



My Beloved Ones,

ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΑΝΕΣΤΗ!

Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen!

I greet you with love and joy in the name of our Risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! Having been found worthy to once again witness our Lord's life-giving Resurrection, I pray that you and your loved ones are healthy and safe during this holy season.

As we come to the end of Bright Week, I would like to divide today's message into two thoughts for two Feasts. The first, which we celebrate today, Bright Friday concerns belief; and the second, related to St. Thomas, concerns doubt.

Today, we celebrate the Ζωοδόχος Πηγή, or the Theotokos of the Life-Giving Spring. Tradition says that on April 4, 450, the future Emperor Leo I encountered a blind man in a grove that once held a spring. Taking pity on him, Leo led the blind man to the shade of a tree, and then began to search for water. Then, Leo heard a voice tell him not to trouble himself looking for water—as it was right here!

Leo was surprised, for there was only him and the blind man; neither was there any water nearby. And yet Leo heard the voice say again, "Leo, *Emperor*, go into the grove, take the water which you will find and give it to the thirsty man. Then take the mud and put it on the blind man's eyes.... And build a temple here ... that all who come here will find answers to their petitions." Leo obeyed, and the blind man's sight was restored to him.

After his ascension to the throne, Leo kept his vow to God, dedicating a church to the Holy Theotokos. The spring resumed its flow and was responsible for many miracles, including resurrections from the dead, from where it received its name, the Life-Giving Spring. Unfortunately, over time the Church was repeatedly destroyed by the Ottomans, and then rebuilt. Presently, after the 1955 pogroms, there is only a small chapel, but the faithful still venerate the intercessions of our Panagia through the spring.

Let us now compare the behavior of this young soldier with that of one of Lord's Disciples. We know from the Gospel accounts of the Resurrection, that the Disciples had hidden fearfully themselves in the Upper Room, so that our Lord appeared to them from

behind a locked door, breaking bread, showing them the marks of the nails and the spear, and granting them the gift of remission of sins through the Holy Spirit. (John 20:19-23) We also know that, since Thomas was absent, he was skeptical, saying to the Disciples, *“Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”* (John 20:25)

Our Lord, of course, granted Thomas’s request, inviting him to feel the marks of the nails. Thomas then exclaimed, *“My Lord and my God!”* (John 20:27-28) Our Lord however revealed His true purpose, by saying, *“Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”* (John 20:29)

Young Leo Marcellus could have ignored the voice in the grove. He could have seen the dried spring and the weeds and walked away. Yet he believed. Out of his love for the blind man, he obeyed the heavenly voice; and it is because of his belief that we have this blessed feast of the Life-Giving Spring to commemorate the intercessions of the Theotokos in our lives.

We honor St. Thomas this Sunday because of his declaration that our Lord was both fully Man and fully God. We can also take strength and comfort as we too are like him: subject to human weakness and doubt. However, through the prayers of our Ever-Virgin Mary, may we take this renewing spirit of Bright Week to demonstrate the reality of Christ’s Resurrection: following the heavenly voice like Leo, so that we may too, like Thomas, declare that the Risen Jesus is both our Lord and our God.

+ALEXIOS

Metropolitan of Atlanta