



## GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

### PARISH OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF OUR LADY, “EVANGELISMOS”

57 CARR ST, WEST PERTH WA 6005 PARISH PRIEST: FATHER EMMANUEL STAMATIOU

MOB: 0419 961 313 EMAIL: [stamatem@iinet.net.au](mailto:stamatem@iinet.net.au)

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### SUNDAY 8 MAY 2016 – SUNDAY OF THOMAS

Today we honour the youngest of the Apostles of Christ, St Thomas. Although he first doubted that Christ was truly resurrected from the dead, he did believe and became one of our Lord's most devoted Apostles. He was martyred in India where he was run through with a lance. He did his missionary work among the Parthians and mostly in India.

**EPISTLE** **The Reading is from The first Epistle of John [1:1-7]** That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life – the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us – that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full. This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

**EXPLANATION:** St John begins his Epistle with a burst of enthusiasm. As an eye witness, he proclaims what he and the other Apostles **have heard and seen with their own eyes and what they beheld, and touched with their hands** – namely Jesus Christ, He Who **was from the beginning**. Jesus is the subject of their proclamation about the **Word of life** or message of life, because it was through Jesus that **the life of God was manifested** to all mankind. By opening with the

words, “from **the beginning**”, John calls attention to the eternity and deity of Christ. That is, “**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.**” (John 1:1) “**Was**” indicates the Word’s eternal existence in the Father without beginning and His oneness with Him in essence. Being with God reveals that he is a distinct person from the Father and in communion with the Father. He is not only from the Father, He is co-equal and co-eternal with the Father; one in divinity with Him. “**I and My Father are one.**” (John 10:30) (V1) The divinity of Jesus **was manifested** in His **life**, especially His teachings and in His miracles. (V2) The Apostles **have seen** the life for themselves and now **witness and declare** it to all men – the eternal life which was with the Father and the Son which the Son manifested in time. They declare this to men so that they may **also have fellowship with them**. That is, the Apostles declare what they have seen and heard in Christ so that all mankind may experience what they have experienced, and thus join them in an unbroken fellowship of life. What they share together is indeed the eternal life made available in Christ, for their sharing (*koinonia* – Greek or fellowship) is **with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ**. The Apostles have come to share the life of the Father and the Son, and through their preaching, others may come to share this also. It is by the acceptance of this message and rejection of all heresies, that people can continue in this fellowship. That is, fellowship requires us to personally participate with other believers in the life of Christ. **Fellowship with us** means communion – especially Eucharistic communion within the Apostolic Church. (V3) In writing this Epistle, John solidifies their connection with the Apostolic fellowship and finds his own joy completed and that their **joy may also be full**. He finds his joy fulfilled only if those he loves avoid the snares of heresy and deception. (V4) St John then warns the Christians to beware of spreading heresies and schisms which deny a number of fundamental truths. He writes to reaffirm these truths, telling his hearers that they must walk in righteousness and not be worldly and immoral as the schismatics are. They must confess Jesus as the true Christ, come in the flesh, dying on the Cross and shedding His blood as the propitiation for their sins. They must love their brethren and not be filled with hate and pride. They must remain true to the Apostolic Church, clinging to the original message, for that is where the Spirit is to be found, and prayers are to be answered and forgiveness experienced. For John, **light** is divine energy manifested as true doctrine, virtue and holiness (true behaviour), and communion with God in the Apostolic Church (true spirituality). In God there is **no darkness at all**, so if we say **we have fellowship with Him** and **walk in the darkness** of sin, **we lie and do not practice the truth**. That is, in order to practice the truth, we must do good works. Our faith must produce moral purity. To have a

relationship with God includes living a holy and righteous life. And faith must seek forgiveness and cleansing of sin through the Holy Sacrament of Confession. **(V5,6)** **But if we walk in the light as He Himself is the light,** St John writes, we will **have fellowship with one another and the blood of Christ will cleanse us from all sin.** If we confess our sins, in private before a priest and receive absolution (as the early Church did), and partake of Holy Communion regularly, the **blood of Christ** in the Eucharistic Cup will cleanse us from all sin. Those who believe that their lives are acceptable to God as they are, despite their immoral lifestyles, deceive themselves and the truth is not in them. **(V7)** Therefore we must strive to walk in the light and imitate Christ.

**GOSPEL** **The Reading is from the Gospel of St John [20:19-31]** Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you." When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to Him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

**EXPLANATION:** After His Resurrection, Christ appeared to His disciples on a Sunday evening. The disciples still feared detection and arrest and so the doors were shut. The resurrected Christ was now no longer bound by the limitations of time and space, and so despite the locked doors, **"He came and stood in their midst."**

Similarly, we will also be resurrected with a “spiritual body” after the glorious Resurrection at the Second Coming of Christ. Jesus saw that their hearts were troubled with uncertainty and fear, so He bestowed His peace upon them – a peace which takes away all anxiety and warms the heart with faith and love. **“He shows them both His hands and side”** – scars of victory, trophies to be treasured, marks of glory, to prove that it was really He, that they may have no doubts about His Resurrection and to eliminate conjecture that He was a ghost. **“The disciples therefore rejoiced when they saw it was the Lord.” (20:19-20)** Jesus again bestows His peace in a different form. That is, they are being given a mission and the gift of peace is the power with which that mission will be carried out. The disciples now share Christ’s mission. As the Father sent Christ, so Christ also sends them. **(20:21)** He commissions the disciples to continue His mission on earth, granting them the Holy Spirit and the power to forgive sins. **“Breathed on them”** means that He breathed the breath of eternal life into His disciples, the power of the Spirit, so that they may come to true life, fearless and bold in order to face suffering and persecution in carrying out this mission. He also grants them the authority to forgive sins (Sacrament of Confession) and to appoint others to continue their apostolic mission (Sacrament of Ordination). **(20:22-23)** On the following Sunday Jesus again appeared to His disciples in the locked room, and bestowed His peace upon them and especially upon Thomas who was not present last Sunday and refused to believe that Christ had risen from the dead. Thomas’ disbelief is difficult to explain. It shows either perplexity about the miracle or a certain stubbornness of character born from pain and disappointment and not from a hardened heart. **(20:24-26)** Thomas upon Jesus’ invitation, does not actually touch Jesus for proof. His magnificent confession, **“My Lord and my God”**, testifies both to the lordship and deity of Christ. **(20:27-28)** Christ does not rebuke Thomas for his need to see, as He offers a blessing to future generations who believe and have faith in the risen Lord without proof, without having seen. **(20:29)** Jesus also showed many other signs of His Resurrection, when he ate and drank with His Apostles during the 40 days after His Resurrection. **(20:30)** However, not all were written in this Gospel. St John made only a small selection of **“convincing proofs”** in his Gospel (that is, signs of Christ’s Resurrection) in the hope that the reader might believe that Christ is the Son of God, risen from the dead and that he may have life in His name. **(20:31)**