

Beloved: Christ is risen! Hristos a inwiat! Χριστός Βοσκήρε! Χριστός ἀνέστη! Al Maseeya kam!

We hear today the gospel that captures two days at once: Pascha and the first Sunday after Pascha. We heard the first half of this reading at Paschal Vespers. Where on the very day of the Lord's resurrection, Christ Jesus appeared to his disciples that night though the doors were locked and Thomas wasn't there. Today we hear the other half of that scene when Jesus returns once more a week later and the doubter, Thomas, is confirmed in his faith, touching the Lord's hands and feet and his side.

As Messiah Jesus was present that very day, so is He present with us at the Holy Liturgy. Whenever we celebrate the Liturgy Christ is with us exactly as He was when He was teaching, when He made the lame leap and walk, the blind see, and the dead return to life. This is not simply having Christ in memory in our thoughts but having Christ Himself truly and concretely present before us. He is present – He, the teacher, the prophet, the miracle-worker. Christ Who was crucified, who was raised from the dead, who ascended into heaven, is now before us! Everything that we see in the church: the hanging lamps, the clergy, the altar table, the gospel book, the bread and wine, the Little and Great Entrances – all are signs of the presence of Christ.

And so, with the Divine Liturgy, we continue the work of Christ, and every time we celebrate it, it's as if we draw Christ Himself close to us. This is precisely what one of the prayers says: "You (Christ) are seated on high with the Father, and invisibly present here with us." You are above the heavens, and at the same time invisibly, truly, here with us. This is why the priest, when he prepares to receive Holy Communion, looks at Christ with the eyes of his soul, and speaks to him in the second person singular: "Make us worthy, by Your mighty hand, to receive Your pure Body and Your precious Blood." You, my Christ, by Your mighty and undefiled hand, give me Your pure Body and precious Blood. If we have spiritual eyes, we can see that before us stands Christ Himself. And what do you do if you happen to be sitting somewhere, and all of a sudden you see someone you love? You get up and you run to them. In the same way, the Liturgy is a movement, a hastening to the beloved, and effort to seize hold of Christ, to take hold of Him.

Do you remember Mary Magdalene? When she realized that she had Christ standing before her, she called him "Rabboni, which means Teacher", and sought to touch His garments, His body (John 20:16-17) Do you remember the woman with an issue of blood? Even though there were many people pressing around Christ, she attempted to touch Him with faith and with reverence (Luke 8:42-48). And today, today, remember Thomas? He placed his hands in Christ's wounds and cried out, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:27-28) This is what we do at the time of the Liturgy! And then some of us ask where Christ is! Here He is! He's standing in front of us, He's with us, next to us. "The Master is here and is calling for you" (John 11:28) they said to Mary, as she wept over the dead Lazarus, her brother. In the Liturgy, the Master, Christ, is present, and calls each of us by name. The eyes of those who feels this sparkle with light and they experience the joy of Christ. Everything is filled with joy. Everything is filled with light. Everything glorifies Christ.

And so when you come to the Liturgy, you should come with the thought that you are meeting Christ, along with the desire to touch Him. Saint Methodius of Olympos says "I purify myself for You, O Bridegroom, and bearing brightly-glowing candles, I come forth to meet You." O Bridegroom Christ, I keep myself pure and spotless for You, and I hold bright candles in my

hands to welcome You. This is how we should come to the Divine Liturgy, which is the very presence of Christ and His kingdom. Where we come to touch the One who hold the cosmos on the tip of His finger, and yet stoops to come to us, to unite us to Himself, to His life, to His light and to His glory.