

Easter I

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[0 : 00] May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our Rock and Redeemer, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Amen. Please be seated. Man, your sins are forgiven you. Those are the words that Jesus said to the paralytic man, whose friends had just lowered him down to Jesus through the roof of a house. Not to our surprise, the Pharisees had something to say about that. Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?

We shouldn't be that surprised that they asked the question. In fact, I think many of us would ask the same question if we were there as well. On whose authority, Jesus, are you doing that? Jesus, being true to his character, knows that they and we are questioning these things in our heart. He says, Did we catch that?

[1 : 22] The purpose of his healing was much deeper than a restored flesh and body to physical well-being. It was giving the very life and breath of God to a man in need of God.

Not all of the disciples had the luxury of seeing such a great display of power and authority from our Lord, but there were three, Simon Peter and the brothers James and John, for the others had not yet been chosen by our Lord.

They saw this great feat and they heard the words of Jesus, that he was able to forgive sins because he had authority from God. But what's ironic is that all three of them, the ones who are most zealous to be seen as righteous in the sight of the Lord, are just as fearful as the rest of the disciples.

Lord, even if everyone deserts you, I will not, said Simon Peter. Lord, when you come into your kingdom, let us sit at your right and at your left, said James and John.

Yet all of them abandon the Lord when he is betrayed by Judas. All of them are afraid of the Jews after the crucifixion. Earlier on that same day, Mary Magdalene came to tell them that Jesus was not there, and then a second time to give them the message that Jesus wanted them to hear after he had raised from the dead.

[2 : 49] They believed that Jesus had risen from the dead. That's what the text says. But they had not yet seen the power that came with the resurrection. In this moment of fear and cowardice, Jesus appears to them, and his appearance must have been sudden, since he did not come through the door and appeared to them, and his appearance to them was in his crucified body.

He still had the holes in his hands, his feet, and the wound on his side that was pierced through with the spear. While the Jews wanted them dead, the one who was dead and now risen wants them to have peace.

Peace be with you. He appears with the nail and spear marks on his body purposefully, not as if to convince them that it really was him, for they knew by the words of Mary that he was risen from the dead.

His appearance to them with holes in his body was an act of revelation, of revealing himself, showing them that once and for all he had conquered death in his own body.

The God of heaven had been crucified, but now was raised to life. But this is not the end. He has power and authority from heaven, and he commissioned his apostles just as he was sent from the Father.

[4 : 08] They were to be sent out into the world with the authority of our Lord. But what were they to do with that authority? They don't have any power of their own.

Just moments ago, they were cowering in fear because of mere men. But now the God who became man breathes on them and gives them the Holy Spirit.

He says, If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them. If you retain the sins of any, they are retained. What the apostles had just received was a gift, the power of forgiveness.

But how could they receive this gift? After all, weren't the Pharisees right in saying that God was the only one who could forgive sins? Well, they were right.

God is the only one who can forgive sins. And that is exactly why the power to forgive sins was given through God himself, the Holy Spirit. The apostles were empowered by the Holy Spirit to forgive sins.

[5 : 13] And if this isn't enough for us, it might be remembered that Jesus had a human nature. He was also a man, united to God in the incarnation. The person of Christ had the ability to forgive sins because he was God.

Yet, he was also man. In a way similar to Christ, by the power of his death and resurrection, and through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, the apostles can now continue the ministry of Christ on the earth.

Well, so what does that mean for us today? The apostles received the power to forgive sins. That's great. Well, what about me, though? What does that mean for me? Friends, what that means for us is something incredible.

Just as the person of Christ forgave sins while he was on earth, he now has representatives, representatives that act on his authority, our bishops and our priests.

The apostles passed down this authority to trustworthy and faithful shepherds, and we can be assured that we have been forgiven of our sins. When we fall into sin or trample on headfirst into sin, we can go to these representatives of Christ and hear from the mouth of Christ himself that he has forgiven us our sins.

[6 : 33] Friends, this is not supposed to be something that ties us down. It is not a punishment. Rather, it is a gift of God. Repentance and forgiveness of sins is God showing forth his mercy upon all of us.

Let us never see this as a hindrance in our lives, for true freedom comes from a restored relationship with God. While most of us do not participate in this specific form of ministry of forgiving sins, this text calls the rest of us to action.

When we read the words of this scripture, we can see within it a call to compel others to come to Jesus, the God-man who has the power to forgive sins and give us divine life.

Our scriptures and tradition teach that the church is not just a building, an institution, cold and lifeless. Rather, it is an organism.

It is living, and Christ's life is found within it because it is his very body. Christ has given the church the business of bringing sick and suffering people to God.

[7 : 48] Friends, let us be advocates. Let us tell those who are sorrowful that we know where they can be comforted. Let us tell the despised where they can find love.

Let us tell all who are tired where they can find rest. And let us all tell those who are doubting, like Thomas, that they can find truth and faith in Jesus, in Christ's body, the church, of which he is the head, the foundation.

When we are afraid that we have offended God beyond any forgiveness, it is the crucified Jesus, the Jesus who has holes in his hands, his feet, and his side, that stands in front of us and tells us that we are forgiven.

He became the sacrificial lamb for us, and the marks on his body stand as the reminder that his sacrifice was once and for all. The one who went to war for us and because of us and our sins with the marks of battle, ready to offer us his very life and soul.

As we pray in the prayer of thanksgiving after Holy Communion, we are heirs through hope of thy everlasting kingdom, by the merits of his most precious death and passion.

[9 : 03] It is not in our physical death that we are raised to life, but it is in Christ's death and resurrection that we die and are raised to new life.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.