

THE BREATH OF GOD, THE BREATH OF THE RISEN ONE

John 20:19-23

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The miracle had occurred in the morning. In the evening the disciples were gathered together. And when at nightfall the shadows of anxieties drew near and lengthened over them, and they closed the doors for protection as a precaution against the Jewish tumult (without thinking that by so doing they might be closing their doors on the Lord), then" came Jesus and stood in the midst". It is a strange thing that at the very moment when we most ardently desire the presence of Jesus we should always proceed to close the door on Him for fear of a host of other things. It is even more extraordinary however that Jesus does not allow Himself to be stopped by the barrier of closed doors. The Risen One does not let Himself be stopped by men as He is on His way towards men. His new body is no longer an obstacle or a limitation for Him, as it is for us. Jesus' body has become the perfect instrument of his Spirit. The Risen One comes in amidst the frightened disciples and He says " Peace be unto you". For a standard greeting it is certainly a very nice one! Furthermore it says everything that men can say when they greet one another. But this greeting will be different depending on who it is that gives it. The pious greeting of a mother or of a tried Christian has a very different weight from one that is used as a formula by just anyone. " Peace be unto you!" from the mouth of the Risen One means, " Your fears are over." The dominion of fear and death over you is at an end. From now on you are at peace with God, with men, and therefore with yourselves, too. Thus speaks the One Who has won this peace in person for us all. And as a visible sign of the battle joined and the victory brought back, He shows his pierced hands and his wounded side. "Peace be unto you, " means that it is our peace in person. Jesus Christ is with us- He, the Crucified and Risen One. The Word of the living Lord fills the disciples with joy. Here once again is communion with the Saviour after the dark days of anguish. But there is not communion with Jesus without the call to serve Him as well. It is only in the service of Jesus

that communion with Him can come about. " Even so send I you. " The sending forth of the disciples by Jesus is the equivalent of the sending forth of Jesus by the Father. The peace given to the disciples will be strength for their service. This is why the Lord says to them again, " Peace be unto you." Here too the sign accompanies the Word. Jesus does for his disciples what the Creator did on the first morning: The breath of new life and of the new mission, the breath of the Resurrection touches and fills the disciples. He Who has fought against sin and against death, He Who comes from Easter morning can bring to the disciples what no man can obtain for himself: the Holy Spirit: " Receive ye the Holy Ghost." The work of Jesus cannot be done unless by receiving the Holy Spirit. This consists in forgiving and retaining sins, with the omnipotence of God. Such was what Jesus did on earth. It is the mission of the disciples and with them of all believers. What He alone Who bore the curse of sin in his one Body and yet Who was without sin had the right to do, from now on the disciples will do in his Name and in his Spirit. But since the forgiveness of sins is a gift of the free and pure Grace of God it is also necessary that, where sin cannot be forgiven on account of hardening of the heart, sin should be retained-that is, that the judgement of God should be announced. To forgive sins whilst refusing to retain sins means making a human work of divine forgiveness: it means playing with sin. The spoiling of Grace dishonours God and harms men. Whilst the announcement of judgement serves the announcement of Grace; and retaining sins serves future repentance, conversion and forgiveness. The disciple has received from Christ the task of forgiving and the task of retaining sin with full assurance and joy. It is for his Lord's work, which is entrusted to him. He must not be afraid of it.

Let us rejoice that the Lord is Present with us. From you
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