

LITURGY of FORGIVENESS

[Jn 20:19-23]



Christophany, the Gift of the Spirit and Reconciliation

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LITURGY of FORGIVENESS

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¹ Cf. Fabien Blanquart, *Le premier jour. Etude sur Jean 20*. Leciton Divina 140, Paris: du Cerg 1991, pp. 85-111.

**A Liturgy of Forgiveness:
Christophany and Gift of the Spirit²
Jn 20: 19-23**

**THE MANIFESTATION OF THE SIGNS OF THE LIVING CHRIST
[A New Epiphany]**

Presentation

[1] In the description of this appearance of Jesus to His 'own' after the resurrection [20:19-23] – and that which follows [vv. 24-29]- some exegetes have seen a kind of **Liturgical presentation**, spiced with temporal annotations: **the evening of the first day, after the Sabbath** –hints of the **Day of the Lord**. Then, there were clear indications, like **8 days later [20:26].³**

a. Numerous traits of the appearance of **Easter Night** will be considered through the years as the **liturgical celebration of the Christian assembly**. The designation of the appearance as **the Coming of the Lord**. This expression enjoyed a considerable emphasis in the Eucharistic Celebration. Very soon, the early community saw all of this in harmony with the Lord's resurrection – **the first day of the week**:

... 7 **On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread**, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the morrow; and he prolonged his speech until midnight... [Ac 20].

... 2* **On the first day of every week**, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that contributions need not be made when I come... [1 Co 16].

b. All that culminates in the Profession of Faith of the Apostle, Doubting Thomas: **My Lord and My God [20:28]**. This, too, seems to have a **liturgical provenance**: the disciples gathered on the Day of the Lord - a blessing would be given: **Peace to you!**. Then the Holy Spirit would descend on the participants and there would be pronounced **the words of absolution**. Jesus Christ is present – this provides more than a hint of the **Eucharist**, and the **proclaimed word of God**.

² Fabien BLANQUART, *Le premier jour. Etude sur Jean 20*. Lectio Divina 146. Paris: du Cerf 1991.

³ These first three pages: cf. Giuseppe Ferraro, *Il Paraclito, Cristo, il Padre nel 4° Vangelo*. Vatican 1996, pp. 37, ff.

c. In the text of Jn 20, there is a three-fold reference to the first day of the Week:

... NOW* on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb... 19* On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side ... 26 Eight days later, his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them, and said, "Peace be with you." 27* Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing." 28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29* Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

d. This certainly seems to refer to the weekly celebration of the first Christian communities. In the course of these it was profoundly believed that the Lord came into the midst of His disciples and they would exchange **a greeting of peace**. His greeting would reflect liturgical practices in a **Eucharistic context**. The allusion to the **pierced side** of the Lord would recall to mind the **Paschal Lamb**. It is not impossible that the added particular of the **doors being closed** would remind the faithful of that **Exodus Night** when the Hebrews left the Land of Captivity. Then, in this same **Liturgy**, there would be the calling down of the Holy Spirit, the Confiteor of sins, and the testimony of the Apostles regarding the Lord's resurrection.

[2] The **Communication of the Holy Spirit**, accomplished by Jesus on behalf His Disciples through the symbolic gesture of **breathing upon them** assumes also **a sublime liturgical sacramental characteristic** as well as one with **a deep Trinitarian insight**:

a. **Liturgy**: for some commentators, this act has remained in the liturgy of the Church for the Blessing of Oil, mixed in with balsam, to make it **sacred chrism**. After having extended the invitation to pray, before reciting the formula of consecration, the Bishop breathes over the container of the new Chrism. This is found in the **Reformed Roman Pontifical**, produced according to the norms of Vatican II, and promulgated by **Paul VI**.⁴ Furthermore others have also thought that here Jn's gospel calls to mind an ancient Christian Ritual of Ordination – there was also a breathing upon candidates during the ritual of ordination.

⁴ cf. Conferenza Episcopale Italiana, Citta' del Vaticano 1980, n. 22.

b. **Trinitarian Theology:** there may be noted a deep tie between these verses:

19* On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "**Peace be with you.**" **20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side.** Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. **21*** Jesus said to them again, "**Peace be with you.** As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." **22* And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.** **23*** If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." [Jn 20].

There is **an opening up of new life** – the closed door, the opened side. There is a full manifestation of the Trinity. Jesus manifests Himself, communicates His divine life. The high point of His manifestation and communication is the **breathing upon his 'own'**. This is the **New Creation, Infusing new life**. The Pierced Side is the source of the **Living Water** [Jn 19:34, the Symbol of the Holy Spirit, promised as the Streams of Living Water, Jn 7:37-39, on Tabernacles] and **the Blood**. Here there is close association between the **Immolated Lamb and the Gift of the Holy Spirit**. The Risen Lord, **showing His Sacred Stigmata** conserved in His Risen Body, and **His breathing upon them**, communicates to them the divine life and the Spirit Who bestows this life is the mysterious expression. There is strengthened here the deep bond between Christ and the Holy Spirit – a **New Epiphany of Christ** and **the Spiration of the Holy Spirit**. These are aspects of **the same mystery of the Divine life** in so far as this is donated to those who **receive it, and welcome it in faith**.

c. The **Sacred Synaxis** celebrated in the **Eucharist** also commemorates the **Holy Communion lived eternally within the Most Blessed Trinity**, the central **Mystery of the Faith**. These passages in Jn recall to mind the Most Holy Trinity, the Spirit, Jesus Christ and the Father are all **received, welcomed** by the Faithful. He now sends His Apostles in the Manifestation of His Glorious Stigmata in His Person and in the salvific goods that He gives through the outpouring of **these streams of Salvation** [Is 12, 1, ff.] symbolized by His own Blood and Water. In all this, these gifts, nor the Spirit Himself, can be received, welcomed by an incredulous world. All is received by the believing disciples who want to **be the Faithful in the joy of the Resurrection and the glorification of the Lord**. This sublime unity of the Spirit Paraclete, Jesus Christ and the all Merciful Father, is expressed by the variety of verbs Jn uses: the verbs of **immanence, being, remaining** – now is expressed on the part of human beings, in their attitude of **welcome, reception in Faith**, toward the Merciful Author of Salvation.

[3] In our passage under discussion regarding the sacred Stigmata, it is noteworthy that the scene is presented **first by Mary Magdalen** – in whose heart Christ had risen in her repentance - she proclaims: **I Have seen the Lord!** [cf. Jn 20: 1, 11, ff.] – the first witness of the resurrection . Then there is the doubting Thomas Jn 20: 24, ff.]: converted by the **vision of the Glorious Wounds**. These are images of the Church: male and female; hierarchy and laity; sinners all, redeemed also by the resurrection: ... **24 but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him that raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, 25* who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification...** [Rv 4].

[4] **To SEE/ BELIEVE** in this **Jn 20** is repeated throughout the Chapter, and this establishes a hierarchy of varied modalities in the accession to **Paschal faith**⁵:

[a] A certain vision, listening to the Risen Lord:

... 8 Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and **he saw and believed**. [v. 8] - ... 20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they **saw** the Lord. .. [v. 20] - ... 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have **seen** the Lord."... [v. 25] - ... then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and **see** my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side ... [v. 27, 28] - do not be faithless, but believing." 28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29* Jesus said to him, "Have you **believed** because you have **seen** me? **Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe**."

[b] A religious intuition, submission, at the sight of the sheets and binding cloths that had been left in the sepulcher:

... 6 Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; he **saw** the linen cloths lying, 7 and the napkin, which had been on his head, not lying with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself... [v.8].

[c] Finally, a generous adherence to Paschal Faith solely on the strength of scriptural witness and that of tradition:

... 9* for as yet they did not know the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. 10 Then the disciples went back to their homes... [v. 9] - ... 25 So the other disciples told him, "**We have seen the Lord**". But he said to them, "**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**." 26 Eight days later, his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. **The doors were shut**, but Jesus came and stood among them,

⁵ Fabien BLANQUART, *Le Premier Jour* ..., pp. 154, ff.

and said, "**Peace be with you**". 27* Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; **do not be faithless, but believing**". 28 Thomas answered him, "**My Lord and my God!**"... [vv. 25, ff.].

[5] The text presently to be contemplated – this is the ultimate Epiphany, the Glorious Christophany:

... 19* **On the evening of that day, the first day of the week**, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, **Jesus came and stood among them** and said to them, "**Peace be with you.**" 20 When he had said this, **he showed them his hands and his** side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. 21* Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." 22* And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23* If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."...



A. **The Manifestation of the Signs of the Risen Lord**

Brief Introduction:

[1] This is the third scene of this Jn 20: (The Discovery of the Signs of Death [vv. 1-10]; The revelation of the Signs of the Living Body [vv. 11-18] – The Manifestation of the Signs of the Risen Lord [vv. 19-23] – Faith at the Witness concerning these Signs [vv. 24-29] – The Obtaining of Eternal Life as the end result [30-31].

[2] There are two distinct parts here: here the actors are Jesus and His disciples are the principal protagonists and Jesus takes the main role:

- the first part of these few lines calls to mind **the opened, pierced Side and the hands of Jesus** – with their nail prints – as expression that Jesus indeed has risen! [vv. 19-20] – this is the **CHRISTOPHANY**.

- the second, is the sign of the risen Lord, **breathing upon His followers, Personally sending His Apostles just as the Father had original sent Him] on the mission to forgiven sin** [vv. 21-23] – this is **THE GIFT OF THE SPIRIT**.

[3] The structure of this scene – like the episcopal salutation at a liturgy, with a two-fold salutation of Jesus: **Peace to you!** This manifests the manifestation of Jesus, this **Christophany** and His **Gift of the Holy Spirit**. The first work here is the that of **the manifestation of Jesus** – and he second is **the conclusion** of that manifestation, **the Christophany, He now breathes forth 'the Other Paraclete**.

[4] This structure shows well the parallelism of the two conclusions, drawn from the earlier part of the narration. The emphasis throughout is the **ECCLESIAL CHRISTOPHANY** and the **GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**.



COMMENTARY

[Jn 20:19-23]

THE CHRISTOPHANY

[I] JESUS PRESENTS HIMSELF

v. 19:... *On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you.*

a. It is always helpful to study these central passages comparing with other evangelists – the theory is that Lk 24 and Jn 20 shared a common source:

Lk 24:36-49:

... 36* As they were saying this, **Jesus himself stood** among them, and said to them, "**Peace to you.**" * 37 But they were **startled and frightened**, and supposed that they saw a spirit. 38 And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do questionings rise in your hearts? 39* **See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have.**" 40 And when he had said this, he showed them **his hands** and **his feet.** *

41 And while they **still disbelieved for joy**, and wondered, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" 42 They gave him a piece of broiled fish, 43 and **he took it and ate before them.**

44* Then he said to them, "**These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled.**"

45 Then **he opened their minds to understand the scriptures**, 46* and said to them, "**Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead**, 47* and that **repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations**, * beginning from Jerusalem.

48 You are **witnesses** of these things. 49* And behold, **I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high.**"

b. **Dialogue** was one of the characteristics of the preceding scenes here – whereas, right here it is Jesus’ **monologue** that dominates. Jesus speaks, and He is the only one to do so. The repentant Disciples listen and it is the narrator who brings the reader into their reactions. This verse is an introduction – and it manifests three clear parts:

- **the time;**
- **the place;**
- **the entrance of Jesus into the scene.**

[1] **THE TIME: ... 19* Therefore, on the evening of that day, the first day of the week...**

[a] This is fully in accord with the Johannine style, as can be seen from a variety of verses from his Gospel from the style of his ‘Inaugural Week’ introducing Cana of Galilee, he is **very time-conscious in presenting the Eternal word**:

...39 He said to **them**, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying; and they stayed with him that day, for it was **about the tenth hour**... [Jn 1]

... - 9 And **at once** the man was healed, and he took up his pallet and walked... [Jn 5]

... 53 So from that day on they took counsel how to put him to death... [Jn 11].

... 19* Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more, but you will see me; because I live, you will live also. 20 In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you... [Jn 14]

... 23 **In that day** you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask anything of the Father, he will give it to you in my name. 24* Hitherto you have asked nothing in my name; ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full. 25* "I have said this to you in figures; **the hour is coming** when I shall no longer speak to you in figures but tell you plainly of the Father. 26 **In that day** you will ask in my name ... [Jn 16].

[b] This ‘**Time Consciousness**’ seems to manifest a continuity with OT, and often provides a certain **Eschatological Color** to the present moment. The narrator makes clear that the reader understands that this is still **the first day of the week**.

[c] **The conjunction, therefore,** indicates that the evening of this Day is presented in a clear continuity, and as a consequence to the **dawn of the Day of the Lord** of hours ago. This indications here seem to offer here a certain **liturgical character** - continuing throughout the **in the beginning**, with which both Gen & Jn open. The insistence on **evening/ night** recall to mind the Creator’s overcoming the **desert, darkness and the deep** - and there can be a hint here of the **First Paschal Night and the march across the sea**:

16* **When evening came**, his disciples went down to the sea, 17 got into a boat, and started across the sea to Caperna-um. **It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them.** 18 **The sea rose because a strong wind was blowing.** 19 When they had rowed about three or four miles, * they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near to the boat. **They were frightened,** 20 but he said to them, "**It is I; do not be afraid.**" 21 Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going... [Jn 6].

[2] **THE PLACE: ... the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews...**

[a] The closed doors are in the place mentioned above, but there is no specific mention of it here. The narrator seems far more intent of leading us to know this place more from the fact that the **disciples are assembled here**. In the first part of this same day, the only place explicitly mentioned is the **tomb**. In the second part, the place of the action has been changed. It is still the Holy City, Jerusalem, but the exact location is characterized by **the presence of the Disciples**. The two first scenes in this Jn 20 are indicated as the places where the disciples are gathered but this fact is not indicated. Mary Magdalen had set out to find Peter and the other disciple [v. 2] whom she reached [v. 10] Then, at the end of her encounter with Jesus, she accomplished the journey that distanced her from the garden and the Cross. She proclaimed to the Disciples that she had seen the Lord and what He had said to her [Jn 20:18].

[b] **The doors were closed:** Lk speaks of their **minds being closed**. However, this privileged scene was reserved for those 'locked within' the closed doors. The **fear of the Jews** was already noted earlier, already noted in Jesus' prophetic Celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles:

... **AFTER*** this Jesus went about in Galilee; **he would not go about in Judea, because the Jews * sought to kill him.** 2* Now the Jews' feast of Tabernacles was at hand. 3* So his brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples may see the works you are doing. 4 For no man works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world." 5 For even his brothers did not believe in him. 6* Jesus said to them, "My time has not yet come, but **your time is always here.** 7* The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify of it that its works are evil. 8 **Go to the feast yourselves;** I am not * going up to this feast, for my time has not yet fully come... 13* Yet for fear of the Jews no one spoke openly of him... [Jn 7].

This factor given by the narrator implies therefore, a certain return to their past, charged by the desire of the contemporaries of Jesus and His accomplishment:

... 38* After this Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for **fear of the Jews**, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him leave... [Jn 19].

[c] The reader would be profoundly surprised by this **abiding fear** of the Disciples brought forward here in the narrative. Had not Simon Peter and the other Disciple already have entered the tomb? Had not Mary Magdalen already announced that she had seen the Risen Lord, and relayed His message to her? What, then, is this fear of the disciples? There are two reasons that emerge:

- the narrator wishes to recall to mind the past facts which will facilitate the presentation and of the signs of the Crucified and will permit Jesus being identified;
- he desires likewise to have the reader understand just who it is Who has converted the disciples. The development of Mary Magdalene was achieved by grace working in her.

It is indeed thanks to His intervention that the disciples are called to set aside all fear. He is indeed **the Conqueror of Fear**. Many exegetes point out that in the 4th Gospel, through the word 'Jews' John has more in mind representing all those who do not accept the revelation of God regarding His only-begotten and most beloved Son and who rather persecute the believers and followers of Christ.

[3] **The Entrance on to the Scene of the Principal Actor here: JESUS' ENTRANCE: Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you'...**

[a] His arrival has been preceded by a certain number of others: there have been at least **five** visits to His tomb [vv. 1, 3, 4, 6, 8] – and Mary Magdalen's two visits brings her among the Disciples. All these visits have permitted the recalling to mind of the earthly dimension of the One Who now arrives in the midst of His Disciples. This **Jesus** is, at the same time, the Person Whose body is sought – and the Master, Who during His public life, was followed not only by the crowds, but also by **a group of faithful disciples**, dispersed at the moment of His Passion and is now **being re-assembled on this Easter night**.

[b] His arrival is announced in the text by the use of the aorist form of the verb. This will be taken up again in v. 24:... **24* Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came...** A few verses later [v. 26], the present tense of the verb is used: ... **Eight days later, his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them, and said, "Peace be with you."** The aorist brings out the more

the punctual aspect of this event. This time commands the following phrase: **Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you!"** ...The conjunction manifests the tie between the arrival of Jesus and the description of His attitude. The two verbs are habitually united in the manifestations of the Risen Lord as can be noted in v. 26: ... **Jesus came and stood among them, and said, "Peace be with you."**

[c] The expression, **and stood among them** is on the lips of John the Baptist: ... **but among you stands one whom you do not know...** [Jn 1:26]. His intervention reveals among his interlocutors an ignorance of Jesus like that of Mary Magdalene:

... while **it was still dark**, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. 2 So she ran, and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and **we do not know where they have laid him.**"... 13* They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and **I do not know where they have laid him.**" 14* Saying this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? **Whom do you seek?**" **Supposing him to be the gardener,** she said to him, "**Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.**" [Jn 20].

[d] This **ignorance** is due to the Mystery of His Person which can only be made manifested on the strength of a specific revelation. The fact that Jesus remains in the midst of His disciples, of those who have been able to see Him, to approach Him, to touch Him, but they still have not truly been able to know Him, surely indicates that **on this evening of the first day of the week**, Jesus will be completely revealed to them.

[e] The word **midst** is above all to be noted in the Crucifixion scene: ... **18 There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them...** [Jn 19]. The implied emphasis here seems to be that Jesus occupies the **central place** between two thieves. By reason of its context in the Passion narrative, this situation of Jesus is generally interpreted as an allusion to His **royalty**. It is possible that our expression contains this same allusion. Jesus comes and **He commands**. He commanded already at the end of the preceding scene, since He prohibited Mary from taking hold of Him, and gave her the order to she should go to the Disciples in order to announce to them the Good News of His Resurrection [vv. 17, 18]. He then will soon give the command to Thomas when he will be invited to practice the faith [v. 27].

[f] The verb **so say, speak** introduces then His special blessing. Here the verb is in the **present** tense. After a series of simple passages, thanks to which the narrator then reports a certain number of events, this present opens up the account on an intervention of Jesus. Each time that Jesus will begin to speak in our scene here and in the following one [**The expression of the Disciple regarding Faith in the Risen Lord**], His discourse is introduced with the verb **to speak, say** in the present tense. What this does is actualize the risen Lord's intervention within the unfolding of each passage: while the English translate this in the past tenses [**said, had said... in vv. 22, 27, 29**], this is due to a kind of sequence of tenses: but, in the **Greek the verb is always present, as though Jesus is speaking in each Liturgy**.

v. 20 c: ..."Peace be with you...!"

a. This salutation is composed of this brief sentence. These are the words of Jesus at the beginning of the **Christophany**. The word **Peace** in Jn is reserved to Jesus Himself, to the Master, and it is only utilized in this chapter [Jn 20: 19, 21, 26] and earlier in the Covenant accounts:

... 25 "These things I have spoken to you, while **I am still with you**. 26 But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. 27* **Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you**. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid... [Jn 14]
 ... 33* I have said this to you, **that in me you may have peace**. In the world you have tribulation; but **be of good cheer**, I have overcome the world..."[Jn 16].

This bestowal of peace as a prayer takes up anew an old Judaic custom, that is the expression of the announced gift and it translate the **eschatological flavor of the entire event**.

b. In **Jn 14**, Jesus is addressing His Disciples and recalls to their minds His return to His Father in terms that are quite similar to these in **Jn 20: 18** He gives them His Peace, i.e, **that messianic benefit awaited in the times of fulfillment and the New Covenant**. Allowing himself, centuries earlier, to look forward across the generations to that time of the **restoration of Israel**, the Prophet Ezekiel reports this word of God:

...11 "For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, **I, I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out**. 12 As **a shepherd seeks out his flock** when some of his sheep * have been scattered abroad, so will **I seek out my sheep**; and **I will rescue them** from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. 13 And **I will bring them out from the peoples, and gather them from the countries, and will**

bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the fountains, and in all the inhabited places of the country. 14 **I will feed them with good pasture,** and upon the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on fat pasture **they shall feed on the mountains of Israel.** 15 **I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep,** and **I will make them lie down,** says the Lord GOD. 16* **I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the crippled, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will watch over; * I will feed them in justice....**23* And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. 24 And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken. 25 "I will make with them a covenant of peace and banish wild beasts from the land, so that they may dwell securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods... [Ezk 34].

This is the New Covenant of Peace – this New Covenant will bring **security [34:25]; abundant nourishment [34:27] the lot of the land will become a plantation of peace, a New Garden of Eden.**

c. Thus, reflecting on **Ezk 34, Jn 14 and Jn 20,** this **Peace of the Lord** will banish both **trouble and fear [14:27; 20:19].** This **Messianic, Eschatological Peace** invites **Joy [Jn 14:27, f.; 20:20].** This is a Gift that comes with the **Paschal Event** – and this event **presupposes the Faith of the Disciples [Jn 14:29; 20: 8, 29, 31].**

d. In reassuring **His Disciples,** Jesus bestows on them His own **Peace,** which comes, by His **Passion,** by His **Victory over the world [Jn 16:33]** .This **Gift of Messianic Peace** leads the Faithful to understand **that the Risen Lord conquered Fear [Jn 14:27] - Evil [Jn 14:30], i.e., the Prince of this world [Jn 16:11] and also Sin [Jn 16:8].**

e. In **Jn 20,** Jesus' salutation leads the Disciples themselves to discover that there is **no place here for their fear,** that the **Death** that He reminds them of by the Glorious Wounds in His hands and in His side, has not kept Him in its clutches. Their Master is no longer the captive of Death, but **He has risen and their sins are forgiven.** This **Messianic Peace** announces **victory over Fear,** the **Prince of this World,** and **Sin.** **This is the triple Victory of the resurrection.**



[II] THE 'MANIFESTATION' [Epiphany] OF HIS GLORIOUS STIGMATA

v. 20: ...When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side...

a. Jesus has just spoken: this phraseology introduces an imaged demonstration of the preceding discourse. Jesus, in showing His hands and His side, goes on then to reveal the **Peace** as **the fruit of His Passion**. There is consequently, an **identity** between the One Who **suffered** on the Cross, Who was buried, and the One Who **appears now** to His Disciples. Thus, after having insisted on **the signs of the resurrection in a first part** of the narrative, where there is called to mind **Jesus' humanity**, the narrator now goes on to insist upon the **signs of His Passion**, in a second part consecrated to the **Risen Lord**.

b. The verb **to show** assumes here its sense when it is connected to its six preceding usages. This is all connected to **Ac 2**, the account of **the Gift of the Spirit, on Pentecost**. In this context of the purification of the temple, the Jews pose a question to Jesus:

... 18* The Jews then said to him, "What sign have you to show us for doing this?" 19* Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and **in three days I will raise it up.**"... 21* But **he spoke of the temple of his body.** 22* When therefore he was raised from the dead, **his disciples remembered that he had said this;** and **they believed the scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken.** [Jn 2].

c. This text provides the tie between the **sign** that was requested, the Body and the resurrection of Jesus, **fortifying the faith of the disciples** - a **liturgical context** seems between the lines, behind the scenes here. The verb **to show** pertains, therefore, to a context of the **demand for a sign**, a demand to which **Christ responds in announcing His resurrection** as the **Foundation of the Faith in the Scriptures** and **in the ever-abiding Word of God.**

d. Following the healing of the paralytic, Jesus then calls to mind his unique relationship to His Father and proclaims:

... 19* Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever he does, that the Son does likewise. 20* For the Father loves the Son, and shows him all that he himself is doing; and greater works than these will he show him, that you may marvel...21* For as the **Father raises the dead** and gives them life, so also the Son **gives life** to whom he will. [Jn 5]

The Resurrection adds completion to the Father's works – this is the sign given by Jesus and presents it as the work of the Father and the Son.

e. In the course of the Feast of the Dedication, the Jews interrogate Jesus and finish this by threatening Him with stoning. In the face of this menace, Jesus in His turn questions His adversaries:

... 31* The Jews took up stones again to stone him. 32 Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of these do you stone me?"... [Jn 10].

The Jews then accuse Him of blasphemy. For all practical purposes, Jesus has revealed the origin of His works, viz, His Father. This revelation could only serve to astound His interlocutors. The verb **to show** refers to Someone Else and reveals Him.

f. A bit further on in Jn's Gospel, Jesus seems about to announce His return to His Father. Thomas confesses his ignorance with regard to Jesus' destination toward which His Master is heading. This is why Philip asks Him:

... 8 Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied." 9* Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? **He who has seen me has seen the Father**; how can you say, 'Show us the Father?'... [Jn 14].

g. Jesus goes on to say that once He personally has departed, anyone who believes in Him, will be able to accomplish works that are even greater than His own. Philip's request is an appeal for such revelation. This revelation supposes in fact Jesus' departure and an open access to heaven for all those who are His Disciples:

...LET not your hearts be troubled; believe * in God, believe also in me. 2* In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3 And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also... [Jn 14].

h. In Jn 20, there is a presentation of this understanding regarding Jesus' return to the Father revealed also as the **Father of all the Faithful Disciples**.

...17* Jesus said to her, "Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." 18* Mary Magdalene went and said to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her... [Jn 20].

i. In using one more time this verb **to show** in v. Jn 20:20, the narrator is emphasizing that we are now in the **time of fulfillment** of the sign announced at the beginning of Jesus' ministry and of the fulfillment of His works that He has realized **coming from the Father**. He suggests that Philip's request has mercifully already been heard and that its fulfillment presupposes the departure of the Master. This departure has been worked out in a **Paschal Context** that has been made clear from the outset. In **showing His hands and His side**, Jesus leaves it to be understood that their contemporaries have sought to stone Him, and that they will have had their moment. Nonetheless, His sacred body, many times wounded and desecrated, leads to something beyond and above immediate history. He recalls to them that His passion has provided as **the sign of the resurrection**. This mystery is at one and the same time the **revelation of the Father and the path towards Him**.

j. This sacred Body had already been referred to earlier by the more customary, **from head to foot: ...12* and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet... [Jn 20]. This earlier text would refer to a body laid out to rest in the tomb**. Here, though, in Jn 20, the text refers to this sacred Body through the Stigmata: **the hands and the side: ... 34* But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water... [Jn 19]**. This reference indicates the Body that has been crucified, but here is risen and these sacred trophies of His Victory are being **shown, preserved as an eternal witness to the holocaust, an immolative, oblativ agape'**.

k. **From this pierced side, there flowed blood and water**. In His Discourse on the **Bread of Life**, Jesus speaks of His Blood, that of the Son of Man, as from a stream that gives eternal life: **... 54 he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. 55 For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. 56* He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. 57 As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me. 58* This is the bread which came down from heaven, not such as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live for ever."**... [Jn 6].

l. In His conversation with the Samaritan woman, it is the **water** that Jesus gives which becomes a **living stream flowing into life eternal**. This water in Jn is often a sign of the Holy Spirit:

... 14* but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; **the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."**

15* The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, **that I may not thirst**, nor come here to draw."... [Jn 4]

... 37* On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, "**If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink.** 38* He who believes in me, as * the scripture has said, '**Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.**' 39* Now this **he said about the Spirit**, which those who believed in him were to receive; for as yet **the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified**... [Jn 7].

m. As for His **Sacred Hands**, they serve as the **sign of His merciful omnipotence** that the Son receives from the Father, a power which empowers Him to communicate eternal life:

... 35 the Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand. 36* He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him.... [Jn 3].

... 27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; 28* and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, * is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. 30* I and the Father are one."... [Jn 10].

... 3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, 4 rose from supper, laid aside his garments, and girded himself with a towel. 5* **Then he poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded.** 6 He came to Simon Peter; and Peter said to him, "Lord, do you **wash my feet?**" 7 Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not know now, but afterward you will understand." 8* Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "**If I do not wash you, you have no part in me.**"...[Jn 13].

n. Thus, it may be very clear now that while the **wounded hands and the side** refer back to the Crucified Body of the Lord, they also refer as signs, announcing eternal life. It is not therefore astonishing that Jesus presents these as **signs of the resurrection**.



[III] **THE DISCIPLES' RESPONSE IN JOYFUL PASCHAL FAITH**

v. 20 b: ... Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord...

a. The conjunction **therefore**, which opens this second part of the same verse places in a deep relationship the **manifestation** and the **effect** that this produces on the Disciples. **Their development, spiritual growth, appears thus dependent on the arrival of Jesus into their midst**, and of the **revelation** that He makes to them on His arrival. This **eschatological, messianic joy** had already been announced in the course of His Priestly Prayer of Farewell:

... 11 These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full... [Jn 15]

... 13 But now I am coming to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves... [Jn 17].

As this is intimately bound to His '**Manifestation**', this **Joy** might be thought of as an effect of the **Eschatological Peace** that Jesus ardently desires for His Disciples.

b. The bond between the verbs **to rejoice/ to see** is likewise established in the other accounts of the Gospel. Jesus in other contexts speaks of this abiding **Joy**:

... 56* Your father Abraham **rejoiced** that he was to see my day; **he saw it and was glad.**" 57* The Jews then said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" * 58* Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.." [Jn 8].

This verse is inserted into the discussion in which the **Paschal allure** is evident. 'Death' is on the Jews' lips [Jn 8:52] and the path that Jesus is on will close the account with this proclamation: **I say to you, before Abraham was, I am!** The relationship of these verbs permits Jesus to call to mind the mysteries of **eternal life** and to allow **His own 'pre-existence'** to be laid bare.

c. In **Jn 16** Jesus announces His departure from the Disciples and His 'return' to His Father. He warns His 'own' that the Hour of their affliction has come. However, **they will see Him again**, and then their heart **will rejoice** [v. 22]: ... **22 So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you... [Jn 16]**. After the resurrection, the Disciples are going to be gathered together again with a view to the up-building of **the New People of God**. Having known the sadness and the trial of His Passion and Death, **they will participate in the Joy of the Risen Lord**.

d. The Disciples have therefore been prepared for the **manifestation of Jesus**. They have learned that this **Joy of theirs corresponds to the Hope of Abraham** – that it **presupposes the pre-existence of their Master** and the **discovery of His Resurrection**. This last mentioned will mean **a victory over their fear, death and sin**; the **joy accorded by the Paschal Event** can no longer then be threatened by anything. All this pertains to the **New Times**.

e. This Joy depends on their being able to share in the **vision: ...blessed are the pure of heart, for they will see God!** To express this, the narrator utilizes the complete expression: **to see the Lord** – in the aorist. This recalls **the vision of Mary Magdalen, in accomplishing her mission** [v. 18] but above all, the **joy of the 'other**

disciple' inside the Tomb itself [v. 8]. The narrator tries very hard to have his readers grasp that the **Paschal Event**, in the wake **Jesus' initiative**, and rests on **the experience of the assembled Disciples**. The vision of the 'other disciple', the announcement of Mary prepares the reader to welcome, receive this experience.

Summary: this **Paschal Manifestation of His Glorious Stigmata** has enormous importance in the reflections of the Church. It indeed seems that Peter and the 'other disciple' as well as Mary Magdalene, have run, hastened so that **we, too, might arrive at this full revelation of the Risen Lord**. At the same time, all this calls to mind the **New Gathering of the Disciples** in which Jesus is at their Center. This therefore, inaugurates the time of a **New People** that has **seen the light of day in the Pasch**. The **Disciples, Apostles, are the first members of this community of the Faithful**. This is why this **Christophany** assumes an **ecclesial dimension** which aims at facilitating the introduction of this Second Table now, consecrated to the **outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the Apostolic Mission of the Disciples of all time**.



B. THE OUT-POURING, THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE APOSTOLIC MISSION OF THE CHURCH [Jn 20:21-23]

[I] JESUS' GREETING AND THE SENDING OF THE DISCIPLES ON HIS MISSION

This second part [like the first part, just considered] of this Document, which presents **the Appearance of the risen Lord [Christophany]** – and **the Gift of the Holy Spirit** – is divided into three segments:

- [I] The salutation and the being sent on Mission;
- [II] The Gesture of Jesus;
- [III] The Remission of Sins.

However, as in the prior Tableau, it is **the gesture of the Risen Lord** which is at the center of the account and which clarifies the words pronounced by Jesus.

v. 21: ... 21* Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you."...

a. This second salutation of the Lord takes up what He said earlier. This assures the tie between both these Tableaus and introduces the Apostolic Mission of the Disciples. The conjunction, **therefore**, as the adverb **again**, so frequent in Jn, indicates that it is necessary to look upon this second salutation as one logically

following as a direct consequence of the earlier one, based on the model and as the continuity of the former. It is however, probable that the two Tableaus have perhaps earlier existed independently of one another. The taking up of the salutation is astonishing for some, and the name **Disciples** is now replaced by **them**. **These are among the last words of the Risen Lord and the Mission of the Church for all time.**

b. The yearning for Peace is immediately followed by a word of Jesus Who **sends His Disciples**. The second gesture of Jesus is found therefore to be preceded by a message, This is introduced by an expression that is much in accord with Jn's style: ***...as... I, too***. This is found in two passages of parallel construction that pertain to the parable of the **Shepherd** and the one pertaining to the **Vine**:

- **Shepherd: 14 I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, 15* as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep... [Jn 10]**. The model of the relationships between Jesus and the faithful down through the ages are noted here – and **this is the same Trinitarian bond that exists between the Father and the Son**. While the accounts of the interchange between Jesus and His Flock might change, this Model remains as the possible ideal.

- **Vine: ... 9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love... [Jn 15]**. This is no longer the theme of **mutual knowledge**, but rather than of **Trinitarian love**. Yet, the structure is the same. This structure aims at revealing an intimate parallelism between the action of the father with regard to His Only-Begotten, Most Beloved Son, and that of the Son with regard to His Disciples. This parallelism does not involve only the action of the Father as a model for that of His Son – but, also, **it indicates the origin, source of the knowledge, of the love, of the Mission to which the disciples participate: all are Trinitarian!**

c. It can be concluded, then, that in our text, there is **an identity here, that of the sending the Disciples into His own Personal Mission and His own Mission received eternally from His Father**. In sending His Disciples, Jesus lets them have a share in the very mission that He received from His Father. As He sends them, it needs to be recalled that He **personally is the Father's Envoy**. This title is at **the heart of the Johannine Christology and His Christophany**. This exchange is most interesting: ... **28 Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" 29* Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."... [Jn 6]**. It is clear that in the 4th Gospel, there have been also 'other envoys', above all **John the Baptist** [cf. 1:6]. However, Jesus is the **unique Envoy of the Father** in this sense - that He accomplishes the work of the Father [cf. Jn 4:32-35]. **He carries out His Will and work** all through His entire earthly sojourn,

and **above all, on the Cross**, in this celebration of the Pasch that leads Him back to the Father.

d. The **first** use of this verb: **to send, envoy**, indicates the Person, or the place towards which the person is sent, the one sent to a specific destination, by the Father – thus Jesus was **sent** into this world by the father, as a description of His Person [cf. **Jn 10: 36 do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God?'**]. The **second** use of the same verb reveals the origin of the Mission, the Person by Whom one is being sent, the one to whom the mandate is addressed: Jesus is at the origin of the sending of His Disciples and of the Apostolic Mission which He confides to His Disciples in this moment. This seems confirmed in **Jn 1**:

... 19* And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" 20* He confessed, he did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." 21* And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" And he answered, "No." 22 They said to him then, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" 23* He said, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said." ...

This flows from **Jn 1:6-8:...** **6* There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. 8 He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light...**

e. The fact that Jesus is the One Who sends His disciples might be understood that with the second verb here in this verse of Jn 20, the One who sends is at the same time, the Model of the Apostolic Mission that is envisaged. The disciples will be therefore, invited to comprehend that **their mission will resemble that of Jesus** and **all need to ponder the Master in order to take from Him the proper orientations for the Apostolic Mission.**

f. The use of the perfect tense: **.. as the Father has sent Me...** , then followed by the present tense: **...now I send you ...** - reinforces this conviction. The perfect tense here indicates that His activity in the past has been continuing right up to this instant when the original Envoy utters these words. In entrusting this Personal Mission of His to His Disciples, Jesus is still active in His own Personal Mission from His Father. It can also be stated that the envoy of the Disciples makes up part of the Mission of Jesus and prolongs it. The resemblance of the times with v. 17 is evident: **... 17* Jesus said to her, "Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."...[Jn 20].** The verb **to ascend** in the

perfect here is contrasted with the same in the present: **I am ascending**. There is a hint here of what is called the **kerygmatic perfect** – it is possible that in this v. 21 we already might have an example of this. It might also be concluded here that our passage is one that is characteristic with John: **As the Father has sent me...** - this seems to 'define' Him: [cf. **3:17, 34; 5:36, 38; 6:29, 57; 7:29 ; 8:42; 10:36; 11:42; 17:3, 8, 18, 21, 23, 25**]. Jesus constantly lives this vocation in His earthly life even up to , and including His testimony on the Cross. **I now send you ...** and this sending is accomplished in the word of the Risen Lord. Thus, **Jesus Himself being at the origin of the Apostolic Mission of the Disciples**, this makes theirs **one of the consequences of his ascending now to the Father.**

g. The motive of their ' being sent' is not explicit, as often is the case in the over-all reading of Jn. It is implied in the words of Jesus that fulfill the enterprise after the Last Supper: ... **20* Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives any one whom I send receives me; and he who receives me receives him who sent me."... [Jn 13]**. This motif is clear expressed in Jesus' prayer: **As You have sent Me into the world, I have sent them into the world ...** [Jn 17:28]. This verse is not exactly reproduced in Jn 20: 21 even though the same verb appears. However, the sayings of Jesus describe quite well **the whole world as the field offered to the Disciples for their Apostolic Mission.** This Mission therefore is **a universal Mission, open to all.**

h. For completion's sake it would be helpful to ask also just who are these 'Disciples'. In Jn, this term designates not only 'the Twelve', but likewise all those who have been Jesus' 'own', His 'friends', and including His discreet friends, like **Joseph of Arimathia [19:38]**. With regard to our specific verse 21, however, the term seems more precise – **the Apostolic Mission handed on by the risen Lord is addressed only to the Apostles** [cf. Mt 28:19; Mk16:15; Lk 24:47; Ac 1:8]. **This is the unanimous NT testimony.**



[II] **THE GESTURE OF JESUS, THE SENDING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

[Jn 20:22]

v. 22: ... And when he had said this, **he breathed on them,** and said to them, "**Receive the Holy Spirit...**

a. The salutation at the beginning of v. 21 echoes that of v. 19. The opening of v. 22 takes up again v. 20. One might, then, legitimately think that it is a matter here that this is a redactional effect. The first illustration of the yearning for

their **Peace**, this took place at the **manifestation of the sacred hands and pierced side of Jesus**. The second is the sending forth of the Holy Spirit, a kind of Johannine Pentecost. At any rate, the reference made to the **sacred pierced side of Jesus [onoy noted by Jn] -** prepares for the Gift of the Spirit.

b. This sending of the Holy Spirit is expressed by a verb, **Jesus breathed** on them. This verb is a *hapax legomena*, in that it only appears here in the gospel narrative, but the LXX has it 11 times. The examination of all these references sheds light the different meanings of the verb in the word of God. There are three separate meanings:

- **the first** is the Breath of the Creator. It is thanks to Him that God bestows on human beings, shaped by the material of the dust and given the **breath of life**. [Cf. Gn 2;7]. It is found again in Ezk's Field of the Dry Bones, in which the dead are restored to life [cf. Ezk 37:9, ff.]. It is lastly, in this same sense that recalls the struggle which directs the **Book of Wisdom** against the worship of idols. The one who makes the **pottery** is the image here: ... **11 because he failed to know the one who formed him and inspired him with an active soul and breathed into him a living spirit. ... [Ws 15]**. Evidently, this sense after what had been noted of the Gardener, and his relationship with the Book of Ezk, this seems to be what is behind the text in Jn. Furthermore, certain commentators have not ceased to consider this **breathing of Jesus onto His Disciples** to a **Creative Breath** which allows the renewal of each one.

- **the second sense** suggests the idea of a Restoration, of a **return** of an antecedent Being. The Prophet Elijah obtains the favor to return to life the only son of the **widow of Zarephtha [1 K 17:11]**. A Healing is also bestowed on **Tobias**, thanks to a remedy:

... 8 And as for the gall, anoint with it a man who has white films in his eyes, and he will be cured."... [Tb 6].

... 12 And when his eyes began to smart he rubbed them, 13 and the white films scaled off from the corners of his eyes... [Tb 11].

These aren't only individual healings, as there is also that of the entire people, restored after the total destruction heaped on them by the Assyrians [cf. Na 2:2] This **restoration of the People** was moreover prepared by the announcement of Good News, that of **Peace**. It therefore, has a physical aspect when it concerns the human body – and a **symbolic meaning** when it foresees the return of a people still in exile.

- **the third sense** appears in the Book of Ezk. God announces through the mouth of His Prophet that He is going to manifest His fury on those very places where his people had been established:

... 17 And the word of the LORD came to me: 18 "Son of man, the house of **Israel has become dross to me**; all of them, silver * and bronze and tin and iron and lead in the furnace, **have become dross**. 19 Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because you have all become dross, therefore, behold, I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. 20 **As men gather silver and bronze and iron and lead and tin into a furnace, to blow the fire upon it in order to melt it; so I will gather you in my anger and in my wrath, and I will put you in and melt you**. 21 I will gather you and blow upon you **with the fire of my wrath, and you shall be melted in the midst of it**. 22 As silver is **melted** in a furnace, so you shall be melted in the midst of it; and you shall know that I the LORD have poured out my wrath upon you." ... [Ezk 22].

This Oracle against Israel is pronounced, as can be noted, in a context of **purification** and of **judgment**. God then reveals the sin of His People [Ezk 22:17] and predicts the time of **Jerusalem's purification** [Ezk 22:21-24]. It is **by His breath** that He will realize this purification and will manifest His Divine Wrath. Nonetheless, the message of the Prophet terminates on a note of hope, with his announcing the **restoration of Israel [37:9]**. This **eschatological restoration** is bound to **the Gift of the Spirit of life**, accorded to dried bones. It can be noted here, this final understanding of the verb **to breathe** does not exclude the other two meanings presented above. The purification from sins goes hand in hand with **the restoration**, and even with the **re-creation** [36:35]. **The purification of Israel is worked out by the passage from death to life and permits a total restoration of the People of God, thanks to the gift of the Holy Spirit**.

c. This gesture of Jesus so powerfully inspired by the **Prophet Ezk [37:9, ff.]** is an echo of the gesture accomplished in the first Tableau on behalf of the Disciples As Jesus presided over the **Manifestation**, His own **Christophany**, He likewise dominates over the **work of recreation** which He confers on His Apostles in **giving them the Holy Spirit**. This work is an accomplishment of total hope for Israel, such **as the Prophets had already expressed in their re-reading of Creation**.

d. This analysis of the verb **to breathe** corresponds to that conception Jn has of the Holy Spirit . In His conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus reveals to this Master in Israel that he must be born anew from on high:

... 7 Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born anew.' * 8* **The wind * blows** where it wills, and you **hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit**."... [Jn 3].

The image of this **New Birth** is moreover accompanied by a commentary which is **inspired by one of the elements of the Creation** in order to offer an accounting of

the role of the divine action. Likewise, at the end of the Discourse on the Bread of Life, it is the divining action of the Holy Spirit which is envisaged:

... 63* It is **the spirit that gives life**, the flesh is of no avail; **the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life**... [Jn 6].

e. This action of the Spirit is in the context of Jn 6 preceded by an incomplete allusion to the heavenly world of the Son of Man. It might be seen here in commenting on the response to Mary Magdalen in v. 17:

... 62* Then what if you were to see the Son of man ascending where he was before?
63* It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life... [Jn 6].

... 17* Jesus said to her, "Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, **I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.**" [Jn 20].

The normal conclusion would be that the return of the Son in glory leaves open the implication of the Gift of the Holy Spirit:

... 37* On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, "If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. 38* He who believes in me, as * the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" 39* Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive; for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. .. [Jn 7]

If all this holds true, then the above noted Jn 20: 17 that prepares the way for the following v. 22, the **breathing forth of the Holy Spirit**. The announcement of Mary Magdalene to the Disciples [v. 18] has for its two-fold consequence **the manifestation of the risen Lord [the 'Christophany']**, but then also **the Sending, the Gift, of the Holy Spirit**.

f. The **Breath** of Jesus had been preceded by one word, and followed by another. The gesture is found commented on in the following manner: ***And He said to them... Receive the Holy Spirit!*** The verb in the phrase which introduces this **Gift of the Holy Spirit** is found in the present. It is identical to that which opened the salutation at the end of v. 19:... **"Peace be with you."**... This of course, is the historical present – Jesus' word is situated in the present of the salutation.

g. The verb **to receive** that Jesus uses here translates both the **acceptance of gifts** – (such as the **loaves** [6:11] - **garments, tunic** [13:12; 19:23], a

body [19:40]) but also the gift of a **person, of Jesus Himself, His testimony, His word** [Jn 3:33; 17:8]. The Disciples are the ones who reserve a favorable welcome for their Master. He, in comforting them, promises them the Spirit before His departure:

... 16* And I will pray the Father, and he will **give** you another Counselor, **to be with you for ever,** 17 even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you **know** him, **for he dwells with you, and will be in you...** [Jn 14].

h. They know Him for He remains with them, and in them. The Spirit will bring them **knowledge of the glory of Jesus** for He will have communicated this to them, the One Whom they have received from Him:

... 14* He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. 15 All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you... [Jn 16].

This Gift of the Holy Spirit had been promised by Jesus to His Disciples. This promise is being realized now in Jn 20 following the **welcome, the reception**, that the Disciples just reserved for the **Risen Lord**, The purpose of this Gift is three-fold:

- to insure that they will not be left as orphans [14:18];
- to provide them with access to the integral truth, in its entirety [16:13] – this means a **better knowledge of Jesus, the Father's Envoy**;
- and also to **convince the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment** ... [Jn 16:6].

This means, then that **the Spirit** as will be permitted as will be **the Disciples, to render their testimony of the One Whose lot they are to share and this from the beginning** [15:27].

i. In the imperative, the verb had already been used in the account of Jesus' trial. Twice Pilate had sought to hand Jesus over to the Jews as they were His accusers. In putting the ball in their court [18:31], he had engaged them to express what was their deepest wish. They had judged Him, innocent though He truly was [19:4], yet they wanted His death [18:31; 19:6-7]. This rejection of the whole world had many times been indicated in the course of the gospel narrative. From the very outset, Jesus had explicitly made allusion to the non-acceptance of His testimony [3:11, 32]. And this comes back often as a kind of a refrain throughout the narrative. This **rejection of Jesus** is precisely the fundamental sin of His contemporaries, and of the world.

j. The **reception, welcoming of the Gift of the Holy Spirit** is therefore to be comprehended in this context of **refusal by some, and welcome by others, of the Person of Jesus**. This means that just as there were those who wanted to put Him to death, **an entire populace who refused His revelation** - there have also been those in good number, of the same race as He was, and also those from among the Greeks, as Philip and Andrew [12:21-33], who **received, welcomed Him this Easter Night**, a **New People of God**, charged with the Apostolic Mission to go out to the whole world, and they would be assisted by the Holy Spirit.

k. As allusion has often been made to the **Spirit of Truth** and to the **Paraclete**, by some contrast, the **title of the Holy Spirit** has been found only in two other places in Jn. At the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus, **John the Baptist**, in speaking of Him, designates Him as ***the One who would take away the sins of the world*** [1:29] – and as ***the One Who baptized in the Holy Spirit*** [1:33]. The **Lamb of God** is a title which makes reference to the **Paschal Victim** [cf. Ex 12:46]. The presence of this title in the background of the Baptism envisaged by the Baptist, supposes the **remission of sins**. Now, in the verse at hand, **the Paschal Gift of the Spirit** announces that **sins are taken away [Jn 20:21]**. It is therefore possible that this **Gift of the Spirit** [v. 22] is to be considered as the **accomplishment of the Baptism** proclaimed by John the Baptist.

l. At the beginning of His Farewell Discourse, Jesus promises His Disciples:

... 26 But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. 27* Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you... [Jn 14].

As Revelation has been accomplished in the work of Jesus, it remains necessary, then, following His death, to watch **to make sure that His word remains alive among the Disciples down through the ages**. It is the Holy Spirit Who assumes this role. **The Spirit prolongs forever, the presence of Jesus** in them in the bosom of His community and **assures the continuity of His Personal Mission from the Father**. It is in effect His role to pursue the work of Jesus among the Disciples and, through them, into the whole world [15: 26, f.]:

... 26* But when the Counselor comes, **whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me; 27* and you also are witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning...** [Jn 15].

It is **part of the Father's Plan** that after the presence of the Envoy has **consummated His Personal Mission** among the Disciples, **Jesus bestows on them His Holy Spirit** [Jn 20: 21, f.].

m. Between these texts and the one presently under discussion here, there is a difference: in v. 22 here, '**Holy Spirit**' appears without the definite article. Furthermore, as a result, there are certain interpreters here, who by reason of the **liturgical context**, have suggested that in connection with the **First Day of the Week**, the reception of the Holy Spirit is presented in a cultic dimension. It might be that the **Liturgical overtones** of Jn 7 [**the last and greatest day of the Festival**] the formula here might be a forerunner of Jn 20:

... 37* On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, "If any one thirsts, let him come to me and drink. 38* He who believes in me, as * the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" 39* Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive; for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified... [Jn 7].

The **Acts of the Apostles** confirm that we are in the presence of a formulation well known to the Early Church [cf. Ac 1:8; 2:33, 38; 8:15, 17, 19; 10:47; 19:2].

n. The vocabulary of Jn 20:21 was characteristic of the Johannine language, and its structure is as well. As for v. 22, we have seen that the **Gift of the Holy Spirit** corresponds well to the theology of the author of the 4th Gospel and it had been announced in particular in Jn 7: 39, as Augustine was early to note. However, the verb translates the gesture by which this Gift has been communicated is indeed a *hapax legomena*, in the NT. As for the verb which introduces this, it is many times found in Jn. The first reference, it seems, is that of the act of New Creation – then, the **restorer of the People** from Ezk's vision of the Field of the Dry Bones [Ezk 35:3, 5, 9].

o. Lastly, the Trinitarian dimensions stand out here: it can be noted that the **Apostolic Mission of the Disciples** engages at the same time, the Father, Who is at the origin of the Son's Personal Mission, but also this Son Who confers His Mission on His Disciples – and the Holy Spirit Who is clearly present in this Mission. This engagement of the most Blessed trinity was already predicted in Jn 3: ... **34 For he whom God [the Father] has sent [Jesus Christ] utters the words of God, for it is not by measure that he gives the Spirit**... God alone indeed is capable of re-creating, restoring humanity - as He alone has the Power to forgive sins.



[III] THE REMISSION OF SINS [Jn 20:23]

... 23* If **you forgive** the sins of any, **they are forgiven**; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

a. This **bind/loose – forgive/retain**, is called a **disciplinary logion**. It seems More in accord with Mt:

... 19* I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you **bind on earth shall be bound in heaven**, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.." [Mt 16]

... 18* Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you **loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven**... [M 18]

It might also approach aspects of the Lukan style:

... 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, 46* and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, 47* and that **repentance and forgiveness of sins** should be preached in his name to all nations, * beginning from Jerusalem.... [Lk 24].

Today, an accord is made to affirm that this is a sign of inheriting a tradition, an inheritance which evidently the narrator has taken up because his formulation is adapted to 'public' Greek.

b. However, this 'borrowing' is not totally 'foreign' to Johannine theology which connects it to the **Gift of the Holy Spirit** unto the remission of sins. One notes in effect that by His coming, the **Spirit** is charged with: ... **8 And when he comes, he will convince the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment...** [Jn 16]. Thanks to the Apostolic Mission of the Disciples the Personal Mission of Jesus is divinely destined to continue across the ages. Therefore, the revelation is offered to us, and those who refuse it find themselves unmasked. Present to this Apostolic Mission, the Holy Spirit confounds those who do not believe in the Divine Son, as they reject the Light and the Truth: **I am the way, the truth, and the Life!**

c. The substantive **sin** is often utilized in the Gospel, but in the plural it is employed only **two other times**:

- In the context of a controversy between Jesus and His contemporaries, He says to them: ... **24* I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he."**... [Jn 8]. Jesus thus teaches them that **the deliverance from death and from sin is attached to Faith in His Divine, Merciful Person**. He attests that outside of Him, no remission of sins is possible. Neither is

there any remission of sins possible outside **the Holy Spirit, Whom He bestows on His disciples** at the end of this **First Easter day** we are studying in Jn 20.

- **the second use** of this substantive is situated at the end of the story of the Man born Blind. The Pharisees refuse to accept the testimony of the old blind man and they say to him: ... **34 They answered him, "You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" And they cast him out... [Jn 9]**. This refusal is all the more dramatic than in the following verse, where **Jesus calls the blind man to faith in the Son of Man**, then He declares to the Pharisees: ... **41* Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains."... [v. 41]**. Jesus notes at one and the same time their refusal and their resultant incapacity of removing sin, but He also works out a discernment here: between the **one who is considered as a sinner from birth**, and **those who reject His testimony**. Such as **these latter are the real 'sinners'** and their refusal of Him condemns them. The discernment that Jesus entrusts to His Disciples is therefore in the line of the One Who effects this in the course of His own mission.

d. These two references pertain to a context of controversies and the **appeal to the faith** in the One Who can **take away the sin of the world [1:29]**. Our verse does not pertain to a context of controversies, but rather to **the appeal of to the faith**, which will resurface at the end of the chapter [cf. vv. 29, 31]. The scholars feel that this seems to have been constructed in its final redaction that it might open up into a confession of faith announced from v. 8 onward. The power to remit sins is granted to the Disciples in the heart of a narrative where **the appeal to believe** in the One Who comes to manifest Himself to them.

e. He has **manifested Himself** to them in showing them **His pierced side and wounded hands**, the signs of His Passion. These signs reveal the refusal of Jesus' contemporaries to **welcome, accept Jesus**, and this is the source of their sin. They allow one to comprehend the fear which animates the parents of the Man born blind, as that of the Disciples after the death of their Master [20:19]. But, this Master comes to **conquer death, fear** and He brings **the pardon of sins**. This is why the remission that He offers by the mediation of His Disciples is at one and the same **time a fruit of the Passion, of the Resurrection and of the Gift of the Holy Spirit**.

f. The **Gift of the Holy Spirit** is presented in the heart of the second Tableau. The **remission of sins** as the **Sending into the carrying on of His Personal Mission** both of this are literarily bound to the phrase, **having said this** [v. 22]. If this Gift is placed by the narrator in relation to the **sending by the Father, and that of the Son**, one might say that the remission of sins is ratified by God, through the guarantee of Heaven and the assistance of the Holy Spirit.

g. In our *logion*, the **remission of sins precedes the refusal of pardon to sinners**. In Mt, it is the inverse. The context is not evidently the same. But this presentation of our verse corresponds also to the theology of the author. In effect while Jesus strongly denounces sin of those who refuse to grasp His word, and who do not love God [cf. 5:37, 42], **He clearly affirms that the Mission of the Son of Man is above all to save** [cf. Jn 3]:

... 16* For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17* For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. 18 **He who believes in him is not condemned;** he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. 19* And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20 For every one who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. 21* **But he who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God.**"

h. The first verb, **to remit**, is also utilized in two other contexts. Jesus announces to His Disciples His departure and promises them that He will not leave them orphans [14:18]. A bit further on, He adds:

... 25 "These things I have spoken to you, while I am still with you. 26 But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, **he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.** 27* Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. **Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid...** [Jn 14].

The context of these two citations is at the same time, that of the **Mission of the Son and the Gift of the Spirit**. It is therefore identical for anyone in whom the Son accomplishes **His Mission in bestowing the Holy Spirit and in remitting sins.**

i. The second verb is a *hapax legomenon*, of the gospel narrative and the member of the phrase in which it is employed has no equivalent in the entire NT. It is however, used by the LXX, and especially in Ezk, in an **eschatological context** where the end of Israel is announced. The hour of its misfortune has sounded, it is the Hour where the wrath of God is going to be revealed:

... 10 "Behold, the day! Behold, it comes! Your doom * has come, **injustice * has blossomed, pride has budded.** 11 **Violence** has grown up into a rod of wickedness; **none of them shall remain,** nor their abundance, nor their wealth; neither shall there be preeminence among them. * 12 **The time has come, the day draws near.** Let not the buyer rejoice, nor the seller mourn, for wrath is upon all their multitude. 13 For the seller shall not return to what he has sold, while they live. **For wrath * is upon all**

their multitude; it shall not turn back; and because of his iniquity, none can maintain his life. ... [Ezk 7].

This misfortune is due to those sins denounced throughout Ezk 4-7. Our second verb, to **retain sins**, calls to mind **the sins of Israel**, and the **times of Expiation**, i.e., **the ruin of Jerusalem and the departure of the People into exile**.

j. The first verb: **to remit** – is utilized in an identical context in Ezk. The Prophet denounces the culpability of Jerusalem. He compares it to **adultery and to prostitution**. God hands over the Holy City to her lovers, and warns her of what lies ahead:

... 39 And I will give you into the hand of your lovers, and they shall throw down your vaulted chamber and break down your lofty places; they shall strip you of your clothes and take your fair jewels, and leave you naked and bare... [Ezk 16].

The time has come for Israel to pay the price for its sin, to bear the weight of her abominations. But, at the end of this chapter, god announces that He will call to mind His Covenant of Mercy, and that He will establish an **Eternal Covenant**, and will absolve His people from all the evil they have done:

... 60 yet I will **remember my covenant with you** in the days of your youth, and I will establish with you **an everlasting covenant**. 61 Then you will remember your ways, and be ashamed when I * take your sisters, both your elder and your younger, and give them to you as daughters, but not on account of the covenant with you. 62 **I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the LORD**, 63 that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame, when **I forgive you all that you have done, says the Lord GOD.**" ... [Ezk 16].

k. In the context of Ezk, these two verbs are used to denounce the sin of Israel. Through many faults and sin, the Prophet accuses the People of God of **betraying the love of God** and of **breaking the covenant concluded with Him**. It is the heart of Israel which is sick and has to be renewed. Her healing is announced by **the Gift of a New Heart, and new Spirit, that of the Lord Himself**:

... 25 I will **sprinkle clean water upon you**, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. 26* **A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you**; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. 27* And I **will put my spirit within you**, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances... [Ezk 36].

l. One might therefore conclude that **the Prophet Ezk plays a large role in the development of Jn 20**. God announces that **He will purify His People** - and, at the same time, **He will place within them His Spirit** in order to enable them to keep

His Laws [cf. Ezk 36:25-27, 33]. There follows then the vision of **the Field of the Dry Bones** which culminates in **the resurrection of the People of God** thanks to the **Gift of the Breath of God, the Gift of the Holy Spirit** [cf. Ezk 37: 9, ff.] – referring back to **the original Creation**, Gn 2:7) – the Principle of **New Life** [Ezk 37:14].

m. This *rapprochement* is all the more justified that one can only be moved by this apparent parallel – even the words used are similar. This resemblance seems to indicate that the OT Prphet had truly inspired Jn 20. If this is the case, then the remissions of sins offered at the end of this 3rd Scene of Jn 20, announces the birth of a **New People** whose **heart God has healed** and which will announce, proclaim, continue **the New Covenant of Mercy initiated through the sacrifice of Calvary**. The **First-Born** of this people, of course, is Jesus Himself. As for the **New Community**, this is entrusted to those who have been with Him as **the Witnesses of His public life and eventual resurrection**.

n. While the remission of sins is bound to the Gift of the Spirit, it is also therefore the announcement of the accomplishment of the promises made centuries earlier to Israel. It is also the welcome, the reception, by the **New Israel** of the One who is the Father's Envoy. The **remission of sins** and **the gift of the Spirit** signify that a people has been rendered capable of **welcoming revelation**, of **believing in Jesus Christ** and to give **witness that He is the Lord**. For the moment these are the disciples who, after having seen Him, they **rejoiced** at His **being in their midst**.

o. By reason of the context to which the *logion* pertains, the power that Jesus bestows on His disciples can be summarized under a simple pardon of the faults, or to a simple sentence pronounced over the sinner. Since the remission of sins is the object of the Apostolic Mission of the Disciples, and this has for its primary cause, the Envoy of the Father, or as its model, **the Divine Son, Most Beloved and Only Begotten** - it is fitting to situate all this at the very heart of **the New Covenant realized in the Easter of Jesus**. This remission of sins is bestowed on the **evening of the First Day of the Week**, and in a context of **purification**, of **restoration** and of **re-creation**, it has an **eschatological dimension**. This operates a discernment between those who do not believe in the Son of Man and who are already condemned – and those who do believe in Him and who can indeed become children of God. The Gift of the Spirit announces that this reconciliation is definitively acquired and that all human beings can rediscover the pathway of fraternity thanks **to the Lord's ascending to His Father**.

p. The verbs are either in the aorist subjunctive, or in the present subjunctive, or in the perfect. The diversity of these times indicates that the power remitted to the Disciples at a precise moment is appealed upon to last for the entire period of the life of the Church. It seems to us, therefore, important to look to this Jn

20 and to see in it its **universalist perspective**, a destination that it might not have been fully grasped, but which is certainly the faith of the Church.

q. We have already said that the power to remit sins was entrusted to the **Disciples**. However, this word has not been explicitly mentioned in this entire second Tableau. This is astonishing in an account which does not hesitate to speak of them, It is without doubt an indication to think that this second Tableau is a secondary redaction and that it had been added to the first Tableau, in order to complete the ecclesial and pastoral dimension. However, there can be no doubt that in this actual account the two pronouns that are used, **you**, inscribed in v. 21 recall to mind those who were present at the end of v. 19. Now it is indeed a question of the **Disciples** in this section where the word is employed at the beginning and at the end of the **manifestation of Jesus**. As for the personal pronoun, **them**, inserted in v. 22, this suggests that Jesus is addressing Himself still to those Whom He had known and chosen from the beginning of His ministry.

r. It remains for us still to take up a difficult question, the position of the Churches **regarding those to whom this power of forgiving sins was entrusted**. The Catholic and Orthodox Churches think that this power has been entrusted exclusively to the **Apostles**. The Protestant sects think that this power has been granted to every disciple of Christ, and not only to a particular group, led by Peter, and to the Twelve [cf. Lk 24:18]. It should be kept in mind that **Canon 10 of IInd Constantinople** had defined the restrictive interpretation taken up later by Trent and Vatican II.

s. The answer to this ecumenical question, needs to flow from the over all reading of this chapter, and to keep in mind the inter-personal relationships of the actors. Mary Magdalen is considered in the account as she who informs the Disciples. He announces to them that someone **has taken the Lord away from the tomb** - she lets them know that **the Master has risen**. She is therefore, a Messenger of the Paschal Event among the Disciples. She enjoys a role habitually attributed to the women in the other resurrection accounts.

t. This role is not under-estimated by the narrator - as he dedicates to her one of the more beautiful NT scenes. But, this scene of recognition is ordained to the deliverance of a message to be brought to the Disciples. And Mary is '*consecrated*' in her role as messenger by Jesus Himself, Who sends her [v. 17]. Thus, Mary's role here that she exercises in this account seems well defined.

u. The Disciples, for their part, have returned to the Tomb. They go inside which **Mary does not do**. The interior of the Tomb is for them the place of a better understanding of the event and even a revelation of itself. They have likewise turned towards the Person of their Master, of the risen One, who is in the **midst of their**

group. Mary is not with them the night of the Pasch. We can therefore conclude that the relationship between Mary and the Disciples is extremely tenuous. Each time that she delivers a message, but **one is never let in on the encounter with the Disciples.** Furthermore, this fact also brings out anew that **she is never with them in those special places they frequent.** She is not at the tomb at the same time that they are, and on that **Easter Night she is not seen to reappear.** **Her role is completed by dawn.**

v. If the narrator had tried to show that the Apostolic Mission had been bestowed on every believer, he surely would have been hard pressed to produce the evidence. Mary on that Easter Night simply was not there – her message to the Disciples can serve as some kind of a **Preamble to His manifestation of His Wounds.** It might also seem that she is not mixed in with the group, but is simply **the messenger who informs them.** We have to conclude, therefore, that **the actual group to which Jesus addresses Himself and confers the Apostolic Mission is a restricted group of just the Apostles.**

w. Not all agree with this, of course. The great difficulty is that Jn designates among the Disciples also the **friends of Jesus, like Joseph of Arimathia.** There were various individuals close to Jesus, a group much larger than the Twelve. Peter and John are also called **Disciples** [v. 24]. Yet, it is clear they are **Apostles.** It is not clear to all just who **the 'other Disciple'** is. The literary bond between the appearance to the Eleven in Lk [24: 36-53] and the appearance to the Disciples in Jn 20 does not fully satisfy all exegetes. It may be noted that the coming of the Risen Lord on that first Easter Night in Lk presents the Eleven and their Companions [Lk 24:33]:... **33 And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven gathered together and those who were with them...** Consequently, in Luke the appearance of Jesus Risen goes beyond the circle of the Apostles. It is true that the Johannine Tradition is not the Lukan tradition, but it seems to some interpreters that Jn 20 and Lk 24 would lead some at least to conclude that the Mission conferred on the **Disciples** to forgive sins is addressed to a group of men, among whom the **Apostles** hold the first place – **two among them are explicitly named** – and that **one of these, Peter, was the first to enter the Tomb.**

x. This group, it is clear, symbolizes the New Israel, the Church accomplishing its pastoral charge. But some argue here that this power is not restricted to the priestly order - a clearer understanding of which develops in the course of time. **[This is delicate material, and believers need to walk gingerly here].**



CONCLUSIONS

[1] Clearly, then, Jn 20 differs from the other accounts. It is composed of two Tableaus which appear as a conclusion to that which took place on **Easter Morn**. But, it must be added immediately that the 2nd Tableau has been constructed on the first, having the same structure. It seems to be a secondary structure, as seems to flow from the composition. There are certain elements which are of the **Johannine style**, and others which come from the **OT**, and still others who have been **borrowed from the Tradition**.

[2] However, the two Tableaus resemble one another. At the center of each of them there is an event which clarifies, which reveals, which guarantees that which is going to be said and that which is going to follow. **The manifestation of His Hands and Pierced Side [the Christophany]** makes clear Jesus' arrival among His Disciples, and this allows them to recognize Him and this explains the source of their **Joy**. The **Gift of the Spirit** reveals to the Disciples that they are to carry out the **sacramental mission** entrusted to them. This guarantees the remission of sins from the Spirit, from the Risen one, through the ages in the Church.

[3] The two Tableaus have in common that they are **essentially Christological**. Jesus has entered into the **midst** of His Church, and He remains there. It is He Who acts, Who speaks, Who commands, Who bestows the power to forgive sin the reaction of the Disciples is known to us thanks to the Dialogue which the narrator presents and engages his reader. This **Christocentrism** appears equally in His relationship to His Father and in the Gift of the Spirit: Jesus intervenes as Mediator, He recalls the origin, the cause of the Apostolic Mission and the transmission of the Gift of the Spirit.

[4] It is also an **ecclesiological** account. The coming of Jesus in the midst of His Disciples recalls the scene at the beginning of the Passion [18:2]. It is in effect the last time that Jesus has appeared in their company. Yet, at the Resurrection on Easter Night, the Group has re-formed. It is thanks to the coming of Jesus that a Body of Disciples comes into existence and it is to the Apostles that the Mission is entrusted. The Spirit is given for the remission of sins. The Church appears before her lord as a **New People** who listens to Him, sees Him, welcomes, receives Him, and finds itself sent into the world, **according to the specific charisms of each**. In Jn 20, this power is bestowed on the **DISCIPLES** – however:

... According to Mt & Mk, Jesus celebrated the Passover Meal, **with the Twelve** [Mt 26:20; Mk 14:17] – and according to Lk, with **the Apostles** [22:14]. For Lk, however, the Apostles were a technical term reserved for the Twelve [6:13].

Even though John speaks about the DISCIPLES of Jesus, rather than explicitly about the TWELVE, or the APOSTLES, he applies this term consistently and exclusively to the Twelve after the occurrence of the crisis that followed the Eucharistic discourse [66-71]:

...66 After this many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him. 67 Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?" 68* Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; 69 and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God." 70* Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?" 71* He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was to betray him...⁶ [Jn 6]

[5] The second Tableau seems to be a complement to the first. If in the first one, the Victory over Death and the Fear of the Apostles stand out, it is necessary to wait for the end of the second tableau in order to know explicitly that sins can be remitted. At the same time, in the first Tableau, consecrated to the recognition of Jesus by His Church, in the second tableau, there is the formal conferral of the Apostolic Mission, according to a classic outline of the account of the Risen Lord.

[6] Lastly the literary composition of the scene tends to indicate the Gift of the Spirit to this **New People of God**, represented by the Apostles, is less a Pentecost in the Lukan sense of the term, than it is an Easter scene. Jesus has come to live eternally. Jesus bestows His Spirit on the entire world in dying, ex-spiring [Jn 19:30] – the **Gift of the Spirit** is a parallel scene at the **resurrection to new life**. The Gift of the Spirit is to be identified with the sending of the Spirit announced in the Discourse of Farewell by Jesus. In this He confers on His disciples His **peace, joy, the mission, the Spirit and the revelation of forgiveness and the conferral of the power to do this**.



⁶ Roch A. Keretszty, O. Cist., *Wedding Feast of the Lamb. Eucharitic Theology form a Historical, Biblical and Systematic Perpesctive*. Chicago/Mundelein Il. Hillenbrand Books 2004, p. 24