

The Eighth Day

By Bishop George Khodr

On the Sunday, the eighth day after the resurrection, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them. Jesus opens what is closed. He opens all horizons before the eyes and the minds. He breaks open blocks and walls of this world so we can go with Him to all realms; so we can expand with Him to the infinite; to roam this world and what is beyond it; to break into the doors of Heaven since we are no more afraid of those who have been His enemies and those who, out of ignorance, make themselves His enemies.

He appeared to them while the doors were locked. He opens all what is locked and He opens Death to Life. When you behold Him, you stop looking for anything else. That is because He is the one who comes today and tomorrow and no one succeeds Him. In the Orthodox Church, the Church of the roots, we do not say that He has a successor since succession implies time in it, and Christ is beyond time. Time receives its meaning and content from Him. He did not become Man so that He would have a successor; a successor is usually the one who comes after, but Jesus has no one before Him, and after Him there is no one. Anything said about Him other than the above would be the words of humans who try to understand history while He has “kidnapped” all histories to Himself.

He appeared to them while the doors were locked; they were locked in themselves, but the doors were not locked for Him. And when He went through them, He told those He loved “Peace be with you”. That seems to be a greeting but in fact He wanted to give them Peace, that is reconciliation with God and with existence; and that requires the descent of the Lord to the kingdom of death to uproot it and establish the Kingdom of Life.

The locked doors between people are not opened in their times, but Christ broke them because there is much resentment in the hearts which are in need of Jesus entering them to remove resentments; and so, hearts do not come together unless Grace is poured upon them to bring about that meeting. Man is not a machine when it comes to the affairs of his life. He needs the God who puts in him (Man) His tenderness so that the hardness goes away. If the Lord does not dwell in Man’s heart, then he would easily receive beauties which are fake. The person, whom God has not filled with His presence, is liable to welcome to himself all what is ugly.

We believe that the one who opens the heart of humans is Jesus of Nazareth the meek and humble of heart; and, in the Divine Mystery, that means that He pours His heart in the hearts of those who are meek to make them like God’s heart.

Jesus stood among them while the doors were locked and said: "Peace be upon you". "My peace I give to you, not as the world gives do I give you." The issue between you and God is that you are His "enemy" due to sin. And sin does not leave unless God removes it through His peace; that is when He puts you in a state of peace with His Father.

After the Lord greeted them they rejoiced at beholding Him. The Lord beholds us first with a tenderness from Him so that we become able to behold Him. What did they see? And how did they see Him? The Bible says that they saw Him with the marks of His wounds. And since one of them was in doubt, the Savior appeared to him and told him: "Put your finger here and see my hands and put your hand and see my side and do not be unbelieving". The Savior accepted that Thomas should believe in Him not by just believing, but by touching Him. The Lord goes down to the state of doubt the disciple was in, not minding that he would ask something from Him. That is the meeting between the One who grants us faith and the person who doubts.

Jesus did not deal with the doubt by reprimanding doubter. He brought Himself down to the state of the doubter because He meets the sinner where he is and grants him peace as He gave peace to the prostitute saying: "Go in peace and sin not anymore." He did not cover her sinfulness. He mentioned it in the second part of what He told her. After Jesus puts the sinner at ease and makes peace with him, He reminds him that his times to come are days of repentance. And repentance is a "shake" before one is put at ease. And repentance is a language, one of turning back to God's face; and that means a leaving of all the aspects of sin. And if it is not a total breaking up with sin, repentance then would be just "jesting". Repentance is tough in that it does not accept to co-habit with any form of sin. There is no room in repentance to make peace with any "particle" of evil. You either break up with evil or you do not. And if you remain with one aspect of sin, you die.

What is difficult with our life with God is that He does not accept to dwell with any other god. And all other gods are false since they come from the deadly lusts that are in us.

It seems that God forms "deserts" in our hearts. And you remain in the desert if you do not seek the waters that He makes to spring in that desert. And you dwell with your God in the dryness that is around you or the one that is in you. You dwell with the Lord just as you are, without any condition on your part. If you get to that, then no locked doors would remain in you. All blocks would fall down and you would walk towards Him in the freedom He gives. And that walk itself would be lifeless unless you throw yourself in the bosom of the Lord totally and finally. For all what there is in the world is to behold Him and that is stronger than faith;

that is love. And with total love you will have the Lord fully, and He takes away from you all the traces of fear since "Love casts out fear".

It is not wrong to want to "touch" (like Thomas), but there is no real "touching" except through love. Is not love in its true meaning a "touching" of the Lord? In that sense Love is more powerful than faith. St. Paul says that our state is as such until we get to see Him face to face. And the "seeing" is cleaving to Him. Tradition says that the vision in its full state is coming; and that does not hold us from anticipating the "seeing" with love. "Seeing" is cleaving, and that is the highest level among the levels of love.

For us who follow Jesus of Nazareth, love comes from His resurrection because the resurrection is the victory over death. And that victory is the continuity of His resurrection in us and in the world. I understand those who do not believe in His resurrection when they tell me "Is not there for us a spiritual life that descends on us directly from God? Why does it have to go through Christ to reach us?"

I do not deny anyone the descent of Grace on him, but I have heard the Nazarene say: "No one comes to the Father but by me". And I tried to go after that word of His. Who am I to deny the faith of those who say that they get to His Father without Him? To get to the Father directly or to get to Him through Christ as the way, is an option that does not mean anything to me. Since I see that any course to God has Christ in its core. For me, the Nazarene's Face and that of His Father do not make an option for me. They are the same. "Who has seen me, has seen the Father".

Every meeting with Christ has in it a revelation of God's face. It is true that St. Paul said that Christ is the mediator between us and God. That is a statement concerning His humanity, but His Book also says that He (Christ) is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. Is the Father the End of Ends? No doubt, it is there that we are lulled and rested.