

Beloved in Christ: Christ is risen! Χριστός Βοσκήρε! Χριστός άνέστη! Al Maseeya kam!

When we say the creed at every Liturgy we profess that “I look for the resurrection of the dead.” “Resurrection of the dead” is not about ghosts. Resurrection means what happened to Jesus on the third day. He rose from the tomb. He was still the Son of God but the human body He had taken on, the human body which suffered death, was different from before. The body of Jesus was transformed in the glory of the resurrection.

And He was transformed in ways that cause us to glorify God for His great works. We read of Jesus’ body in the Resurrection in the Holy Gospels. On Bright Tuesday we read the resurrection gospel from St. Luke when Jesus walked with two of His disciples on the way to Emmaus on the very night of His Resurrection. Though He was with them and explained the Scriptures to them they did not recognize Him. It was only when they were at supper when He broke the bread, shared with them the Holy Eucharist, that they realized it was He. And instantly He vanished from their midst. When the two disciples rushed back to tell the apostles, Jesus instantly appeared in their midst. Saint Luke records that “they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit. And He said to them, ‘Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.’ When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. But while they still did not believe for joy, and marveled, He said to them, ‘Have you any food here?’ So they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb. And He took it and ate in their presence.” (Luke 24:43) They thought Jesus was a ghost! And though in the resurrection the body needs no food nor drink like we do now, Jesus ate to prove to them that it was indeed He, alive in the resurrection and not a ghost.

In the other Gospels we know some things about Jesus’ human body in the resurrection and how He moved among the disciples. In Saint John’s gospel we read that at the empty tomb Mary Magdalene “saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?’ She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, ‘Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Mary!’ She turned and said to Him, “Rabboni!” (which is to say, Teacher). (John 20:14-16) It was the same Lord Jesus but His resurrected body was not familiar to Mary. Only when He called her by name did she realize it was He.

In the same gospel we read of the disciples fishing all night on the Sea of Tiberias/Galilee. “But when the morning had now come, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.” (John 21:4) He told them to lower their nets down the right side of the ship. They listened to this stranger and caught an overwhelming number of fish. “Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, ‘It is the Lord!’” (John 21:7) When they came to shore He broiled them some fish and gave them bread to eat, saying “‘Come and eat breakfast.’ Yet none of the disciples dared ask Him, ‘Who are You?’ – knowing that it was the Lord.” (John 21:12)

On Pascha itself at Vespers we heard how Jesus passed through locked doors to greet His disciples. Today’s gospel reading completes that passage. Jesus returned the following week, passing again through the locked doors and confirmed the doubting Thomas in his faith. Jesus gave Thomas His wounds to touch and feel to show that He is not a ghost but risen from the dead. Able to pass through locked doors yet having human flesh. Bearing wounds of His passion but impervious to pain. Visible but not always recognized at the first.

We learn from these Gospel passages that in the Resurrection Jesus is sometimes not recognized immediately. We do not know why nor how. We only know that this is what happened. Christ Jesus moved quickly and with ease, disappearing in an instant and going beyond earthly limitations by passing through solid matter yet He is not a ghost.

On the last day Jesus will come again in glory to the earth in His resurrected body and raise up those who are alive at His coming as well as those whose bodies have long turned to dust. Jesus will come in His human body united to His divine nature, a human body that is changed in the resurrection. What we see in our Lord Jesus in His resurrection, we may look to what the bodies of all those who rise in Christ will be like. That as God raised up the Lord, so He will raise us up by His power (1 Corinthians 6:14) That He who raised our Lord from the dead will give life to our mortal bodies through the Holy Spirit. (Romans 8:11) That our bodies that are buried in the grave are as a bare kernel of wheat (1 Corinthians 15:37). And what is planted in the earth as a seed will rise imperishable, glorious, and immortal. In the resurrection on the last day earthly bodies will be made incorruptible. How it will happen is in God’s plan. We only know it WILL happen because Jesus has said so and His word is truth because He Himself is Truth. In the resurrection we will not need food nor drink. Those who rise to life in Christ Jesus will no longer be able to suffer pain, nor sickness, nor death. Bodies will be restored as whole in the resurrection. This will be the blessedness for all those who live a life in Christ and die in Him.

In the twinkling of an eye those who rise in Christ will no longer be mortal but immortal. And those who rise in Christ will then participate in the fullness of the triumph of the kingdom that has begun with the resurrection of Christ. Thanks be to God Who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is risen!