

Christ is risen!

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

St. Augustine once said, “Reiteration is Confirmation.”¹

He said this because of the way Jesus repeats Himself.

Twice on Easter Evening—

the first day of the week,

the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews (Jn 20:19)—

Jesus says to them,

“Peace be with you.”

Those words deliver what they say.

And the fact that Jesus repeats this shows how great our need for this peace is.

It also shows how hard it is to believe it.

Jesus *reiterated* “Peace be with you” in order to *confirm* His disciples in the peace He gives.

And this didn’t stop in that locked room long ago.

That’s exactly what Confirmation is today:

reiteration of our Lord’s Words: *peace be with you.*

These words will be spoken today to our Confirmands—

and then they’ll be slapped!

They won’t see it coming—

at least whoever comes first.

This is actually a very ancient custom (you can check it out in this month’s newsletter).

But the theology behind it is brilliant.

In the midst of hearing our Lord’s Word of *peace*, the face gets slapped.

Is there anything more *real-life* than that?

The peace our Lord promises and delivers is, as St. Paul says,

“A peace that surpasses understanding”—

it’s otherworldly, divine, but in so many ways, not as we’d expect it.

The reality we see in our lives is fear, terror, brokenness, and pain.

We see life just like those first disciples—

in fact, that’s why we wanted to Confirm the kids today, on the 2nd Sunday of Easter:

they’re being confirmed into the faith of *Doubting Thomas!*

¹ Tractate CXXI; NPNF 7:438.

Talk about a reality check!

St. Gregory once said,

“Mary Magdalene’s faith at the resurrection has never done me as much good as Thomas’s *lack* of faith.”

Thomas won’t believe in Christ or peace or anything—
not unless he gets to touch and see for himself.

That’s the boat we’re in.

We’re in a world that doesn’t trust anyone.

We lie and cheat and take the easy road whenever we can.

We won’t believe the unbelievable—
not unless we see it with our own eyes.

Thomas doesn’t believe the first time around.

And neither do we.

As we’ve taken these kids through their Catechism this year, I let them know my favorite part:
it’s from the explanation to the 3rd Article of the Creed, where Luther says,

*“I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength
believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him...”*

I believe that I cannot believe.

Thomas couldn’t do it.

I can’t do it.

And none of you can either.

Here’s a man who claims to have risen from the dead
and now speaks peace into this hurting and broken world?

He acts like death is nothing.

It doesn’t faze Him at all.

He casually enters the room—
never mind the door!

No way.

Smack.

So the question is: which reality is true?

Is this world broken and hurting and full of suffering?

Or does the peace of Christ heal our pain and free us from our guilt?

These Confirmands know full well that the answer to any question like this is *yes!*

That's why they get the smack and the peace at the same time.

That's how our Lord works,
 He gives His peace when we'd least expect it,
 but when we most need it.

He gives His peace to a bunch of terrified disciples.
 He gives His peace to Thomas,
 even though he's so stubborn he needs to get his hands bloody for proof.
 He gives His peace to you.

In the midst of unbelief,
 in the midst of suffering and anger and bitterness toward your family,
 in the midst of deep sadness and loss and guilt—
 our Lord delivers *peace*.

We find this peace running through our Scriptures today—
 twice on Easter evening to the disciples,
 once again, on the next 8th day, the 2nd Sunday of Easter to Thomas and the disciples;
 and even in our Epistle today we hear,
 “*Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come.*”

And then it fills our liturgy!
 We pray in the *Kyrie*,
 “*For the peace from above and for our salvation...*
 and, “*For the peace of the whole world...*”

Then, when the bread and wine are made Body and Blood by the Words of Institution,
 they're held before your eyes with the words:
The peace of the Lord be with you always.

And at the end, the very last word of the Benediction is another giving of this peace:
The Lord look upon you with favor, and give you peace.

Our Lord reiterates this peace in order to confirm you all in it.
 He knows that everything in this world would suggest otherwise.
 He knows that you can't believe by your own reason or strength.
 He knows we're all a lot more like Thomas than we'd like to admit.

And so He speaks His word of peace over and over and over.
 He gives us what He says.
 And it's by this word that the Holy Spirit creates faith in us.
 As Luther goes on in his Catechism,

“I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.”

Just as He says to Thomas, so He says to each and every one of us:
“Do not disbelieve, but believe.” (Jn 20:27)

And then He gives!
He gives Himself to you.
He gives His Body; He gives His Blood.
He breathes His Spirit onto you and into you.
He washes you with His promises.
He teaches and catechizes, He makes disciples out of you by giving Himself to you.

No shut doors will keep Him out.

He doesn't reject Thomas and He doesn't reject you.

So come, delight in His peace!
Delight in the reality of peace in the midst of chaos.

Come and get a little bloody like Thomas,
eat and drink from the wounds in His hands.

For there is peace—
for Thomas, for our Confirmands, and for all of you.

Peace be with you.

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