

Sermon John 20:19-23

May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

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In today's Gospel, the disciples were hiding in a locked room for fear of the Jews. They were distressed and in panic of being caught. Would the Jews scourge them, would they stone them to death, would they nail them to the cross as they had done to Jesus? Jesus had been their leader, their comforter. Jesus was gone. He had died. They were alone. They had abandoned Jesus. They had denied Him. They had doubted all they had been taught by Jesus. They had lost faith in Jesus. Jesus had shown that He was indeed the Christ. He was supposed to rise from the dead. He had not. He had left them. As we heard in today's readings: whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith; and If we receive the

witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. The disciples had witnessed the miracles of Jesus: the blind see; the deaf hear; the lame walk; the dead rise. The miracle of the fishes and the loaves, His walking on water. All these were being disregarded, Jesus had died. He was not with them any longer. They were in despair. Their faith had failed them. Then, suddenly, Jesus appeared in that locked room. The disciples were stunned. Here was Jesus standing in their midst. He had risen from the dead. They were afraid that Jesus might punish them for what they had done, for their weakness, for their cowardness. But Jesus did not show anger or even disappointment, instead, He said to them “peace be unto you”. Jesus, in his loving mercy, had forgiven them, just as he forgives us when we stray. He is our loving Lord. Then, Jesus showed them his hands where the horrendous nails had been violently hammered into his flesh. And then He showed them the open wound where the spear had been thrust up into his heart. The disciples were overwhelmed with joy. Their Lord had risen from the dead. Again, Jesus said to them: ”peace be unto you”, but then he continued: “as my father hath sent me, even so send I you”. Jesus was telling them that they had a mission from God, that they were to go out among the people,

and spread the word of the miracles Jesus had performed; teach the people of the risen Jesus; of His message; of His love. This message was not only for the disciples, it was for us also. We are to tell others of the miracles and of the love of Jesus. How he forgives sinners and how he wants us to rise from the dead, and spend eternity with him in paradise. He wants us to love God and to love our neighbors; he wants us to invite others to join with us in the glory of the love of God and the risen Christ. But that was not the end of His message. He then breathed on them, and told them “Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.” They were given the power, through the Holy Ghost, to forgive sinners, and bring them into the fold. This power has been handed down from the Apostles to the Bishops, and through them to the priests. This has been misinterpreted as granting the power to the Bishops and the Priests to forgive sins themselves. It does not. It grants the Bishops and priests the power of the Holy Ghost to do so. We see that in our Mass when we make our general confession, and then the celebrant prays to God to grant us forgiveness of our sins.

“ALMIGHTY God, our heavenly Father, who of his great mercy hath promised forgiveness of sins to all those who with hearty

repentance and true faith turn unto him; Have mercy upon you; pardon and deliver you from all your sins; confirm and strengthen you in all goodness; and bring you to everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Now, I do not think that Jesus will suddenly appear to us as He did for the Apostles, but then, with God, all things are possible.

Today, we live by faith, and not by sight. We hold the truths and teachings of our Lord, Jesus Christ in our hearts.

The followers of Jesus, have something inside of them, and it is something inside of you – it is faith. You believe, even though you don't see; You don't hear. You have no proof. You have nothing tangible except the Word of God. And that, according to God Himself, is all you need to believe - that's why God gave us the Bible. The bible which records all of the miracles and teachings of Jesus. The Apostle John says: "These are written, that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

God wants us to walk by faith, and not by sight. Faith is believing in something that we do not see. As Christians, we believe that Jesus Christ was a human being, through and

through, just like you, and just like I, and that He also was God, the only begotten Son of the Father. That is faith.

And Jesus, who was God and man, publicly died on a cross and He was buried, but then Jesus miraculously rose from the dead. He came to life again.

The death and resurrection of Jesus - this is what gives us the forgiveness of sins. His death and resurrection gives us hope. Jesus comes to us in mercy and grace and forgives us and invites us to believe. God wants us to believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that Jesus loves you and that He is watching over you.

And during Mass, you will receive the blessed Body and Blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

You will come to His Altar, and all you will see is bread and wine, and that is all you will taste, but you believe that there is something else there, something different, something very special, the body and blood of Jesus Christ. You believe - that more than just people at the communion rail – there is God Himself, and that it is not just the priest who is saying that you are forgiven, but it is God. Almighty God is everywhere.

You can look up into the sky and see the stars and the planets, you can look all over, and see the beauty of God's creation all around you, the mountains, the rivers, the oceans, the plants

and the animals, and you know that there must be something behind all of that, that it is not all just an accident. – You know that there is a real heaven with a real God and real angels – and you believe that, because you live by faith and not by sight. You believe that - by the faith that you hold in your heart, and you thank God for all of His creations. And you thank His only Son, Jesus Christ, for loving us so much, that he died on the cross for us, and rose again. And you believe, deep inside you, His promise, that one day you will dwell with Him in heaven for all eternity.

Amen.

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Remember the words of our Lord, Jesus Christ, “It is better to give than to receive”.