thomas, called Didymus, one of the Twelve,
was not with them when Jesus came.
So the other disciples said to him, "We have seen the Lord."
But he said to them,
"Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands
and put my finger into the nailmarks
and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

Now a week later his disciples were again inside
and Thomas was with them.
Jesus came, although the doors were locked,
and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you."
Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands,
and bring your hand and put it into my side,
and do not be unbelieving, but believe."
Thomas answered and said to him, "My Lord and my God!"
Jesus said to him, "Have you come to believe because you have seen me?
Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples
that are not written in this book.
But these are written that you may come to believe
that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,
and that through this belief you may have life in his name.

Jerome Biblical Commentary

(ii) *Appearance to the disciples* (20:19-23). A resurrection appearance to the disciples is attested by 1 Cor 15:5. Whether Jn means that only ten were present (the Twelve less Judas and Thomas) or that there was a larger group (cf. Lk 24:33) is not certain. This and the following episode constitute the Johannine conclusion to the history of the exaltation of Christ, and the contrast with the preceding section is significant.

19. *on the evening of that first day of the week:* Note that in what follows John's attention is still fixed on Easter Sunday. *the disciples had shut the door:* Jn does not explain but simply notes as a fact the spiritual qualities of the resurrected body of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 15:44). *peace be with you:* Cf. 14:27; 16:33.**20.** *he showed them his hands and his side:* Though the resurrected body of Christ possesses spiritual qualities, the essence of the resurrection testimony of the NT is to the return of the very Jesus of Nazareth whom the first witnesses had known familiarly (cf. 1 Jn 1:1-3). The resurrection, in other words, did not simply imply individual experiences of Christian disciples convinced that Jesus had somehow survived death. Hence the emphasis in the NT on the empty tomb and on details such as this testifying to the continued existence of the historical Jesus. Here reference is made to the wound in Jesus' side and to nail marks on his hands (cf. vv. 25-27). This is the only explicit evidence from the Gospel that Jesus was nailed rather than tied (as was often the custom) to the cross; Lk 24:39 also implies that the feet were nailed. *this brought the disciples joy:* Cf. 16:22; Lk 24:37 stresses instead the fear and amazement of the disciples at what had occurred.**21.** The resurrected Christ confers upon his disciples the mission of which he spoke in 17:18 (cf. 4:38; 13:20). This is the commission of the Church to perpetuate the work of divine salvation accomplished in Christ.**22.** *he breathed on them:* This is a parable in action, a sign, a sacrament, to indicate the conferring of the Spirit (pneuma—breath, spirit; cf. 3:8). Jn uses the same verb as in the Gk text of Gn 2:7 to describe this new creation. *receive the Holy Spirit:* The giving of the Holy Spirit was contingent on Jesus' glorification (7:39), on his return to the Father (15:26; 16:7). In v. 17 he told Mary Magdalene that he had not yet ascended to the Father but that his ascension was imminent. From the present verse we see that this ascension has now taken place; thus, in the Johannine perspective, resurrection, ascension, and the coming of the Spirit take place on one and the same Easter Sunday. This perspective is not necessarily in conflict with the Lucan portrayal of the ascension and Pentecostal coming of the Spirit as events separated from the resurrection in time (see Lk 24:49-53; Acts 1:3-11; 2:1ff.); however, what must be borne in mind is that the NT authors are in every case concerned with historical mysteries primarily and with chronologies, and statistical circumstances secondarily (cf. E. Schillebeeckx, *Worship* 35 [1961] 336-63). What Jn insists on is the intimate connection of the resurrection with the animation of the Church by the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 15:45), something that has always been reflected in the liturgy

NT New Testament

Gk Greek

and teaching of the Church.**23.** The giving of the Spirit is here specifically related to the power given to the Church to continue the judicial character of Christ (3:19; 5:27; 9:39) in the matter of sin (cf. Mt 9:8; 16:19; 18:18; Lk 24:47). Catholic tradition (DB 920; DS 1710) has rightly seen in this act the origin of the Sacrament of Penance, even though it is equally true that the Church's power over sin is also exercised in baptism and the preaching of the redemptive word.

178 (iii) *Appearance to the disciples and Thomas (20:24-29).* There seems to be no doubt that John originally intended this episode to be the culmination and conclusion of the Gospel. Having exposed all the divine mysteries inherent in Christ's death and resurrection, and having provided an historical account providentially designed to establish the fact of the resurrection beyond all question, he concluded by citing the most explicit expression of faith to be found in the Gospels.

24-25. *the Twelve:* This designation of the first apostolic band remained even though one of them had defected. "Doubting Thomas" (mentioned earlier in 11:16; 14:5) expresses in Jn the incredulity that the Syn indicate was shared by other disciples.**26-27.** *a week later:* This appearance also takes place on a Sunday; this emphasis almost certainly means that Sunday had by John's time become the special day of Christian assembly and liturgy. Christ appears under the same circumstances as before. For the significance of the reference to hands and side, see comment on v. 20 above.**28.** The Lord's invitation to Thomas contrasts with his prohibition to Mary Magdalene in v. 17; for the reason, see comment on v. 22. Whether Thomas actually touched the Lord is not said, and the point is immaterial. *my Lord and my God:* Paradoxically, it is the "doubter" who makes the most complete affirmation of Christ's nature to be found on the lips of anyone in the Gospel. The combination "Lord and God" (kyrios theos) is to be found in the LXX to translate the name of the God of Israel (Yahwēh 'Elôhîm); it was also a combination used as a divine designation in the Hellenistic world. We are brought back, then, to the affirmation of the first line of the Gospel, as Thomas speaks the language that became the common Christian confession concerning Christ (cf. Acts 2:36; Ti 2:13; Heb 1:8f.).**29.** *you have believed...believe without seeing:* Christ's words also transcend the little group present and address themselves to all Christians of all time (cf. 1 Pt 1:8). As important as the resurrection appearances are for the testimony of the primitive Church, it remains a fact that it is the Word itself, the Gospel, which is the power of God (Rom 1:16), that will always continue to be the real and only adequate motive of faith (cf. 17:20). Miracles, historical evidence, even factual evidence such as that presented to Thomas, can assist the seeker of faith, but it is in the preaching of the message itself

DB H. Denzinger and C. Bannwart, *Enchiridion symbolorum* (31st or earlier ed.; Freiburg, 1957). Cf. DS

DS H. Denzinger and A. Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion symbolorum* (32nd and later ed.; Freiburg, 1963). Cf. DB

Syn Synoptic Gospels or Synoptic writers

LXX Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT)

that the grace of God is to be found, in which the issue of faith or disbelief is finally engaged (cf. 4:48; 10:38).

179 (iv) *Conclusion: The meaning of these signs (20:30-31)*. It is on this note that John concludes his Gospel. He says, in effect: The first disciples believed, seeing Christ's visible presence; but you, who have not seen it, yet have as much reason to believe. You have the eyewitness testimony of this Gospel, and you have in the living presence of the Church the "signs" that have been pointed out here from among many (see comment on 2:11); the Church, which manifests the life of the Spirit, therefore manifests Jesus himself, his saving word and his saving ministrations. *so that you may have faith*: The best reading of the mss. is the pres. tense rather than the aorist, therefore meaning "that you may continue to believe," "grow in faith"; Jn's Gospel has been written for Christian readers, to deepen their faith and understanding. *in his name*

Haydock's Catholic Commentary

Ver. 19. *And the doors were*[1] *shut, or being shut*; and remaining still shut, his glorified body entered by penetration through the doors, as he did at his resurrection. Maldonatus takes notice, that Calvin was the first that denied this, against the belief of all the ancient Fathers and interpreters, who call this a miracle of divine power. (Witham) --- The same power which could bring Christ's whole body, entire in all its dimensions, through the doors, can, without the least question, make the same body really present in the sacrament; though both the one and the other be above our comprehension. (Challoner) --- Therefore it is a want of faith to limit the power of Christ, by the ordinary rules of place, and to deny that he can be in the blessed Sacrament, and on so many altars as he pleaseth. We do not still join with the Ubiquists or Brentiani, who, quite contrary to the Zuinglians, maintain, that the humanity of Jesus Christ is in every place where his divinity is. This is contrary to faith. (Bristow)

Ver. 21. *As the Father hath sent me*. The word *mission*, when applied to our Saviour Christ, sometimes signifies his eternal procession from the Father, and sometimes his mission, as he was sent into the world to become man, and the Redeemer of mankind: the first mission agrees with him, as the eternal Son of God; the second, as man, or as both God and man. The mission which Christ here gives his apostles, is like this latter mission, with this great difference, that graces and divine gifts were bestowed on Christ, even as man, without measure: and the apostles had a much lesser share in both these missions. See St. Augustine, lib. iv. de Trin. chap. xix. xx. tom. 4. p. 829. and seq. (Witham) --- Jesus Christ here shews his commission, and so giveth power to his apostles to forgive sins, as when he gave them commission to preach and baptize

throughout the world, he made mention of his own power. Hence, whosoever denies the apostles, and their successors, the right of preaching, baptizing, and remitting sins, must consequently deny that Christ, as man, had the power to do the same. St. Cyprian, in the 3rd century, ep. lxxiii. says: "for the Lord, in the first place, gave to St. Peter, on whom he built his Church, *super quem ædificavit Ecclesiam*, the power that what he loosed on earth, should be loosed also in heaven. And after his resurrection, he speaks also to his apostles, saying, as the Father sent me, &c. whose sins you shall forgive," &c. Why, on this occasion, passing over the other apostles, does Jesus Christ address Peter alone? Because he was the mouth, and chief of the apostles. (St. Chrysostom, de Sacerd. lib. ii. chap. 1.)

Ver. 22. *Receive ye the Holy Ghost.* It was said, (John vii. 39.) *that the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not glorified.* The sense must needs be, that the holy Spirit was not given in that solemn manner, nor with so large an effusion of spiritual gifts and graces, till the day of Pentecost, after Christ's ascension: but the just, at all times, from the beginning of the world, were sanctified by the grace of the Holy Ghost, as no doubt the apostles were, before this time. Now at this present, he gave them the power of forgiving sins. (Witham) --- Some say, that our Saviour did not then confer the Holy Ghost on his disciples, but only prepared them for the receiving of the Holy Ghost. But surely we may understand, that even then they received some portion of spiritual grace, the power, not indeed of raising the dead, and working other miracles, but of forgiving sins. (St. Chrysostom, hom. lxxxv. in Joan.) --- St. Cyril of Alexandria, speaking of the remission of sins, promised in this text, asks, "How then, or why, did Christ impart to his disciples a power, which belongs to the divinity alone? It seemed good to him, that they, who had within themselves his divine Spirit, should likewise possess the power of forgiving sins, and of retaining such as they judged expedient; that Holy Spirit, according to his good pleasure, forgiving and retaining, through the ministry of men." (In Joan. lib. xii. chap. 1.)

Ver. 23. *Whose sins you shall forgive,*[2] &c. These words clearly express the power of forgiving sins, which, as God, he gave to his apostles, and to their successors, bishops and priests, to forgive sins in his name, as his ministers, and instruments, even though they are sinners themselves. For in this, they act not by their own power, nor in their own name, but in the name of God, who as the principal cause, always remitteth sins. This is generally allowed to be done by God's ministers in the sacrament of baptism, as to the remission of original sin; and the Catholic Church has always held the same of God's ministers, in the sacrament of penance. (See the Protestant Common Prayer Book, in the Visitation of the Sick.) --- *Whose sins you shall retain, they are retained:* by which we see, that to priests is given a power to be exercised, not only by *forgiving*, but also by *retaining*; not only by *absolving* and *loosing*, but also by *binding*, by *refusing*, or *deferring* absolution, according to the dispositions that are found in sinners, when they accuse themselves of their sins. From hence must needs follow an obligation on the sinner's part, to declare, and confess their sins in particular, to the ministers of God, who are appointed the spiritual judges, and physicians of their souls. A judge must know the cause, and a physician the distemper: the one to pronounce a just sentence, the other to prescribe suitable remedies. (Witham) --- See here the commission, stamped

by the broad seal of heaven, by virtue of which, the pastors of Christ's Church absolve repenting sinners upon their confession. (Challoner)

Ver. 24. *Thomas ... was not with them.* Yet no doubt the like power of forgiving sins was given to him, either at this time or afterwards. See St. Cyril. (Witham)

Ver. 25. *I will not believe.* St. Cyril thinks, that the grief and trouble St. Thomas was under, might partly excuse his want of belief: however, we may take notice with St. Gregory, that his backwardness in believing, was permitted for the good of Christians in general, that thereby they might be more convinced of Christ's resurrection. (Witham) --- The doubts of St. Thomas are of greater advantage to the strengthening of our faith, than the ready belief of the rest of the apostles. For when he proceeded to touch, to assure his faith, our minds, laying aside every, even the least doubt, are firmly established in faith. (St. Gregory the Great)

Ver. 27. *Put in thy finger hither.* Christ, to shew he knew all things, made use of the very same words in which St. Thomas had expressed his incredulous dispositions. Our blessed Redeemer would have the mark of the spear, and the prints of the nails to remain in his glorified body, to convince them it was the same body: and that they might be for ever marks of his victory and triumph over sin and the devil. The evangelist does not say, that St. Thomas went and touched Christ's body, though it is very probable he did as he was ordered. But how could a body that entered in, when the doors were shut, be *felt*, or be *palpable*? St. Chrysostom[2] answers, that Christ at that time permitted his body to be palpable, and to resist another body, to induce St. Thomas to believe the resurrection; and that when he pleased, his body could not be felt. In like manner, his body was either visible or invisible, as he had a will it should be. In fine, he could eat in their sight, though he stood not in need of any nourishment. See St. Augustine.

Be not incredulous, but faithful. In the Greek, be not an *unbeliever*, but a *believer*. --- *My Lord, and my God*; that is, I confess thee to be my Lord, and my God; and with the Greek article, to be him, that is, *the Lord*, and *the God*. (Witham)

[1] Ver. 19. 29. Cum fores essent clausæ: januis clausis, *ton thuron kekleismenon*. See St. Ambrose, in Psal. cxviii.; St. Augustine, tract. 121. in Joan. De Agone Christiano, chap. 24. 4. 6. p. 257. Epist. ad Volusianum. t. 3. p. 405, where he says, demus Deum aliquid posse, quod nos fateamur investigare non posse. In talibus rebus tota ratio facti est potentia facientis. See St. Cyril on this place, lib. xii. p. 1092, 1103, and 1107. St. Chrysostom, hom. lxxxv. p. 315. Lat. Ed. and hom. lxxxvii. Ed. Ben. p. 520, *to qar outo lepton kai kouphon os kekleismenon eiselthein ton thuron*. &c. See St. Jerome, ad Eustochium in Epitaph. Paulæ. t. 4. p. 685. and lib. i. cont. Jovin. t. 4. p. 178; St. Leo, serm. i. de Resurr.; St. Epiphanius, her. lxxiv. p. 593. Ed. Petav. &c.

[2] Ver. 23. Whose sins you shall forgive, &c. See St. Cyril, lib. xii. in Joan. p. 1101, *metanoousi sugginoskontes*. St. Chrysostom, hom. lxxxvi. p. 517. nov. Ed.,

Magna est sacerdotum dignitas, quorum remiseritis peccata, &c. See also lib. iii. de sacerd. t. 1. p. 383. nov. Ed. Ibid., noli esse incredulus, sed fidelis, *kai me ginou apistos, alla pistos.*