

**Intro.:** Among the most dangerous labels a person could receive these days is to be identified as “a conservative Christian.” It seems that many are far more sympathetic to African War Lords and Islamist Terrorists than they are faithful, confessing Christians. They mock us with statements like: How stupid can you be to think the scriptures are the trustworthy and true Word of God! How ignorant are you to believe that there are moral absolutes! And how hateful and intolerant you are to claim that the risen Christ is the only way of salvation! Such ideas are viewed by the unbelieving world as dangerous and divisive. One of the charges that you will often hear people throwing at confessing Christians is that we are closed-minded.

Actually, such accusations are false. Today’s Gospel teaches us that those who do not know the risen Christ are the ones whose minds are really closed – closed to God. Only Jesus can open minds to receive peace and to understand the scriptures. It is my hope that through today’s Gospel the Lord will lead all of us to give those who deny Christ and attack us a piece of our minds - our open minds.

### **I. To Receive Peace. (vv.36-43)**

**A.** Since the fall of Adam and Eve humanity has been plagued by fear; fear of the world around them and fear of God. The goal of the devil and the world, working through our fallen nature, is to close our minds to God by programming fear into us and filling us with doubts.

The events recorded in our Gospel begin with two of the disciples telling the story of how they had seen Jesus, alive. But in the shadow of all that had happened in recent days the faith of that little band of followers was nearly destroyed. Where they once heard Jesus speak of peace and forgiveness, now all they could muster was fear and guilt.

In the same way so much of what goes on around us, and happens to us, leaves us fearful and timid. We cower before a hostile world. We grow shamefully silent when our faith is challenged. We allow Satan, who is ever reminding us of our sins, to drive us into fearful hiding away from the Lord. Our decisions and what we do and say are twisted because we live by fear and not by faith.

And where there is fear, doubt is not far behind. Repeatedly Jesus had told His disciples what was going to happen to Him, and what it meant for them. Yet, huddled together behind locked doors, feeding off of one another’s fears, they just couldn’t believe it. To them fear seemed safe and doubt would not disappoint them.

I know that you all want to appear bold and immovable in your faith, but don’t you still have moments of weakness that lead us to struggle with doubts? We experience so many circumstances that seem impossible. What good are all the promises of the Bible, when the harsh realities of life are bearing down on us like a freight train?

Allowed to continue, such fears and doubts will result in our minds and hearts becoming closed to God. This is what happened to the fearful and doubting disciples in the room that night. Despite Christ’s definite promise of a resurrection victory their minds were closed to the possibility. Our Gospel reports that they were **“startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost”** Rather than believing the testimony of their fellow disciples, and trusting Christ to fulfill His promise, they were taken captive by superstition. Their minds were closed to the possibilities of God’s power and grace.

Many of us suffer the same effects from our fears and doubts. Living in a fearful, unbelieving world we may allow our minds to become closed to the promises of God in Christ. We see the troubles surrounding us and convince ourselves that some things are just impossible. We struggle with our losing battle against sin and close our minds and hearts to God’s mercy. Living by fear rather than by faith we refuse to believe that the risen Christ is always with us, even to the very end of the age. We treat him like a ghost who haunts us rather than as the risen Savior who blesses us with life and salvation. But thanks be to God...

**B.** Jesus opens our minds to receive His peace – one that surpasses all human understanding.

In our Gospel He came to the disciples and appeared to them through locked doors to calm their fears by speaking to them. He said: **“Peace be with you!”** He encouraged them not to be afraid nor let doubts arise in their minds. He invited them to look at the holy wounds by which He had saved them. He told them to touch the very body which He had offered on the cross for their sins, and proclaimed to them: **“It is I, myself?”** He was not a ghost to fear, but the very one who always had and always would love them.

He proved to them that He truly won the victory over death and the grave for them. In His body He was showing them that because He is alive, they and we shall live also.

Still today, Jesus comes to us and preaches heavenly peace into our hearts. He assures us that He is alive and that we who were once dead in our sins are now alive with Him. He comes saying: “Do not be afraid, and do not let doubts continue to arise in your minds.” He even invites us to touch his living body in the Sacrament of the Altar, and through it to receive forgiveness, life and salvation. Jesus comes to us with His perfect love to drive out our fear. He comes to dispel our doubts and to open our minds and hearts, not only to the possibility of God’s grace and mercy, but to their certainty. Through Christ our minds have been opened...

## II. To Understand The Scriptures. (vv.44-46)

Speaking to us through the apostle God teaches us that the things that are written in the Bible cannot be understood or accepted by those whose minds have not been opened by Christ. St. Paul writes: ***“The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned...But we have the mind of Christ.” (1 Cor. 2:14,16b)***

**A.** Jesus is the one who opens our minds to understand the meaning of all that God has done and will do for us. Again St. Paul writes: ***“We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us....” (1 Cor. 2:12)***

In our Gospel Jesus came to His disciples whose minds had been closed by their fears and doubts and taught them that His promises can always be trusted. He told them: ***“This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the prophets and the Psalms.”*** He reminded them that it was always God’s plan: that the Christ would suffer and rise again on the third day.

He taught them, and He teaches us, that because of what He has done we have forgiveness of sins. He opens our minds to understand what God has given us and opens our hearts to receive God’s grace.

**B.** Not only that but Jesus opens our minds to see Him as the key who unlocks all of scripture.

Did you know that the meaning of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics was a mystery for centuries? It was not until Napoleon’s troops discovered a slab of black stone in 1799 near the seaside town of Rosetta in lower Egypt that they could be read and understood. The Rosetta Stone contained three inscriptions, one in hieroglyphic, one in demotic and one in Greek. This offered the key to unlock the mysteries of the ancient writings, so that today experts can understand everything that remains of the ancient Egyptian writings.

For many the Bible remains as mysterious and confusing as hieroglyphics are to most of us, because they do not yet have the living Rosetta stone, the Rock of Salvation, Jesus Christ. He is the key to open our minds to understand the scriptures. The apostle writes: ***“We speak of God’s secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory, as it is written: ‘No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him,’ but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit...” (1 Cor. 2:7-10)*** Jesus plainly told His disciples that all the scriptures are about Him.

Just as He did with them, Jesus comes to us and opens up our minds to understand all that scriptures have to say to us. All of them are written so that we may believe that He is the Christ, the Son of God, and by believing we may have life in His name.

From Genesis to Revelation it is all about Christ and the salvation He offers us. He is the fulfillment of God’s Law and God’s Promise. He is the key to understanding the secret wisdom of God, and the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven; that God was reconciling the world to Himself, through Christ, not counting our sins against us. Jesus is the One who opens our hearts and minds to find peace with God by understanding what the scriptures say about His grace and our salvation. And Jesus is the one who prepares us then...

## III. To Give Others A Piece Of Our Mind. (vv.47-49)

**A.** In our Gospel Jesus came to the disciples who had retreated into their little room as fearful victims of abuse and false accusation and commissioned them to instead go out and give the world a piece of their mind. He sent them to be His witnesses to all nations beginning in Jerusalem.

In the same way, with minds that have been opened to God’s grace we are not content to keep the peace we have in Christ and the understanding we have been given to ourselves. Free from fear and doubt we are ready to go. We are ready to go and be His witnesses to those whose minds remain closed to God and so live under the shadow of fear and doubt.

We are ready to go and tell all the world what Christ has done; that He has kept the law for us, that He laid down His life as a sacrifice for our sins, and that He has risen in glory to give eternal life to all who believe. With open minds we will leave here today and through us repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations. Because...

**B.** He sends us the promised Holy Spirit to empower us.

In our Gospel He told His disciples to wait for the Pentecost gift of the Holy Spirit through whom they would be clothed with power from on high. And sure enough, 50 days later they received what He had promised. In the power of the Holy Spirit they then proclaimed the glory of Christ’s resurrection, so that many minds and hearts were opened and thousands were added to their number to receive the gift of salvation in Christ.

That same promise is given to us by Christ and fulfilled for us right here today, because we receive the empowering gift of the Holy Spirit in Word and Sacrament. Through them we are fully equipped to be His witnesses so that...

We are so blessed, because not only have our minds been opened to God, but by His grace we now have the mind of Christ. This is the mind we have been given to share with others. We are privileged to give them a little piece of that mind so that their minds may be opened to God, to His peace and to understanding the mysteries of His grace. And now the peace of God.... Amen.