



My Beloved Ones,

I am so pleased that I am now able to begin these weekly messages with that most beautiful and joyous of greetings, ***ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΑΝΕΣΤΗ!*** *Christ is Risen!*

At the Agape Vespers, we read that the Resurrected Lord appeared to His fearful Disciples from behind a locked door, saying, *“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.”* (John 20:21). Now Thomas was not there, and so he was doubtful, saying to the joyful Disciples, *“Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe”* (John 20:25). Eight days later, the Lord appeared and encouraged Thomas to touch the marks from the nails & the spear. Amazed, Thomas proclaimed our Lord’s human & divine nature: *“My Lord and my God!”* (John 20:28).

In this Paschal season, we have begun to read the Acts of the Apostles. This week, we read that King Herod began his persecution of the Jerusalem Church by killing the Apostle James, and that *“...he proceeded to arrest Peter also. When he had seized him, he put him in prison and handed him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending to bring him out to the people after the Passover”* (Acts 12:3-4). Like His Lord, Peter is betrayed by his own community, and is cruelly imprisoned during a spiritual feast about freedom.

“Peter, bound with two chains, was sleeping between two soldiers, while guards in front of the door were keeping watch... Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He tapped Peter on the side and woke him, saying, ‘Get up quickly.’ And the chains fell off his wrists... Peter went out and followed him; he did not realize that what was happening with the angel’s help was real; he thought he was seeing a vision. After they had passed the first and the second guard, they came before the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went outside and walked along a lane, when suddenly the angel left him. Then Peter came to himself and said, ‘Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hands of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.’” (Acts 12:7; 9-11)

Thomas’s doubt and Peter’s denial are feelings that we know because of our human weaknesses. However, as St. Paul says in his Epistle to the Romans, *“...we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life”* (Romans 6:4). Though Thomas & Peter could not witness His Crucifixion because of their fear, this week, Thomas venerates the sacred wounds, and St. Peter undergoes his own kind of spiritual resurrection, dying to the world because he trusts in the Lord. May we also turn to God in the same spirit of faith and prayer, so that the Paschal flame remains lit in our hearts, not only during this season, every day of our lives.

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