



## WEEKLY THOUGHTS - APRIL 17, 2020

Dearly Beloved,

Greetings to you in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ who has Risen!  
**'Qyomto' Season- New Sunday - John 20:19-29**

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "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." A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Post Resurrection Appearance: This appearance has kept the disciples from getting doomed. They had lost all their hope with crucifixion and death of their Guru. They had seen Him buried like everybody else. Disciples already had threats from religious leaders for the reason they were following Jesus. After He had been caught and executed, they had to come to the unfortunate conclusion that, what they had as a highly elevated life in the past three years, has come to an abrupt and irretrievable end. Imagine how the employees of a highly reputed and profitable company would find it when they hear of a complete lock out? Or think how the confidants of a political ideological movement would feel when they realise the unexpected death of their one and only leader? When it comes to Jesus Movement, it had strong opposition from own community and also had threats from established religious leadership. It was also homicidal if their growth as a new reform move had made the local government feeling challenged through their spread of ideas and acquiring social momentum. So, from all sides, they could sense the fact that it was impossible for them to survive without their charismatic and powerful one and only leader. It has been written that disciples had to get into their enclosures and coming out was decisive for their life. The news of Resurrection of the Lord was in effect a life support for the disciples though they couldn't figure out whether it was true or false. Appearance of the Lord had to happen for them to realise. The reading we have here is the appearance occurred after one week (precisely on the eighth day of resurrection). Disciples except Thomas had visitation on the same day of resurrection. Unfortunately Thomas was not there to see his Lord. The effort God takes to make His people believe in Him is surprising! He is ready to appear for them. If we look at faith process, it doesn't happen at once. It takes time to get deep rooted in faith. It would require many instances to make one gets doubts cleared off. If we go sad about lack of faith, never feel disappointed. If the Apostles had to go through ups and downs, ebbs and flows, swings of moods, how much would it be for us?! What Resurrection teaches us? 1) What the Lord has promised, it would happen in every believer's life. 2) Faith in God would never fail us. 3) We, as a community, have common and general shared faith. But for every individual, we



# ST. GREGORIOS ORTHODOX CHURCH OF TORONTO

(Since 1969)

6890 Professional court, Mississauga, Ontario, L4V 1X6, Canada



would need to have intense and personal conviction to live a life of faith. We need to gather every God experience, small or big, added up to make it to grow and to have its good fruits in life. 4) It might take a life time to get full reflection of faith. But it would be worth holding on to our faith little by little and to reach that summit of perfection. We need to be tolerant, patient, experimental and resolute. It will fetch result. It would make each day a 'walking with the Lord' like the Apostles. He would provide for our needs. He would help us in situations hard and tricky. He would take us to the right destination. Glory be to Him!

## Season of Virtual fellowship

We had a fruitful usage of virtual media for the Holy Week. May I submit a few reflections on it:

1) Orthodox members within and outside our parish have expressed their feeling of joy and contentment after having the live-stream of services. They deserve high appreciation for their enthusiasm in utilising the online facility provided. If there is no user, any service would be pointless. This reveals the deep underlying longing of each faithful to involve in worship and faith practices. They admire the tradition and heritage of the most ancient church in the world. Wherever we go, we carry our tradition, as the Israelites carried the bones of Joseph with them while they were on the long move from bondage to liberty. This dedication has enabled us to establish churches and congregations in all parts of the world. Let us salute our forerunners who came to this land when there were limited resources available, still made their best in building churches and practicing faith. Following immigrants have also contributed towards further developing of community with all its various ceremonies and activities. Currently we have new comers who also express their genuine dedication towards church and its practices. It continues... Every member had, is and will be contributing to the life of the church through their presence in various ways.

2) While we appreciate the Holy Week Service for its beauty and meaning, we should acknowledge the prophetic vision of early exponents of the church. They have given form to one of the most beautiful traditions and worship patterns in the world! One would really appreciate the prayers, chronological arrangement of liturgical year, theologically sound and biblically enriched hymns, most beautiful music with eight tones/ragas which never give a chance to get tired up or feeling bored, Prumiyaons & Sedros with their ecological/ historical/ salvific/ and teleological (teleos in Greek means end, fulfilment, end purpose- things related to fulfilment of time, end of age, 'parousia' which means second coming and post judgement life) contents, the arrangement of everything with high aesthetic sense and the magical setting of church interior. If we take the case of Hosannah service, how it has become relevant in our times after many centuries with its blessing of tender leaves and flowers, praying for crops, vegetation and environment?! It transcends time and space! For every human situation, church has at least one service to offer! Through involvement in singing and praying, common worship and private prayer, fasting and prostration, communion and veneration, we vent our emotions, fears, anxieties and feelings. Thus it becomes the best tool for stress management. See how the service has expelled our fears and worries through releasing our pressure and growing our faith?! We should put this first while bringing up our children. We should continue practicing church life for a stress free and confident life.

3) What we have enjoyed through Holy week service is not anything of parish politics, disputes, power plays, role plays or voting. It is purely sacraments and worship. It is the real filling element of church. We had no much spending for this. We had no worries in organising anything. We didn't need even being there physically than only five! This should give us a chance to review our past struggles, clashes, disputes and rivalries which has caused severe damage to our fellowship and community life. Unnecessary and irrelevant arguments have made our children to move away. We have missed them desperately though they might be building up their life in their own way. Let us



# ST. GREGORIOS ORTHODOX CHURCH OF TORONTO

(Since 1969)

6890 Professional court, Mississauga, Ontario, L4V 1X6, Canada



think about our children who stand in front rows or running and playing in the church. See how they enjoy the sacred space! See how much comfortable are they within the temple! We must allow them to feel the same till their last breath. Let us genuinely repent and be considerate to them. Let every faithful enjoy the space without any fear or worry. Let it be a place solely dedicated for prayer, meditation and worship. If we once again fail, we would become a completely lost community. We would be destined to see an abandoned building in place of the current vibrant temple. **LET US NEVER ALLOW IT TO HAPPEN. IT WOULD BE THE BIGGEST FUTURE**

**DISASTER.** Hope we would never be that bad. (Sorry if I am becoming rude by saying this!)

4) Classic it is! What we have as worship is classic. It really elevates. Look at any classic art. It never goes monotonous. It never degrades. It uplifts. It raises our culture and thoughts. It brings in awareness of quality living. It cooperates, coordinates and collegiates people with a sense of belonging and pride. We should never feel ashamed about singing the hymns, saying the prayers and holding the Bible. It is the best treasure and gem human has created in cultural history! Feel proud in singing 'Velivuniranjoreeso...' in Malayalam anywhere. It could be the best and beautiful invoking chant of 'Light'! Learning and practicing of Orthodox prayers and hymns should be admired more than learning French or going for Life Science! An Orthodox Doctor/Scientist/Engineer/IT Expert... who is unable to sing hymns and chant prayer should find the self non-qualified, amputated or illiterate with regard to the most ancient system of quality living.

5) Church promotes faith, self confidence, mental stability, physical health, cultural value, environmental awareness, citizen responsibility and dutifulness, sense of the needy, mutual care and respect, commitment towards the rest of creation, virtues like forgiveness/endurance/tolerance/patience/charity/chastity/humility and in short a holistic approach towards life itself. Church offers various platforms for all categories of life. When we consider development, church could be the best hub. Let us think about various possibilities in front. Let us be open to make **PLANS FOR FIFTY OR HUNDRED YEARS!** Let us envision a future generation who would be living in a totally different world. We need to equip them now. Let us learn from the past, visualise future and act in present! Let us think globally and act locally! Hope we could make ourselves good Disciples of Christ!

6) If we could enjoy and feeling immersed in the Worship, it is because we have dedicated the whole of us for it. We were listening to each word of hymn and prayer attentively, enjoying the music carefully and keeping ourselves from getting distracted to anything. We have brought a change in the way we used to attend at church. We haven't chosen any particular service to go, but attended all services which kept its continuity. Even at home we prepared better than we do to church. We wanted to have some experience under the pandemic insecurity. We were expecting a filling. When we take things seriously and put our effort honestly, it would give us returns. Doesn't this make sense about greeting someone on their special days 'Many Many Happy Returns'? When we do something worth bringing happy returns, it would!

7) Christianity is neither superstition nor outdated. It is rather a holistic way of quality living. It has a sound philosophical backup and antiquity in practice. Let us realise how much the modern world wish to explore the life in the past to learn from it for future planning. How many excavations have been undertaken by various departments?! It is a vast treasure beneficial for the whole human race. Even after two thousand years, though many cultures got disappeared, Christianity remains with more significance and relevance. Religion is not that bad!



## **Upcoming Virtual Participation**

Till the Covid restrictions remain, we would have all our church worship and organisational/administrative programs televised or telephoned. May I invoke all our spiritual organisations to plan their programs to be conducted virtually. We would be able to start prayer meetings from next Saturday onwards and for the time, it would be not convened for areas. Our parish would have an online account which could be accessed and utilised by all organisations avoiding any time clash. We can conduct educational/ training/orientation programs. Sunday School has been doing online classes for the last few weeks. Divyabodhanam can also be done likewise. Can't we also think of Bible studies and learning of hymns which could be organised solely for all members or specifically for each organisation? Please come up with your ideas and comments on this ASAP. You could send your thoughts to [fr.thomaspjohn@gmail.com](mailto:fr.thomaspjohn@gmail.com). Let us keep connected spiritually and socially.

Sunday Service tomorrow

Morning Prayer would begin at 09:00 followed by Holy Qurbana. It would be live-streamed through the link we have been using for Holy Week. Please send names for Qurbana at the earliest to [fr.thomaspjohn@gmail.com](mailto:fr.thomaspjohn@gmail.com).

## **Charity**

As a community, we couldn't do much in supporting Covid related care programs. We do acknowledge the highly valued role of our members working in frontiers of health care and community/social service sectors. Still, we can do further as a community. Yesterday the Mayor of Mississauga, Bonnie Crombie, had organised a teleconferencing of interfaith community leaders. The whole meeting has left a positive tone regarding the ceasing of pandemic. She has appreciated faith communities in resolving many issues through their charity support and the way we have supported our people emotionally through virtual spiritual programs. There is a big need in the food donation area. Can't we think seriously about it and contribute our part to the parish account which could be donated to Govt Food Bank Project? We cannot go out physically now. So we can arrange for a good cause remotely. A financial plan shall be sent out to our members via Email soon. May I request, please look for it and respond.

## **Financial Support to Parish**

Wholeheartedly we do thank our members for supporting the parish through financial contributions. May it be reminded that there are many more members who remain unresponsive due to various reasons. But this is a time our church needs support. Please turn to this need and do the best possible. You can e-transfer your contributions to: [treasurer@sgoctoronto.org](mailto:treasurer@sgoctoronto.org)

Holding you all in prayer

May the illumining presence of the Risen Lord keep us safe and secured.

Yours in Christ

Thomas John Achen

[fr.thomaspjohn@gmail.com](mailto:fr.thomaspjohn@gmail.com)

+1 (416) 570 5610