

Rev. Anthony T. Bertram

THE LORD OF PEACE AND GOD OF FORGIVENESS
John 20:19-31; Easter 2C; April 26-27, 2025

Eight days later, [Jesus'] disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then He said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see My hands; and put out your hand, and place it in My side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." Thomas answered Him, "My Lord and my God!"

P Alleluia! Christ is risen!

C He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

It was **"eight days later,"** that is, "one week later," when Jesus appeared again to His disciples. Easter, the Resurrection of our Lord, was last Sunday; "eight days later" is today. The Gospel Reading for the Second Sunday of Easter is the account of Thomas, who was not with the rest of the disciples on Easter evening when Jesus first appeared to them and did not believe that Jesus had risen.

When Thomas saw the living Jesus eight days later and believed, he made that great confession of faith: **My Lord and my God**, which is my focus today. While Jesus commended as **"blessed"** those who come to faith in Him without seeing but by hearing all that is written about Him, today I want to focus not on how we believe but on what we believe. The faith we confess in Jesus is the same that Thomas did. **"My Lord and my God."** What sort of Lord and God do we have in Jesus Christ, along with the Father and the Holy Spirit?

At both post-resurrection appearances, the Lord Jesus greeted His disciples with, **"Peace be with you."** Jesus is the Lord of Peace. What is this "peace" we have from God? Jesus, God's Son, gave them the Holy Spirit, and sent them out with God's forgiveness. Jesus is the God of Forgiveness. What is this forgiveness we have from Jesus?

1. [The Lord of Peace]

Every week we confess with Thomas that Jesus is our Lord: in the Nicene Creed, "And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God," or the Apostles' Creed, "And in Jesus Christ, His only

Son, our Lord.” The statement, “Jesus Christ is Lord,” was an early Christian creed. Paul wrote in Romans 10. **“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved”** (10:9).

The confession, “Jesus is Lord,” identifies Jesus as God’s Son and the God of the Old Testament who revealed His name as *Yahweh* (יהוה) in Hebrew, which means something like “I AM WHO I AM” and printed in our Bibles as “the LORD” in all capital letters. God’s Hebrew name was translated into Greek as *Kyrios* [κύριος], which is Lord in English. How Jesus can be true God at the same time as true man and die on the cross is a mystery, but that was the faith of Thomas, and is the faith of the Church of all times and our faith.

So, what does it mean that Jesus is Lord, the Lord of peace? That Jesus greeted His disciples with, **“Peace be with you”** as he showed them His nail-scarred hands and spear-pierced side from His crucifixion seems a contradiction. Jesus declared that the violence of His suffering and death brings the peace we need.

Our lives are full of turmoil and trouble. People hurt us through their words and actions. Our own sins cause strife between us and others. Spouses and family members, who should be the closest to us, become enemies and adversaries. We feel guilt and shame when exposed as sinners. Our bodies suffer from disease, injury, and weakness that lead to death. Our lives are full of stress and tension. If there is something we crave in this life, it is peace.

Jesus’ death brings us God’s peace. By His cross, Jesus overcame what has separated us from God and each other, as shown by His rising to life again. Jesus did not rise from the dead to seek vengeance on those who caused His death – which includes all of us because our sins cried out for His crucifixion as much as the angry mob at His trial. The violence caused by our sin and unbelief was directed toward Jesus on the cross, to make peace with God. The wrath we deserved from God was suffered by Jesus in our place and we are forgiven for His sake. **“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”** (Ro 8:1) because Jesus was condemned to die instead of us. Jesus rose from the dead to declare God’s peace. Jesus is the Lord of peace.

2. [The God of Forgiveness]

Jesus is also the God of forgiveness. God forgives our sins for Jesus' sake, and He commissions us to forgive each other's sins. **“The Lord Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, even so I am sending 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 anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld.’”**

When Jesus said to His disciples, **“Peace be with you,”** it was like Him saying, “I know you are feeling guilty for abandoning Me to die alone on the cross. Some of you denied even knowing Me. You think you can't be My disciples anymore based on your failures, but I forgive you. I won't hold any of that against you.”

The word “forgive” Jesus uses has the meaning to pardon or cancel something that should be held against someone, such as an offense or debt. It means that what is owed and should be paid back is no longer owed and never needs to be paid back. To be forgiven our sin is to be set free from its deserved punishment and the guilt it carries. This forgiveness is free, at least for the ones forgiven.

While forgiveness is free for us, it cost God dearly. **“Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side.”** What did they see in His hands and side? The wounds left by the nails pounded into His sinless hands and feet, and from the spear that pierced His side so His blood and water could pour out to wash away our sins. Our forgiveness came at the highest price ever paid by anyone for anything. Our forgiveness was paid for by the suffering and death of God's own Son. We are forgiven for free, but the cost Jesus paid for us is beyond all measure.

When we forgive each other, it also comes at a cost. Our forgiveness of others is paid first of all by Jesus on the cross, but it also costs us something. We can no longer claim the right to hold those sins against others. We cannot hold a grudge against those who sinned against us, and we cannot bring up those sins again the next time we are sinned

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against. We can't seek revenge; we can't look on with smug satisfaction when bad things happen to those who have sinned against us. Forgiveness is always expensive. We give up what was owed us; the ones we forgive are set free of any obligation to us.

When we are the ones being forgiven by God and others, we must remember that the wounds of Christ made this forgiveness possible for us. We must never receive forgiveness from God or others as if we have gotten away with our sin and are free to go on sinning because, "You know, there's always more forgiveness."

Jesus notes that there are sins that are not to be forgiven. **"If you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld."** If we don't feel sorry for our sins, that is a sign that we don't have faith in Jesus as the God of forgiveness. People without contrition and repentance actually reject God's forgiveness and will face God's wrath when they are judged by Him. Those who think God's forgiveness is cheap do not believe in Jesus as "the Lamb who was slain, whose blood sets us free to be people of God."

Let us draw near to the throne of grace and rejoice that Jesus, the Lord of Peace and God Forgiveness comes to us with this word: **"Peace be with you... [You] are forgiven... Believe."** And with Thomas and the Church of all times, let us confess our faith in Jesus. **"My Lord and my God!"** Amen.