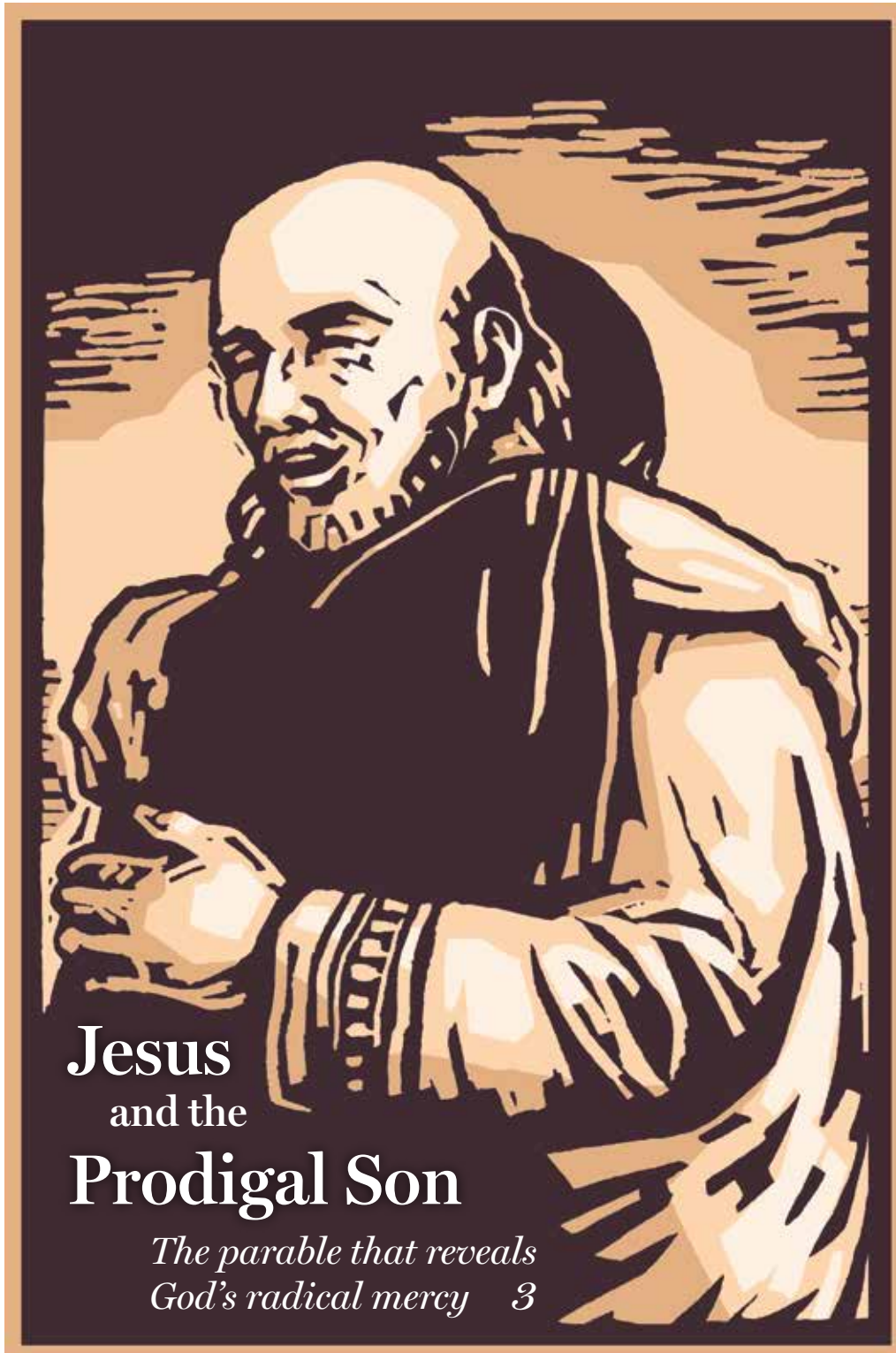


Celebration

March 2016 | 45:3

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A Comprehensive Worship Resource



Jesus and the Prodigal Son

*The parable that reveals
God's radical mercy 3*

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As we move through the final weeks of Lent to Easter during the Holy Year, one of the deep theological challenges of our faith is the mystery of sin.

God's gift of freedom makes consent to the divine plan possible for human beings. But it also made possible our rejection — a great turning away from God that seems to have spread exponentially and intergenerationally in history to create a collective distortion of the image and likeness of God that was our original identity and birthright.

We have fouled the planet, rampaged through history in countless wars, divided our world into rich and poor, withdrawn from each other and community into isolation and exaggerated individualism, insecurity and self-centeredness.

How could even God heal such damage except by wielding divine authority to force us to be good, for our own sake? But this would not address the deeper challenge to us — that is, to freely choose friendship with God,



Pat Marrin

the ultimate goal of divine love.

The answer to this dilemma lies in the mystery of Jesus, who came into the world as one of us, not to force but to convince us that living justly and lovingly is our authentic nature and our path to happiness with God.

But Jesus did much more than just model goodness. He immersed himself in our world, its limitations and conflicts, experiencing the full consequences of our selfishness and fear. He endured every aspect of our fallen nature, though without sin, and went out to find us, embrace us and bring us home to God's love.

Jesus' death on the cross gives us a glimpse into what St. Paul expressed in 2 Corinthians 5:21: "For our sake, God made him to be sin who did not know sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him."

Jesus became sin, our alienation from God, that we might be restored to friendship with God. He took our place that we might take his. Isn't this the meaning of the Holy Year? Can we even begin to grasp it? — Pat Marrin

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Jesus and the Prodigal Son

The parable that reveals God's radical mercy

By BRIAN J. PIERCE

In Luke 15, Jesus tells three parables — the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son — in response to criticism regarding his spontaneous practice of eating with a rather disreputable group of friends. In light of this, it is quite symbolic that his first bed as a newborn baby was a feeding trough for animals. It seems that from the very beginning Jesus associates with a pretty unusual group of “friends.” The imagery found in Luke’s infancy narrative already announces to us that Jesus has come to be bread and sustenance for the world. He has come to feed the lowly, the poor, the sinners, even the four-legged friends of God. Luke’s imagery also tells us that this child, who has come to nourish the poor and the outcast, will end his life wrapped in a shroud (swaddling clothes), put to death for daring to let his life — his very own body — become the bread of life, the bread of hope for sinners and for the poorest of the poor.

There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, “Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.” So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country. (Luke 15:11-13)

Jesus, the beloved Son of God, flows out from the eternal Source, from the house of his Abba, setting into motion a faith-filled journey of salvation, a story of light and darkness, of life and death — the latest segment of Israel’s long journey of faith. Traveling from one land to another, often in desperate situations, Israel has tried to respond in obedience to God. The good news behind this long story, of course, is that beneath every step of Israel’s pilgrim journey one finds God’s footprint and God’s promise: “I am with you.” This is what we call “grace.”



— Julie Lonneman

The beloved Son knows that he is free to leave the protection and safety of his Abba's home and travel into the distant country, a country of suffering and sin. He longs to seek out and find those who have lost their way, like sheep that stray from the shepherd's watch.

The prodigal Christ, moved by love, leaves home and plunges into our complex world. We cannot remain closed in our small, comfortable nest and call ourselves followers of Christ. When I was in college, I met a contempla-

tive Dominican nun who had spent many years confined to a wheelchair. Other than her occasional visit to the doctor, she never left her monastery. I was shocked when I discovered that Sr. Mary Michael had dedicated her whole life to corresponding with prisoners, especially those on death row. Her wheelchair and her life of prayer were not impediments at all to her missionary spirit. Her quiet life of prayer was the pulpit from which she proclaimed Jesus’ unconditional love to those whom the world easily forgets. She was a fountain of love that flowed out into the world.

“You are the salt of the earth ... the light of the world,” says Jesus to each of us (Matt 5:13-14). Our proper place is right in the heart of this wonderful and complicated world, living out the drama of the Incarnation. Worldly realities are good and important for us precisely because the world has been created by love, in the image of God. We are not afraid to embrace the world. In fact, we are anointed to be salt and light precisely because God is passionately in love with the world. This is what it means to be *church*: to stand in the middle of our beautiful and broken world, with our baptismal candle held high, and be God’s presence and God’s light right here and now in the midst of it all.

As Pope Francis reminds us, we are sent as bearers of God’s healing love and mercy:

The thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful ... it needs nearness, proximity. I see the church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he or she has high cholesterol. ... You have to heal [the] wounds. Then we can talk about everything else.¹

“Nearness, proximity” — these are powerful, beautiful words that lead us right into the heart of Jesus’

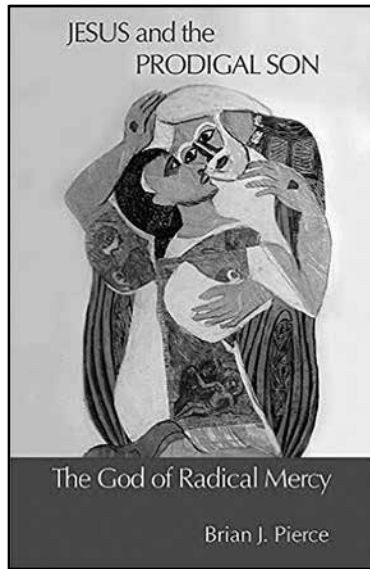


incarnation. Pope Francis challenges us to make these words part of the vocabulary of our daily lives. To really be disciples of Jesus, we must be prepared to draw near to those who live on the periphery of human existence, those who have been excluded for one reason or another from a full life. In this way we practice *proximity*, releasing Christ's healing love into the universe. Pope Francis continues, "We Christians remain steadfast in our intention to ... heal wounds, to build bridges ... to bear one another's burdens (Gal 6:2)."²

In the parable of the prodigal son, the younger son does not trip and fall into the distant land of sin and suffering (like most of us). Not at all. The fact is, he *chooses* to set off down this road. Before leaving on his journey he asks his abba to give him his inheritance, and his abba's response is to share his very *being* with his son. From the very beginning of the parable, then, we are given a powerful hint: This abba is different from the others; he does not play by the established rules. His actions in the parable are clearly unconventional, even a bit dangerous. He breaks with deeply ingrained cultural rules here, and it does not seem that he does so haphazardly. If we miss this detail, we may miss the parable's power to surprise us into conversion. We will see this unusual behavior again at the end of the parable, when we stumble upon the abba as he waits anxiously, even lovingly, for his wayward son's return (Luke 15:20).

Kenneth Bailey, a Protestant scripture scholar who has lived for 60 years in the Middle East, suggests, "The image of *father* [in this parable] is transformed from that of a tribal chief into a metaphor that can be used for God."³ It is a portrait of a father who acts with the tender compassion of a mother. Theologian Sandra Schneiders agrees wholeheartedly:

Jesus' parable about the father actually constitutes a radical challenge to patriarchy. The divine father who has been understood as the ultimate justification of human patriarchy is revealed as the one who refuses to own us,



Jesus and the Prodigal Son:
The God of Radical Mercy,
by Brian Pierce
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The Son does not break his relationship with his Abba. In fact he wants nothing more than to follow the example of his Abba, to go out of himself, to live for others, to empty himself through love.

demand our submission or punish our rebellion. Rather, God is the one who respects our freedom, mourns our alienation, waits patiently for our return and accepts our love as pure gift.⁴

The beloved Son knows — and has known from all eternity — that he is loved. He knows that everything that his Abba has is his, for he and his Abba are one (John 10:30). This *knowing* is the greatest inheritance of all. The Son has no need to search for his freedom, because his Abba's love is

freedom. The beloved Son knows that he is free to leave the protection and safety of his Abba's home and travel into the distant country, a country of suffering and sin. He longs to seek out and find those who have lost their way, like sheep that stray from the shepherd's watch.

The Son does not break his relationship with his Abba. In fact he wants nothing more than to follow the example of his Abba, to go *out of himself*, to live for others, to *empty himself* through love. He sets off with a piece of his Abba's heart so that he can help build a world free of fear and small-mindedness, where people trust life and live it rather than measuring it. He wants to share his Abba's inheritance with the friends he hopes to meet in the distant country. He wants to get to know the tax collectors and the prostitutes, the gentiles and the lepers, listen to their stories, understand their worldviews, and share their experiences. He wants to engage with the rabbis and the philosophers and learn from the simple faith of the poor and the outcast. He wants to find those who are lost, to heal those who are broken, to feed those who are starving.

The journey of Jesus is the church's journey. Says Pope Francis:

I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security. ... If something should rightly disturb us and trouble our consciences, it is the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters are living without the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of faith to support them, without meaning and a goal in life. More than by fear of going astray, my hope is that we will be moved by the fear of remaining shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security, within rules which make us harsh judges, within habits which make us feel safe, while at our door people are starving and Jesus does not

tire of saying to us: “Give them something to eat” (Mark 6:37).⁵

Jesus’ *downward movement* into the world, into the midst of the people of God, is the movement of the Incarnation, the movement of love. By taking on human flesh, the eternal and creative Word of God freely enters into the human condition, into the human heart — the heart of sinner and saint alike. In the Gospel of John, Jesus makes reference to this dynamic movement by referring to himself as “the bread of God ... which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world” (John 6:33). Pope Francis refers to the need for the church to follow Jesus in this self-giving movement of love: “The ministers of the Gospel must be people ... who know how to dialogue and to descend themselves into their people’s night...”⁶

This downward movement of God toward humanity is made real and tangible for us in the incarnation of Jesus. Jesus’ journey sets the example for the rest of us, for as he comes “down the mountain” and into the heart of humanity, bringing God’s healing love to our broken, sinful and suffering world, he looks back at us and says, “Come, follow me” (Matt 19:21). In the words of Pope Francis:

The Son of God “went out” of his divine condition and came to encounter us. ... No one is excluded from the hope of life, from the love of God. The Church is sent to reawaken this hope everywhere, especially where it is suffocated by difficult existential conditions, at times inhuman, where hope does not breathe but is suffocated. There is need of the oxygen of the Gospel, of the breath of the Spirit of the Risen Christ, to rekindle it in hearts. The Church is the house whose doors are always open not only so that everyone can find welcome and breathe love and hope, but also because ... the Holy Spirit drives us to go out ... to the fringes of humanity.⁷

Where do we, who call ourselves followers of Jesus, find ourselves on this path? Do we hear the voice of the Good Shepherd and risk journeying

with him into the distant country — without counting the cost? Does our heart burn with passion for the poor, the lost, the disenfranchised, so much that we want nothing more than to break bread with those who hunger for the mercy and peace of God?

What or who awaits us at the end of this journey of faith? Like the prodigal son, we are likely to be wounded along this path, wounded because we want nothing more than to love our neighbor the way Christ loves us. Is he not, after all, the beloved Son who was lost and has been found, who was dead and has come back to life? “Oh happy fault that earned so great, so glorious a Redeemer!”⁸

Brian J. Pierce, O.P., is a Dominican friar of the Province of St. Martin de Porres. He has spent the past 20 years preaching worldwide, especially in Latin America. His latest book is *Jesus and the Prodigal Son: The God of Radical Mercy* (Orbis Press). This feature article is a summary of the central theme of the book.

Endnotes

1. “A Big Heart Open to God,” An interview with Pope Francis, *America*, Sept. 30, 2013, p. 24.
2. Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, November 24, 2013), n. 67.
3. Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jacob and the Prodigal: How Jesus Retold Israel’s Story* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 146.
4. Sandra Schneiders, *Women and the Word* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), p. 47.
5. Ibid., Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 40.
6. Pope Francis, Ibid., “A Big Heart Open to God,” p. 24.
7. Pope Francis, Address to the Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization (Vatican City: Oct. 14, 2013).
8. A segment from the “Paschal Proclamation” (*Exsultet*).

“I am no longer worthy to be called your son” (Luke 15: 21).



Illustration by Mark Bartholomew

Volver a Casa

El culto y la vida para el mes de marzo 2016

PATRICIA DATCHUCK SÁNCHEZ
y RAFAEL SÁNCHEZ ALONSO

Durante estos últimos demasiados años los hombres están en guerra, los unos contra los otros. Los medios de comunicación nos mantienen en contacto con sus horrores, destrucción e incontables muertes sin sentido. Esta cobertura completa y abrumadora a veces nos deja insensibles. De vez en cuando nos informan de una tregua en este caos, el regreso a casa de un guerrero malherido. Entonces vemos escenas conmovedoras que llenan nuestros ojos de lágrimas de alegría y alivio porque es en casa en donde esos cuerpos rotos y esos espíritus quebrantados podrán descansar, sanar, y afrontar los terrores que han vivido. El hogar es donde uno puede encontrar de nuevo la paz. Pero no todos los que vuelven a casa hallan curación. Sus experiencias les han dejado irremediadamente perdidos, vacíos, amargados, aislados. Sin embargo, el hogar mantiene todavía esa promesa de esperanza, apoyo y sanación.

Es posible que usted, como yo, recuerde un verso del poema de Robert Frost, “La muerte del jornalero” (“The Death of the Hired Hand,” 1914). Cuando el jornalero Silas volvió a la granja de Warren y María en donde trabajaba, se marchó de repente en el momento más inoportuno. Esto disgustó a Warren. María sabía bien que Silas andaba mal de salud y había vuelto a casa para morir. Warren no estaba tan seguro de ello y comentó amargamente: “El hogar es el lugar en donde, cuando tienes que volver, te tienen que amparar.” María, por su parte, dijo: “Yo lo llamaría, en donde no es necesario merecerlo.”

Un ambiente similar de volver a casa sin merecerlo lo hallamos en las Sagradas Escrituras de esta Cuaresma. A lo largo de su larga historia, Israel viajaba continuamente hacia casa, hacia su Dios; dejaba atrás un pasado triste y pecaminoso



para recibir en casa una bienvenida de perdón y reconciliación. Josué (el 6 de marzo), Isaías (el 13 de marzo) y Pablo (el 6 y el 13 de marzo) nos recuerdan que el pasado ha pasado verdaderamente y que no debemos recordarlo más; la culpa perdonada no debe seguir siendo una carga pesada para quienes regresan a casa. Antes bien, y como asegura Dios a través de estos mismos mensajeros, hay algo nuevo que debemos disfrutar: La obra de Dios y la obligación que tenemos de agradecer el haber sido llamados una y otra vez a volver a casa.

Dios nos ofrece esta nueva vida por Jesucristo. Es lo que celebramos solemnemente el Domingo de Pascua de Resurrección (el 27 de marzo). Cristo, resucitado y victorioso sobre el pecado y la muerte, ha hecho posible que los pecadores sean perdonados y que los fieles puedan pasar con Él de la muerte a la vida eterna. Jesucristo ha pagado un gran precio por cumplir su misión y hacernos este gran don de Dios: se degradó, “se despojó de sí mismo y tomó la condición de siervo... se humilló y obedeció aceptando una muerte vergonzosa, muerte en la cruz” (el 20 de marzo). Pero de la muerte pasó a la vida. Jesús no regresa a Dios sin compañía, sino que nos lleva consigo a la casa de Dios, como a sus amados hermanas y hermanos e hijos del único y solo Dios.

Este ambiente de volver a casa lo resume y expresa dramáticamente San Lucas en su relato del hijo pródigo (el 6 de marzo) en el que asegura que la misericordia de Dios nos invita a volver a casa. Esta increíble miseri-

cordia toma vida en un cuadro de enormes dimensiones del maestro pintor holandés Rembrandt van Rijn (1669). Pinta el fin de la parábola de San Lucas: un joven libertino ha vuelto a casa y está arrodillado ante su padre que lo abraza con cariño y firmeza. En el fondo oscuro, Rembrandt ha pintado al hermano mayor enojado y sin simpatía hacia su hermano. En vez de dejar que la alegría penetre en el corazón de su padre, el hermano mayor sólo siente resentimiento. La reacción del hermano mayor puede parecernos lógica, justa y hasta de sentido común. Puede ser que compartamos sus razones y que, como él, también nosotros nos encontremos fuera, mirando hacia adentro, a un amor incomprensible, inexplicable. La actitud del hermano mayor nos enseña a no juzgar a lo que no tenemos derecho.

De este encuentro de Henri Nouwen con el cuadro de Rembrandt en el Hermitage de San Petersburgo, en Rusia, resultó un libro de oración, *El regreso del hijo pródigo* (Doubleday, Nueva York: 1992). Al leerlo, uno puede verdaderamente penetrar en este relato, hallar su propio lugar en él y, con confianza, pedirle perdón a Dios. Como mentor solícito, Nouwen ruega al lector que ponga atención al abrazo del Padre y vea que Rembrandt pintó dos manos diferentes. La izquierda del padre es más grande, como la de un hombre; la mano derecha es pequeña, suave y femenina. Nouwen nos recuerda que Dios ama con ternura, como una Madre, y fuertemente, como un Padre. Este Dios-Padre-Madre tan amoroso espera a cada uno de nosotros con los brazos abiertos y un corazón lleno de perdón y de amor. Es nuestro deber ahora pensar, reaccionar y elegir el camino que nos lleva a casa.

Patricia Datchuck Sánchez y Rafael Sánchez Alonso han provisto de comentarios y homilías a *Celebración* desde 1979.

Coming Home

Lectionary themes for March 2016

PATRICIA DATCHUCK SÁNCHEZ
and RAFAEL SÁNCHEZ ALONSO

Year after year, we humans have been warring against one another. The wars change, the countries involved may change, but the violence of battle never really stops, wherever it may be happening. All the while, the media has kept us well in touch with the horror, destruction and countless, senseless deaths. Coverage is so complete and overwhelming that we are, at times, reduced to non-seeing numbness.

Occasionally, however, there is a welcome respite amid all the chaos as the same media reports on the homecoming of a wounded warrior. There are touching scenes that bring on tears of joy and relief — because home is where broken bodies and fractured spirits may rest and heal and try to deal with the terrors they have known. Home is where peace can once again be found. Even when people's wartime experiences have left them almost irretrievably lost, empty, bitter and isolated, home still holds out the promise of hope, help and healing.

Perhaps, like me, you are reminded of a line in the poem "The Death of the Hired Hand" by Robert Frost (published in 1914). Silas, the hired hand, had worked at Warren and Mary's farm for years, repeatedly leaving and then coming back. When he returned to the farm again, at a most inopportune time, Warren was resentful. But it was clear to Mary that Silas was in poor health and had come home to die. Warren was unsure, and bitterly remarked, "Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in." Mary replied, "I should have called it something you somehow haven't to deserve."

A similar ambience of homecoming pervades the whole of the sacred scriptures, and particularly those chosen for the season of Lent. Throughout its long history, Israel



was continuously journeying home to God, leaving behind a sad and sinful past so as to be welcomed home to forgiveness and reconciliation. Joshua (March 6), Isaiah (March 13) and Paul (March 6, 13) remind us that the past is indeed the past and should no longer be remembered; nor should guilt burden those who have been forgiven. Rather, as God assures us through those same messengers, we should enjoy the newness we have received. It is God's doing, and it devolves upon those who have been called home, yet again, to be grateful.

This newness that God holds out to us in Christ will be celebrated in a grand way on Easter Sunday (March 27). Christ, risen and victorious over sin and death, has made it possible for sinners to be forgiven and for the faithful to cross over with him from death to eternal life. But this good and gracious gift has come at a great price: the mission, the suffering and the degradation of Jesus, who "emptied himself and took the form of a slave ... he humbled himself, obediently accepting even death, death on a cross!" (Phil 2:7-8, March 20). But when he had suffered and passed over from death to life, Jesus did not return home to God unaccompanied. On the contrary, he takes us with him; he brings us home to God as his beloved brothers and sisters, children of the one and only God.

This ambience of homecoming is dramatically expressed and summed up by Luke, whose narrative of the prodigal son (March 6) assures us of the mercy of the One who calls us

home. This extravagant mercy was beautifully brought to life by Dutch Master Rembrandt van Rijn around 1669. His larger-than-life painting of the Lucan parable features a profligate young man, newly returned home, kneeling before his father, whose embrace is warm and firm. In the shaded background, Rembrandt has painted the bitter and unsympathetic older brother. Instead of allowing his father's rejoicing to enter his heart, he has room only for resentment. His logical, common-sense reaction to his brother's sinfulness might be uncomfortably familiar to us. We might even share his reasoning, and, like him, find ourselves on the outside looking in at a love we cannot understand. The attitude of the older brother warns us against making judgments we have no right to render.

When Henri Nouwen encountered Rembrandt's painting in the Hermitage museum in St. Petersburg, Russia, the result was Nouwen's prayerful book *The Return of the Prodigal Son* (Doubleday, New York: 1992). This book allows readers to enter into the narrative, find their place at that moment in time and confidently reach out to God for forgiveness. Always a thoughtful mentor, Nouwen draws attention to the father's embrace so that we will notice, as he did, that Rembrandt painted two different hands. The left hand is larger, like that of a man; the right hand is smaller, soft and feminine. What an artful way to remind us that God loves us strongly, like a father, and tenderly, like a mother. This great, loving Parent, our God, awaits each of us with a heart full of forgiveness and love, with arms eager to embrace. We, for our part, need only "come to our senses" (Luke 15:17) and choose the path that leads us home.

Patricia Datchuck Sánchez and Rafael Sánchez Alonso have been collaborating to provide Lectionary commentaries and homilies for *Celebration* since 1979.

Leaders Who Preach the Gospel

Postscript to the bishops of the United States as we approach the Triduum

By GABE HUCK

Dear Bishops: Over the last three months, my essays have been a letter to you. This fourth part is a P.S. to speak to you about your role and responsibility as presiders and homilists at liturgy, something very timely as we are approaching Lent's end and so entering into the Three Days.

The odor of sanctity and the odor of money

You have a burden here, for you are bishops at a time when few have any expectation that this means you will be learned, just or chosen by God. Yet it is also a time when Pope Francis has in so many ways (and he surely knows and means this) become an experiment and a probably deliberate example of leadership in the church. And how anxious so many are, in and out of the church, to have such a leader.

His preparation for this leadership was, as he admits, failures at leadership. He had gone in some strange directions and disappointed many earlier, but he must have a lot of both ambition and humility. Most important, he is moving on from the in-house squabbles that have taken so much energy these last three decades and has dared all of us to do the same. He doesn't look to the United States for leadership, nor does he believe, as we often seem to, that we're special. When he visited last autumn, he named four Americans of those who stand out not because they talked the talk, but more because they walked the walk. What walk? We know very well. As Dr. King said in Memphis: "I may not get there with you."

I like a pope who quotes Basil, bishop and saint and plain speaker from what is now central Turkey. I quoted him in the previous essay where he sounds like a fourth-century spokesperson for the Occupy movement: "The shoes rotting in your closet belong to the one who has no shoes. The money which

you put in the bank belongs to the poor." But Francis has more recently quoted Basil as saying (with a polite translation into English): "Money is the devil's dung." Not just *dung*, the *devil's dung*!

We are a church with treasures like that, with the Gospel's impatience with hypocrisy and a sense that while riches don't mean a person is evil and lack of riches doesn't mean a person is virtuous, Jesus (as Fr. Gerard Sloyan once wrote of those Gospel stories) must have thought the odds went in that direction. Other popes must have figured that out also, but Francis seems to have realized that nobody would take it seriously until you began to deal with it in your own life and in your use of authority.

That was also Blessed Oscar Romero's hard story. As many have said, Romero is a martyr not because he was killed for being Christian; he was shot dead because he found eloquence when he found Gospel purpose for his being bishop. The words he spoke that last Lent flow from the Gospel, flow from the way he must have been hearing Lent's scriptures so clearly. His understanding of what a bishop must do seems to have confronted him and clarified what this bishop would say week after week in homilies rooted in the Sunday scriptures and the Paschal season. (Some of Romero's homilies of his last years are translated into English and published by Orbis Books as *The Violence of Love*.)

Who taught Bishop Oscar that language and courage? And what's important to your work as homilists is how Romero brought together the scriptures, the season, the situation of the people. We might not be up to reading the serious research about the "one percent," but we had better find people we trust who do. Then pass it on.

But you can't write or talk or homilize without knowing the situations that the Gospel itself demands be in

front of us, homilists and bishops more than any. To say it well you need help, but eloquence is not just oratory, it is passion, and we are so hungry for that. Basil and Oscar were both confronted with a one-percent problem and, inevitably, with the violence used to keep it so. So why do we not hear more of such preaching this Lent from our bishops?

This is not all. More compromised by our U.S. citizenship than bishops and faithful in any other nation, we are challenged, but are so reluctant, to go beyond helping someone starving or hungry or made a refugee. That's what we do with a bit of our time or money, we help. But we don't probe for the *who* and the *why* of these wars, the *cui bono*, the simple questions we should have confronted earlier. We have to learn. Yes, feed the hungry but ask and find out: Why are they hungry, or powerless, or seeking asylum, or in prison, and who benefits from this?

I have to mention yet another bishop who had an answer so obvious but so hard for us because of the choices we make about our time. Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez Maradiaga spoke at Fordham University last November. He was asked in the question period: "What advice so you have? What can we do?" He immediately responded: "Read!"

This had to be one of those "shock of the obvious" moments. He went on to say that we North Americans have to get off our cell phones (among other things) and *read*. That happens to be what I most wanted to tell you. It's pretty clear that he didn't mean just the diocesan paper.

What we have failed to do

We have this great blessing: a relatively free press, an amazing number of people who, mostly at their own expense, have learned the things that take us out of the consuming and flag-waving and fascination with one's own likes and needs. They have been think-

ing and telling and investigating in long hours and they have found truth to tell. Does anyone care? These people do what they do in various ways:



■ Academics who do long research and know they must tell the truth both within the academy of their peers and to the rest of us. These are people like Joy Gordon in *Invisible War: The United States and the Iraq Sanctions*; Michelle Alexander in her book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*; Ilan Pappé, an Israeli professor of history, in *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* and several books since. It will help any of us find the right books if we read at least some of the review essays by Gary Wills and Charles Glass and such that appear every two weeks in *The New York Review of Books*.

■ Journalists who pursue the complexity and write about it. I.F. Stone was as indispensable to the opposition to the Vietnam war as the activists. From his home, he wrote and published a newsletter, *I.F. Stone Weekly*. It did what it did based on the hard work of finding and simply reading what the various government reports made public. Now we have people doing this in the media and on paper. Many are heard on *Democracy Now* five mornings a week, and in their articles and books (and online at www.democracynow.org).

■ Fiction and poetry. Literature is vital, as are the other arts. *The Corpse Washer*, a short novel by Sinan Antoon, an Iraqi who is teaching at NYU, tells of how the war was far more deadly than we know, and to the spirit and mind also. George Orwell and Ray Bradbury may still offer us insights into these times.

The work is there. You know *National Catholic Reporter*, *America*, *Commonweal*, and in the U.K., *The Tablet*. They do it on less than a shoestring. Read and go beyond. Bring in speakers. Work with institutions of higher education as a supporter of speakers who bring challenging views

to public lectures.

I know! None of us has time. But really, it isn't time, it is often that we are unwilling to discover how much this will change us. I have not heard a homily in these three-plus years back in the United States from Syria that even acknowledged we Catholics (as citizens) should be challenged weekly to confront the harm, the evil, we allow our country to do. Not one. I think sometimes that homilists are so happy some people still show up. They reinforce the messages of fear and security or they ignore any Gospel analysis that would challenge. I expect that soon homilists will stay away even from immigration issues, the one place our bishops have dared venture.

How many times these past few years did the words of a homily or an intercession make a compelling issue clear? We in this room won't say in so many words that some lives are worth more than others, but we clearly do. We will pray for people killed in Paris violence, weep, stand with candles burning. We might affirm that black lives matter, but even there, where is the probing of the homily preparation, the willingness to read Michelle Alexander and find out about privatization of prisons, torture, life-long penalties for having been convicted? Instead of weeping for the dead in Paris, ask why they died, and don't stop with the racist responses.

This assembly, this town, this state, this country — our failures to act and to forbid evil are far more numerous than our deliberate deeds. Remember the firm purpose of amendment. Remember "heartily sorry"? Maybe the words don't ring a bell, but we can find others. But it isn't the forgiveness we need, so much as a firm purpose of amendment, since none of these are those pesky individual sins but are sins of and against the world, including the one we are rendering possible: "the world without us," in

a few generations.

Speak the language of the bathhouse and the tomb

Aidan Kavanagh was a Benedictine monk, a scholar of liturgical theology who was eventually a professor at Yale, someone who knew well the importance of words well chosen and ordered. In 1977 at a presentation he gave at a diocesan gathering in Colorado, I heard him tell most of what there will ever be to tell of what ritual is and why we are shaped by it. He began:

I have always rather liked the gruff robustness of the first rubric for baptism found in a late fourth-century church order that directs that the bishop enter the vestibule of the baptistery and say to the catechumens without commentary or apology only four words: "Take off your clothes." There is no evidence that the assistants fainted or the catechumens asked what he meant. Catechesis and much prayer and fasting had led them to understand that the language of the passage this night in Christ from death to life would be the language of the bathhouse and the tomb — not that of the forum and the drawing room.

I have often used Kavanagh's opening and even the whole description of the Vigil and its baptisms because in that description we are hearing how, even in these once-a-year rites, the community, the church, is not an audience but the principal. The words, chants, dialogues, postures, movements and processions gave evidence that in these deeds, the daily ones, the Sunday ones, the seasonal and the once-a-year ones, they were rehearsing the lives they had chosen to live in this community. It was known by heart, sung and processed in its cycles, belonged to all. It was strong enough to bear that burden.

How can we join in this?

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Three Vital Skills

Prayer, fasting and almsgiving lead us to a fuller human life

By MELISSA MUSICK NUSSBAUM

I was the guest teacher at the Little L School in November. (The Little L School is a preschool that meets in my daughter's house. It was started, originally, for her daughter, Lucy, and her nephew, Leo. Hence the name). Each November, their teacher, Miss Laura, tries to combine the kids' fascination with queens (read: princesses) and kings (read: warriors) by talking about "saints who were also kings and queens."

Enter Ma-Maw (that's me), who likes reading about and thinking about saints and who likes asking saints to pray for us. We talk about the True King, and what sort of king Jesus is. We make shields and talk about the shields of faith God gives us to protect our hearts. (We talk about the shield of faith even as the boys are using their homemade shields to battle). We make crowns and talk about the crown of faith. (We talk about the crown of faith even as the girls are gluing jewels on their homemade ones, all the while preening and vamping.)

We talk about their patrons — an Abraham, an Alexander, an Elizabeth, a Terese and more — and I tell them stories. I tell them stories of St. Margaret of Scotland and St. Elizabeth of Hungary, two of my favorites. I teach them songs and poems. And I watch them as they play.

In the midst of their play I spy my tutu-wearing 3-year-old granddaughter, standing in the middle of the room, her cardboard crown on her head and her cardboard shield in her hand. She is talking to herself: "Kings never, ever, ever pick their noses."

She speaks with conviction and purpose. One of the important lessons the Little L's do is something Miss Laura calls "Skills." The children learn to put on shoes and fasten them. They learn to put on coats and hats and mittens. They learn to use toilet paper and flush and, yes, they learn the many uses of tissue. These are not in-



The church holds this sacred tripod before us. Not because talking, eating and finding comfort are evil, but because, alone, they are not enough, not sufficient for a fully human life.

stinctive skills, like walking and talking. These are social skills, hard-won and sometimes learned only after lots of fails and many tears. So it makes sense, doesn't it, that a king would be someone who is as handy with a Kleenex as a sword.

I talk about kings and queens who seek God, who feed the hungry and sue for peace, because those are my needs and the needs I see all about me, needs I am called to meet and fail at meeting, again and again. But my granddaughter knows her own strivings, her own failures, and so she invests "the King" with all the abilities and skills she is yet to acquire. He never, ever, ever picks his nose.

Every Lent we are called to the sacred tripod: prayer, fasting and almsgiving, the same three things for all our lives. It occurs to me that we baptized are in a lifelong "Skills" class. For prayer, fasting and almsgiving are not instinctive skills.

It is instinctive to go our own ways, turning a deaf ear to admonitions or counsel. Just watch a child chase a ball into the street or jump into deep

water. No one has to teach us, much less drill us, in heedlessness. We take to it as we take to talking.

And that's talking, not listening.

It is instinctive to eat. It is our second human act, right after breathing air. No one has to teach us, much less drill us, in how to take what we want and consume as much of it as we can. We take to it as we take to breathing.

It is instinctive to think of ourselves, to make sure that we are warm and fed and comfortable. No one has to teach us, much less drill us, in selfishness. We take to it as we take to walking.

So the church holds this sacred tripod before us. Not because talking, eating and finding comfort are evil, but because, alone, they are not enough, not sufficient for a fully human life. To say, at the end, I "did it my way," and I was well fed and comfortable in the doing, is not a big enough story. Not big enough, because it doesn't come close to Jesus' own story, which is the story of the new Adam, a man living on earth as God intended men and women to live.

I will continue, for all the Novembers I am invited to the Little L School, to talk about the Queen of Compassion, as St. Margaret of Scotland is sometimes called. I will tell her story, even as I know the children will probably go through stages where they are more interested in the Queen of Fashion.

I can be patient because I know the church is, and has been, and continues to be patient with me as I struggle to listen for God's voice and see and care about needs other than my own, or those of my family and tribe.

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We Have Already Been Saved

The Psalms of March

By DENISE SIMEONE

Thanksgiving is not usually the first thing we think of when we reflect on Lent, yet the verses from Psalm 34 on the **Fourth Sunday of Lent (March 6)** are clearly that. The vow of thanksgiving and praise in verse 2, “I will bless the Lord at all times,” launches us into a refrain of invitation to others: “Taste and see the goodness of the Lord” (v. 9). The psalmist knows deliverance; the Lord has already saved. We who sing this psalm often forget that is the case. Salvation has already been given. Jesus died and rose and by his life showed us how to give the same witness to the reign of God. Paul’s letter from 2 Corinthians reminds us that we are now the ambassadors. God appeals to the world through our witness.

The first reading from Joshua recalls the time the Israelites were fed manna from God. Luke’s Gospel begins with the tax collectors and sinners drawing close to Jesus to listen in the face of complaints from some of the religious rulers. The story he told (perhaps better called the parable of the prodigal father) must have scandalized them all. But can we imagine the glimmer of hope and new life this story might have raised in those who felt marginalized by their religion?

This unimaginable possibility of hope pervades all the readings for the **Fifth Sunday of Lent (March 13)**. Isaiah reminds the Israelites of the defeat of the powerful Egyptian army, yet he cautions: “Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago consider not; see, I am doing something new!” (43:18-19). Paul reminds the Philippians, “Just one thing: forgetting what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead” (3:13), remember to pursue the goal of living in and witnessing to the resurrected life of Christ. In the familiar story of the woman caught in adultery who is left by her accusers to stand alone, Jesus issues her an invitation



Remember how good your own bed feels after you return from a long trip? Imagine that feeling a hundredfold for people who have been refugees far from their own country and are finally able to return home. Laughter bubbles forth. Songs erupt.

forward: “Go and from now on do not sin any more” (John 8:11).

We hear all of Psalm 126 this Sunday, and it too characterizes the joy of new life we hear in the readings. The people have returned to their land after long exile. Remember how good your own bed feels after you return from a long trip? Imagine that feeling a hundredfold for people who have been refugees far from their own country and are finally able to return home. Laughter bubbles forth. Songs erupt. Work still needs to be done, and the land will need to be cultivated, but the people sing, “The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy” (v. 3). Can we sing these words as we recognize that we, too, are sent forward already saved?

“My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” (Psalm 22:2), sung in all three cycles on **Palm Sunday (March 20)**, conveys the despair that must have accompanied the crucifixion for the disciples. Luke does not put this psalm on Jesus’ lips as both Mark and Matthew do, but it is familiar. Enemies seemed to

surround the disciples just as they surrounded Jesus. And the disciples not only abandoned Jesus, but did not even appear to trust each other.

But from somewhere, the rest of the psalm bursts forth: The Lord does not stay far off; he rescues and delivers. The words of Isaiah, too, echo the idea that disgrace and shame are not the final answer. The early church community recognized in the words of this psalm the terrible suffering of the crucifixion. Yet they came to understand that Jesus took all the suffering unto himself. The acknowledgement begins to dawn: Salvation has already been won. Life has conquered death. Their response was to trust that God continues to act this way and confess, as Paul does in Philippians, that Jesus Christ emptied himself in obedience, even unto death.

Easter Sunday (March 27) begins with the reading from Acts describing the witness of Peter in the temple. He tells the crowds the disciples have been commissioned (sent on mission) to preach, testify to God’s reign, bear witness and forgive. Like Jesus, they are to teach, heal and continue this mission. They were prepared for this, and now it is their call. Their preaching, which we hear throughout the Easter season, reminds us this is the result of faith: Act!

Psalm 118 is a thanksgiving litany sung as the people walk in procession to the temple. The scene of this psalm is a far cry from the despair and shame of the crucifixion and recalls the people’s confidence in their God and their rescue from death. The shadow of rejection and death is near but no longer has a hold. The resurrection has shattered death, and new life has sprung forth. “This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad” (v. 24). We add our “Alleluia!”

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Revitalizing Synodality

Pope Francis and a Vatican II church

By **BIAGIO MAZZA**

On October 17, 2015, at a ceremony commemorating the 50th anniversary of the institution of the synod of bishops, Pope Francis spoke briefly and prophetically concerning the revitalization of a key teaching of the Second Vatican Council, a teaching aptly named “synodality.” The whole address is worth our attention and reflection. It can be found both in English text and Italian video formats at http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html.

Francis begins by stating:

From the beginning of my ministry as Bishop of Rome, I sought to enhance the Synod, which is one of the most precious legacies of the Second Vatican Council. ... We must continue along this path. ... It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium.

Synodality literally means “walking” or “journeying together.” Pope Francis is very attuned to synodality and promotes it at every opportunity in order to make real the Vatican II vision of church. Synodality is not merely accomplished by periodic meetings of bishops called by the pope to discuss certain topics. Rather, synodality is a perennial and permanent process in the church; it existed from its beginnings and was retrieved by Vatican II after many centuries of neglect and suppression.

Francis emphasizes:

A synodal Church is a Church which listens, which realizes that listening “is more than simply hearing” (*Evangelii Gaudium*). It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome:

Synodality means “walking” or “journeying together.”

all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the “Spirit of truth” (John 14:17), in order to know what he “says to the Churches” (Rev 2:7).

Having struggled with this issue both as a Jesuit and as a member of the church’s hierarchy, Francis quickly adds, “What the Lord is asking of us is already in some sense present in the very word ‘synod.’ Journeying together — laity, pastors, the Bishop of Rome — is an easy concept to put into words, but not so easy to put into practice.”

Francis has continually insisted that if we are to be a church that not only teaches but also practices and lives out synodality, then a whole new way of being church has to come into being. The Vatican II vision of church as the entire people of God gifted with *sensus fidei*, a sense of the faith, must be incarnated in all aspects of church life, structure and interaction with the world. The role of the papacy and the bishops, as well as the structure of the church, has to change if synodality is ever to become the integral operating principle of church life and ministry. Francis addresses these points directly by stressing:

Synodality, as a constitutive element of the Church, offers us the most appropriate interpretive framework for understanding the hierarchical ministry itself ... the pope is not, by himself, above the Church; but within it as one of the baptized ... within the Church, no one can be “raised up” higher than others. On the contrary, in the Church, it is necessary that each person “lower” himself or herself, so as to serve our brothers and sisters along the way.

Turning the traditional pyramid

model of the church on its head, Francis insists that

in this Church, as in an inverted pyramid, the top is located beneath the base. Consequently, those who exercise authority are called “ministers,” because, in the original meaning of the word, they are the least of all. ... Let us not forget this! For the disciples of Jesus, yesterday, today, and always, the only authority is the authority of service, the only power is the power of the cross.

Francis concludes with a prophetic challenge to the church, something that each of us needs to reflect on in prayer and live out in our daily activities:

A synodal Church is like a standard lifted up among the nations (cf. Isa 11:12) in a world which — while calling for participation, solidarity and transparency in public administration — often consigns the fate of entire peoples to the grasp of small but powerful groups. As a Church which “journeys together” with men and women, sharing the travails of history, let us cherish the dream that a rediscovery of the inviolable dignity of peoples and of the function of authority as service will also be able to help civil society to be built up in justice and fraternity, and thus bring about a more beautiful and humane world for coming generations.

During this Lenten season, take time to reflect carefully and prayerfully on Pope Francis’ words. The conversion process integral to the Lenten season will be greatly enhanced by examining our actions in light of the call to be a synodal church.

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Enter the Drama

We all have our part to play in moving Lent into Easter

By ERIN RYAN

Have you ever been part of a theater production? The sets have to be painted. Costumes have to be designed. Music rehearsed, lines learned. There's a sense of solidarity as you all band together, working, practicing, laboring to build a living story. On opening night you hope it all comes together and weaves a spell so that the audience, for two or three hours, will enter into the reality you create before them.

I used to run with a theater crowd in high school. (I was usually on the tech crew, painting backdrops, while most of my friends were actors.) These days, I'm a passionate opera fan. To me, there's nothing like sitting in the dark theater, listening to the orchestra perform the overture; then hearing a drama come to life through the music and the human voice. A well-done opera can make me cry for days — no kidding. (Lots of them are tragedies, after all.)

The same thing often happens to me in church: I get so overwhelmed by the scripture, or the preaching, or the music, that I am awash with tears. I recognize the truth, the reality of something: God's compassion, the triumph of light over darkness, my own sin — and it breaks my heart.

It takes a lot of practice by many people to make this happen.

Søren Kierkegaard once wrote, "Only in subjectivity is there decision" (*Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, 1846). I think what he meant by this is that we do not really *believe* until we *feel* something. You can give all the rational arguments for something that you want, but no one will really decide, no one will really be convinced, if it all remains within your head.

I remember going to see a performance of "Lucia de Lammermoor," Donizetti's 1835 opera of thwarted love on the 18th-century Scottish

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moors, whose heroine goes insane with grief (the famous "mad scene"). Instead of following the story, I spent most of the opera thinking how horribly ugly the costume design was. Why did they choose those awful tartans? It kept me in my head — critical — instead of *feeling* the performance, in my heart.

There have been times like that during liturgy, too: The homily is badly prepared. The cantor's voice is so low that no one can follow along. The choir doesn't practice the hymns. I once went to an Easter Vigil where they accompanied the first reading from Genesis with a sort of projection on the wall of a lava floe, with this churning sound that was supposed to be — Creation, I guess? Instead of marveling at what God had done, I just kept thinking, "This is weird."

Liturgy and performance (i.e. opera) have a lot in common. There's music, singing, environment to design, gestures to memorize. There is no greater drama than the Triduum, with its processions and venerations and prostrations; the fire, the light low, the Exsultet, the story of salvation, and then the light rising upon lilies as "Alleluias" burst forth after a long Lent of fasting from this acclamation.

But despite the similarities, liturgy and performance are *not* the same thing. In liturgy, we are not just putting on a good show. We aren't just sitting there watching performers act out a made-up tale. No, in liturgy,

we are not trying to create a new reality from scratch. We are giving expression to a reality that already exists. We're living it, not just acting it out. And when we do this, *everyone* plays a part.

Even if we are not lectors, or cantors, or preachers or musicians or being baptized this Easter, we all have a part to play. Lent is like our practice to enter the story fully. Let's use the rest of Lent to prepare to be the people who make the liturgy come alive and tap into the mystery it is trying to portray.

At the Vigil, traditionally, there are seven readings from the Hebrew scriptures, one from Paul, and then the Gospel. There are psalm responses to each of the seven readings; then we sing the "Gloria" before we hear Paul's proclamation of the Resurrection. Many congregations do not read the full gamut of Vigil selections — the rubrics allow them to be shortened, particularly when there are going to be baptisms. But whichever responses we sing, let us sing them with our whole heart:

*Lord, send out your Spirit, and
renew the face of the earth.*

*You are my inheritance, O Lord.
Let us sing to the Lord; he has
covered himself in glory.*

*I will praise you, Lord, for you
have rescued me.*

*You will draw water joyfully from
the springs of salvation.*

*Like a deer that longs for running
streams, my soul longs for you,
my God.*

And, finally:

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

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Embrace the Season

Deepening our faith in the midst of daily life

By PEG EKERDT

It is March. Some among us are consumed with tax season, and others are fixated on basketball's March Madness or on spring break vacations. Some wait for college acceptances while others begin to register children for summer camps. Still others can talk of little else but baseball's spring training. In some cities (yes, I do live in Kansas City), a good portion of the population is focused on the countdown to opening day. All of these things speak to our places in the world — our work, our families and our play.

But for people of faith, March means something more. March is the time of year when we take stock, make amends and resolve to do better as we immerse ourselves in the spiritual disciplines of Lent. Distracted, busy, consumed with things of this world, we often are challenged to put faith first. The world is graced and good, and it is where we were placed by God. It is where we belong and are called to be. But it's not easy to integrate what sometimes seems like two far-apart worlds.

How, then, do we fulfill the responsibilities of daily life and still embrace the season of spiritual renewal? The Catholic tradition encourages the practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving during these Lenten days. Each year, we think about and choose some variation on these age-old practices with the hope and intent of deepening our lives of faith.

We consider and weigh options as we wonder how to merge the desire to pray more faithfully with the reality that days are already chock-full and it seems difficult to imagine doing one more thing. The fasting options are ever expanding: Do we fast from food, alcohol or sweets? Or do we fast from social media, television, gossip, or accumulation of goods? (We might like to fast from car pools and work deadlines, but that is not realistic



*When all is said and done,
Lent is a season
that calls us to live in the
world, not out of it.*

unless one is headed to a hermitage.) Sharing time, talent and treasure is a way of life for some, and they don't need to do more during this season. But for all of us, in Lent and on every other day of the year, faith's call to generosity reminds us that giving alms is essential to the Christian life.

Not long ago we gathered a group of 12 for an evening of formation for new Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist. There were cradle Catholics in the group, people formed by the Baltimore Catechism, as well as people who had never heard of that catechism. There were RCIA alumni, Christ Renews His Parish past participants, new parishioners, fourth-generation parishioners, and a parish wedding coordinator thrown in for good measure.

On that evening, the group explored the catechism's names for the Eucharist (Catechism of the Catholic Church #1328-1332) and chose their favorites: the Breaking of the Bread because it connects us to the first Christian community, the Lord's Supper because it is the meal Jesus shared with his disciples, Holy Communion because it draws attention to our union with Christ and with

one another, and Holy Mass (from the Latin *missa*) because it reminds us that we are sent into the world to live the faith we profess. As the discussion continued, the group was visibly moved when they read a description of the Sunday gatherings of second-century believers (CCC #1345) and recognized the same elements of the Eucharist that they celebrate each Sunday.

But the evening's richest discussion focused on Thomas Porter's hymn that we sang as evening prayer: *Let us be bread, blessed by the Lord, broken and shared, life for the world. Let us be wine, love freely poured. Let us be one in the Lord.* The discussion brought us to the brink of grasping the grace of transformation. We bring our busyness, the concerns of work and family, to the table of the Lord. We who are most ordinary come as we are. In all our human need and imperfection, we come to be blessed, broken and then shared with others. Then, we are sent (missioned) to the world where we belong, to be love freely poured, to give life to the world.

When all is said and done, Lent is a season that calls us to live in the world, not out of it — to love what we do, who we live with; to be filled with gratitude and to live with generosity that is rooted in God. The age-old practices might help us grow in God's love, or we might simply want to ask the question: What would help me in this Year of Mercy to be a better vessel of God's love? Think about it and see what you come up with. I might go to bed earlier, exercise more regularly, read the daily scriptures and write in a journal, pray to let go of judgment, and ask for the grace to be filled with joy.

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The New Social Activism

College seniors and others are ready to work for change

By COLLEEN DUNNE

I am too young to remember the days of protests in the South for civil rights or Americans committed to protesting the Vietnam War. I had only history class, movies, documentaries and stories to give me an idea of what these movements were like and the power they had to affect injustice. Over the years, I have heard many older people say the youth of this generation have lost the appreciation for social activism as a way to bring about change and to be a voice for the marginalized. These statements were made with sadness that the days of the well-planned, passionate protest were over.

If we take a closer look at what is happening in the world today, however, we see that this couldn't be further from the truth.

The Catholic tradition gives many great examples of social activists who worked for change, including Dorothy Day and her Catholic Worker movement. Like many social activists, she knew that change had to come from more than one direction — both through her ministering directly to those on the margins, and by empowering those she served by organizing them around a cause.

As a journalist, Dorothy Day believed strongly in the power of nonviolence and actively participated in acts of civil disobedience, not afraid to challenge an unjust law. The Catholic Worker movement still offers hospitality and shelter today for those on the streets and inspires a constant dialogue on bringing about change in the world. It draws many young people to serve others and to be a part of the conversation. Dorothy Day once said, "The greatest challenge of the day is: how to bring about a revolution of the heart, a revolution which has to start with each one of us?"

In a world overwhelmed with a need for this revolution, it can be

Social media users, both young and old, have found ways to bring attention to those most affected by injustice.

easy to believe that our voice doesn't matter or can't help to bring about change. However, there are countless examples of young people coming together to minister to others and to be formed through their service, which can lead to systematic change that inspires us and calls us to action.

As spring draws closer and college graduations are on the horizon, numerous soon-to-be graduates are choosing to do a year of volunteer service locally or internationally before they go on to graduate school or begin their intended careers. Among many others, programs such as the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, Lasallian Volunteers, Peace Corps, Mercy Volunteers and Maryknoll Missionaries place young people on the margins to become active in the need for social change. These experiences emphasize communal living and simplicity. They help to shape a vision where activism can change the world, and where getting involved is not only necessary but is one of the most radical calls of the Gospel.

Not all of us can leave our lives in order to move into a Catholic Worker house. However, thanks to social media, it is not hard to find a place where we can become social activists. Social media users, both young and old, have found ways to bring attention to those most affected by injustice. It's a way for us to lend our voices in movements that speak on behalf of the marginalized. Such movements are found on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat or with a simple Google search. It would be unrealistic to think we could re-

spond to every movement that seeks to make a difference for others. Fair trade wages, immigration, hunger, homelessness, treatment of factory workers, race relations, and a host of other issues come to our attention every day.

As with the example of Dorothy Day, our responsibility is to discern how we can respond to the needs around us and to trace how our faith guides us along this path. For some, that responsibility takes on the form of going out into the streets to protest or risk arrest. It can lead others to abstain from using products that exploit people or the environment; to spread a message to inform others; or to volunteer a few hours a week in a place that serves those in need. The options are endless.

The idea of social activism can no doubt be an uncomfortable one. It requires a definitive position; we have to take a side and let our voices be heard. It can also require us to look at our lives and see how the products and services we use or the opinions we hold keep people on the margins. Social activism has the power to speak across religions and cultures, uniting people around a cause to do good for others.

American cultural anthropologist and author Margaret Mead once said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." Even in the times when we feel powerless over injustice or we feel one voice will not make a difference, as Christians, we have a responsibility to support the poor and oppressed.

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Singing the Triduum

This big challenge for pastoral musicians also brings great joy

By J. MICHAEL McMAHON

The three major liturgies of the Triduum — the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday, the Celebration of the Passion on Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday night — constitute a single celebration of Christ's death and resurrection, yet each one has its own character and includes unique ritual elements that celebrate different dimensions of the Paschal Mystery. If possible, liturgy planners should approach these three intimately connected liturgies as a single event, providing musical leadership and making musical selections that provide continuity from one to the other.

Here are some important issues to consider as you begin the process of selecting music for the Easter Triduum liturgies:

Acclamations. As at Sunday Mass, acclamations are among the most important musical elements to engage the active participation of the assembly during the Triduum. The Good Friday Celebration of the Lord's Passion includes an acclamation for the Showing of the Cross. At the Easter Vigil, acclamations are used for the proclamation of light, the solemn Alleluia, the blessing of baptismal water, and the baptisms.

Dialogues. The dialogues between the assembly and the priest or deacon are also a high priority for singing. Musicians can help to provide gentle and supportive coaching for priests and deacons who may be a bit reluctant or frightened. Make sure that the deacon (or priest) and choir are prepared to sing the dismissal and response with the double Alleluia at the end of the Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday liturgies.

Psalms. The liturgies of the Triduum make generous use of the psalms, especially during the Easter Vigil's extended Liturgy of the Word. Make careful choices that require little if any instrumental support so that the



The liturgies of the Triduum make generous use of the psalms, especially during the Easter Vigil's extended Liturgy of the Word.

texts of the psalms can be proclaimed with as little encumbrance as possible.

Hymns and songs. There are many ritual actions during the Triduum that call for liturgical songs that enrich their meaning. Be sure to study and reflect on sung texts provided in the Roman Missal for various ritual moments. Many of these texts can help guide the selection of other appropriate hymns and songs, such as the entrance antiphon for Holy Thursday, "We should glory in the cross." The missal also includes antiphons and other sung texts to accompany the washing of feet (Thursday), the veneration of the cross (Friday), the sprinkling of the assembly (Easter Vigil), and the Communion procession. Some hymns are traditionally associated with certain ritual actions, such as *Ubi caritas* for the preparation of the gifts and *Pange lingua gloriosi* for the transfer of the Eucharist, both on Holy Thursday.

Instruments. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal directs that instruments be used only to support

the singing from the "Gloria" on Holy Thursday until the "Gloria" of the Easter Vigil. In that spirit, many communities continue to observe the former practice of using no instruments at all during this period. Musicians should also consider, however, the creative use of instruments to sound a joyful opening to the Triduum on Thursday evening and to evoke a spirit of exuberant celebration beginning with the "Gloria" at the great Vigil.

Vocal leadership. The Easter Triduum deserves the biggest and best group of choir singers and the best psalmists and cantors who regularly serve the community. Even in parishes with a diversity of choirs and music groups, there should ideally be one group of musicians, combined if possible, to serve the worshiping assembly at all three celebrations. One of the most important sung elements of the Triduum is the Easter Proclamation, or Exsultet, ordinarily sung by a deacon or priest. However, the Roman Missal makes provision for the Exsultet to be sung by a lay cantor "because of necessity," which reasonably includes the deacon or priest's lack of skill to proclaim it well.

Cultural diversity. In communities with a variety of cultural groups, the voices and languages of all should be part of these major celebrations of the church year. Selecting music for a diverse parish may present challenges, but can be deeply enriching for all of the various groups that gather to form one worshiping community during the Easter Triduum.

Preparing and leading music for the Easter Triduum are among the greatest challenges in the ministry of a pastoral musician, but the joys are far greater than the difficulties!

J. Michael McMahon is *Celebration's* music editor and former president of the National Association of Pastoral Musicians. Contact him at jmichael.mcmahon@gmail.com.



By J. MICHAEL McMAHON

March 2016

4TH SUNDAY OF LENT

March 6, 2016

Psalm of the Day: Ps 34

O Taste and See (Isele) CBW 414
 Taste and See (Alstott) JS2 40
 Taste and See (Angrisano) MI-BB 348
 Taste and See (Brustle/Black) CBW 55
 Taste and See (Chepponis) SS 642
 Taste and See (Dean) JS2 37/JS3 42/W4 48/MI-BB 766
 Taste and See (Guimont) W4 49/GC2 917/G3 46, 1027
 Taste and See (Haugen) GC2 34, 827/G3 45/SS 643
 Taste and See (Hillert) OF 990/WS 106
 Taste and See (Hommerding) OF 243/WC 433
 Taste and See (Hunstiger) SS 528
 Taste and See (Keil) JS3 41
 Taste and See (Kendzia) MI-BB 350
 Taste and See (Moore) W4 945/GC2 827/G3 930/LMGM2 750, 827/CBW 610/WC 690/WS 581/MI-BB 328
 Taste and See (Proulx) W4 1038
 Taste and See (Reza), vss 1, 2, 3 JS2 39/JS3 39/MI-BB 356
 Taste and See (Rubalcava) OF 245/WS 368
 Taste and See (Schiavone) JS2 914
 Taste and See (Talbot) JS2 620/MI-BB 765
 Taste and See (Tate) OF 246/WC 432/WS 369
 Taste and See (Willcock) JS2 38/JS3 40
 The Goodness of the Lord PSL C-41/SS 420
Songs for the Liturgy
 All Who Hunger (1, Ps) W4 844, 951/

GC2 817/G3 852, 925/SS 1084
 Amazing Grace (G) W4 650/GC2 586/G3 645/LMGM2 495/JS2 713/JS3 680/OF 576/CBW 480/WC 707/WS 610/MI-BB 428/SS 927
 As a Fire Is Meant for Burning (2) W4 734/GC2 643/G3 744
 As We Gather at Your Table (2, G) W4 831/GC2 738/G3 839/LMGM2 685/CBW 583/JS2 792/JS3 760/CBW 583/MI-BB 311/SS 1006
 Awake, O Sleeper, Rise from Death (2) W4 915/OF 689/WC 827/WS 693
 Bless the Lord (G) W4 603/GC2 576/G3 620/LMGM2 451/JS2 631/SS 889
 *Come, Come to the Banquet (G) PSL C-43/SS 242
 Come to the Feast (G) GC2 499/G3 838/LMGM2 684/JS2 795/JS3 763/MI-BB 307
 Come, Ye Disconsolate (G) LMGM2 590
 Come, You Sinners, Poor and Needy (G) W4 962/LMGM2 766/OF 778
 Deep Within (2, G) GC2 419/G3 486
 Forgive Our Sins (G) W4 967/GC2 848/G3 965/JS2 556/OF 575/CBW 620/WC 711/WS 612/SS 1092
 *From Ashes to the Living Font – verse for 4C (G) OF 420/W4 463/G3 474/WC 558/WS 489
 From the Depths of Sin and Sadness (G) OF 435/CBW 487/WC 568
 From the Depths We Cry to Thee (G) JS2 386/JS3 357/BB 129
 God Is Forgiveness (2, G) W4 653/G3 959
 Grant to Us (2) W4 957/OF 579/CBW 621/WC 710/WS 607
 Great God of Mercy (G) CBW 361

Great Is Thy Faithfulness (G) LMGM2 492/OF 611
 Hold Me In Life (G) JS2 702/CBW 707
 Hold Us in Your Mercy (G) GC2 398/G3 494/LMGM2 291
 Hosea (G) JS2 559/JS3 529/GC2 405/G3 484/OF 581/WC 704/WS 611/MI-BB 672
 *I Call You to My Father's House (G) LMGM2 786/WC 724/WS 624/SS 1106
 I Will Be Your God (2) JS2 383
 I Will Sweep Away Your Transgressions (Ps, G) CBW 622
 Jesus, Heal Us (1, Ps) GC2 846/G3 952
 Lord Jesus, as We Turn from Sin (G) SS 804
 Love Divine, All Loves Excelling (2) W4 642/GC2 613/G3 641/LMGM2 494/JS2 746/JS3 709/OF 743/WC 857/WS 721/SS 934
 Loving and Forgiving (G) JS2 560/JS3 532/MI-BB 671
 *Make of Our Hands a Throne (Ps) OF 552/WC 694/WS 600
 Make Us Turn to You (2, G) G3 958
 Merciful God (2, G) W4 478/G3 489
 Mercy, O God (2, G) GC2 417/G3 480/SS 792
 Now Is the Acceptable Time (2, G) JS3 343/BB 118
 Now We Remain (2) W4 764/GC2 696/G3 785/WC 678/WS 583/MI-BB 506/SS 983
 O Christ, Bright Sun of Justice (G) JS2 389
 O Christ, the Great Foundation (2) GC2 646/CBW 527/SS 958
 *Our Father, We Have Wandered (G) W4 963/GC2 849/G3 956/LMGM2 771/JS2 554/OF 583/WC 705/WS 609/SS 789
 Out of Darkness -- Walker (2) JS2

* Quotes or makes direct reference to one of the scripture readings or antiphons. E Related to entrance antiphon. 1 Related to first reading. Ps Related to responsorial psalm. 2 Related to second reading. G Related to Gospel. C Related to Communion antiphon.

RESOURCES

Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, Publications Service, 90 Parent Ave., Ottawa, Ontario K1N 7B1: CBW=Catholic Book of Worship III (1994). **GIA Publications, Inc. (GIA), 7404 S. Mason Ave., Chicago, IL 60638:** G3=Gather, Third Edition (2011); GC2=Gather Comprehensive, Second Edition (2004); LMGM2=Lead Me, Guide Me, Second Edition (2012); W4=Worship, Fourth Edition (2011). **Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN:** BFW=By Flowing Waters (1999); PSL=Psallite, Year C (2006); SS=Sacred Song (2011). **OCP, 5536 N.E. Hassalo, Portland, OR 97213:** BB=Breaking Bread (2016); JS2=Journeysongs–Second Edition (2003); JS3=Journeysongs–Third Edition (2012); MI=Music Issue (2016). **World Library Publications (WLP), 3708 River Road, Suite 400, Franklin Park, IL 60131-2158:** OF=One in Faith (2014); WC=We Celebrate (2014); WS=Word and Song (2016).

PREPARATION: MUSIC



765/JS3 724/MI-BB 508
Out of the Depths (G) W4 970/JS2
107, 393/JS3 109/OF 424/WC 563/
WS 409/MI-BB 816

Praise to You, O Christ, Our Savior (2)
JS2 208/JS3 643/W4 591/GC2 517/
G3 596/CBW 442/MI-BB 598

Ps 51: Create in Me (G)

Ps 103: The Lord Is Kind and Merciful (G)

Ps 130: With the Lord There Is Mercy (G)

*Rejoice, Jerusalem! (E) IH 18

*Rejoice, Rejoice, All Who Love Jerusalem (E) PSL C-40/SS 394

Remember Not the Things of the Past (2, G) JS3 359

Remember Your Love (G) GC2 851/
G3 961/JS2 561/JS3 533/MI-BB 668

Restore in Us, O God (2, G) W4 476

Restore Us, O God (2, G) W4 460

Return to God (G) W4 475/GC2 410/
G3 478/OF 427/WC 564/WS 498/SS
798

Return to the Lord (G) GC2 415/G3
471

Shepherd of Souls, In Love Come
Feed Us (1) OF 565/WC 681

Show Us Your Mercy (G) JS2 563/JS3
527

Somebody's Knockin' at Your Door
(G) W4 462/LMGM2 283/GC2 394/
G3 470/JS2 388/JS3 354/OF 638/
WC 753/WS 495/BB 119

The Lord Is My Hope (Ps, G) JS2 730/
MI-BB 469

*The One Who Longs to Make Us
Whole (G) W4 644

There Is a Balm in Gilead (Ps, G) W4
646/GC2 617/G3 640/LMGM2 502/
JS2 723/JS3 688/OF 588/WC 715/
WS 615/MI-BB 471/SS 946

There's a Wideness in God's Mercy (G)
W4 645/GC2 603/G3 644/LMGM2
511/JS2 748/JS3 712/OF 585/CBW
443/WC 709/WS 608/MI-BB 488/SS
935

This Is Our Accepted Time (2) OF
425/WC 565

This Is the Time of Fulfillment (1, G)
W4 471/SS 803

Those Who Seek Your Face, Scrutiny
verses (G) JS2 128

Turn Our Hearts (2, G) BB 137

Turn to Me (G) JS2 377/JS3 345/MI-
BB 667

Turn to the Living God (2, G) GC2
408/G3 485

*Yes, I Shall Arise -- Deiss (G) OF 584/
W4 964/WC 703/WS 613

You Have Looked upon the Lowly (G)
CBW 624

5TH SUNDAY OF LENT

March 13, 2016

Psalm of the Day: Ps 126

God Has Done Great Things for Us
(Haugen) GC2 69

Laughter Fills Our Mouths PSL C-5/SS
333

The Lord Has Done Great Things (Cor-
tez) MI-BB 814

The Lord Has Done Great Things (Gui-
mont) GC2 995/G3 1030

The Lord Has Done Great Things (Hol-
land) LMGM2 796

The Lord Has Done Great Things (Hun-
stiger) SS 603

The Lord Has Done Great Things
(Manalo) JS2 103/JS3 104

The Lord Has Done Great Things (Mar-
chionda) OF 993/WS 110

The Lord Has Done Great Things
(Proulx) W4 99, 1041/SS 527

The Lord Has Done Great Things (Schi-
avone) JS2 917

What Marvels the Lord Worked for Us
(Young/Black) CBW 58

Songs for the Liturgy

Amazing Grace (G) W4 650/GC2 586/
G3 645/LMGM2 495/JS2 713/JS3
680/OF 576/CBW 480/WC 707/WS
610/MI-BB 428/SS 927

As We Gather at Your Table (G) W4
831/GC2 738/G3 839/LMGM2 685/
CBW 583/JS2 792/JS3 760/CBW
583/MI-BB 311/SS 1006

Center of My Life (2) JS2 697/JS3
665/W4 678/GC2 580/G3 679/MI-
BB 491

Come, You Sinners, Poor and Needy
(G) W4 962/LMGM2 766/OF 778

Crucem Tuam (2) W4 464/GC2 393

Crux Fidelis (2) OF 675/WC 794/WS
668

Deep Within (G) GC2 419/G3 486

*From Ashes to the Living Font -- verse
for 5C (G) OF 420/W4 463/G3 474/
WC 558/WS 489

Forgive Our Sins As We Forgive (G)
W4 967/GC2 848/G3 965/JS2 556/
OF 575/CBW 620/WC 711/WS 612/
SS 1092

*Give Judgment, Lord My Savior (E) IH
19

Give Me a Clean Heart (G) LMGM2 625
Glory in the Cross (2) JS2 523/JS3
375/G3 501/MI-BB 719

God Is Forgiveness (G) W4 653/G3
959

Great God of Mercy (G) CBW 361

Help Us Forgive, Forgiving Lord (G) W4
969

Hold Us in Your Mercy (G) GC2 398/
G3 494/JS2 629/LMGM2 291

I Will Choose Christ (2) JS2 775/JS3
736/GC2 683/G3 802/MI-BB 515

I Will Sweep Away Your Transgressions
(G) CBW 622

Lift High the Cross (2) W4 885/GC2
785/G3 881/LMGM2 726/JS2 522/
JS3 500/OF 703/CBW 435/WC 792/
WS 699/MI-BB 720/SS 1054

Lord Jesus, as We Turn from Sin (G)
SS 804

Lord Jesus Christ (G) W4 587/GC2
409/G3 477

Loving and Forgiving (G) JS2 560/JS3
532/MI-BB 671

Make Us Turn to You (G) G3 958

Merciful God (G) W4 478/G3 489

Mercy, O God (G) GC2 417/G3 480/
SS 792

*My God, My Strength (E) PSL C-45/
SS 364

Now Is the Acceptable Time (G) JS3
343/BB 118

O Christ, Bright Sun of Justice (2, G)
JS2 389

*Only This I Want (2) JS2 766/JS3
732/GC2 701/G3 782/CBW 516/MI-
BB 510

Our God Is Rich in Love (G) GC2 620

Ps 51: Create in Me (G)

Ps 103: The Lord Is Kind and Merciful (G)

Ps 130: With the Lord There Is Mercy (G)

Out of Darkness -- Walker (1, 2, G) JS2
765/JS3 724/MI-BB 508

Remember Not the Things of the Past
(G) JS3 359

Remember Your Love -- Dameans (G)
GC2 851/G3 961/JS2 561/JS 533/
MI-BB 668

Restore in Us, O God (1, Ps, G) W4 476

Restore Us, O God (1, Ps, G) W4 460

Return to God (G) W4 475/GC2 410/
G3 478/OF 427/WC 564/WS 498

Return to the Lord (G) GC2 415/G3
471

Seek the Lord (G) JS2 558/JS3 531/
GC2 395/MI-BB 666

PREPARATION: MUSIC



- Show Us Your Mercy (G) JS2 563/JS3 527
Take Up Our Cross (2) JS3 502/MI-BB 721
Take Up Your Cross (2) W4 761/GC2 688, 690/G3 787, 801/JS2 524/JS3 501/OF 679/CBW 353/WC 793/WS 669/MI-BB 718/SS 985
The Cross of Jesus (2) W4 465/GC2 396/G3 482/SS 797
The Lord Is Near -- Joncas (G) JS2 719/GC2 599/G3 692
*The Love of the Lord (2) W4 776/GC2 680/G3 792
The Master Came to Bring Good News (G) W4 968/GC2 853/G3 964/CBW 439
The One Who Longs to Make Us Whole (G) W4 644
*The Scheming Elders Challenged Christ (G) W4 961
There Is a Balm in Gilead (Ps, G) W4 646/GC2 617/G3 640/LMGM2 502/JS2 723/JS3 688/OF 588/WC 715/WS 615/MI-BB 471/SS 946
There's a Wideness in God's Mercy (G) W4 465/GC2 603/G3 644/LMGM2 511/JS2 748/JS3 712/OF 585/CBW 443/WC 709/WS 608/MI-BB 488/SS 935
This Is the Time of Fulfillment (1, Ps, G) W4 471/SS 803
Those Who Seek Your Face, Scrutiny verses (G) JS2 128
Tree of Life – Haugen (2) GC2 401/G3 475/CBW 373/SS 799
Turn Our Hearts (G) BB 137
Turn to the Living God (G) GC2 408/G3 485
We Have No Glory (2) JS2 671
We Should Glory in the Cross (2) JS2 521/OF 443/WC 573/WS 500
*When from Bondage (Ps) SS 791
*When I Survey the Wondrous Cross (2) W4 494/LMGM2 725/JS2 417/JS3 387/OF 678/CBW 382/WC 796/WS 667/BB 152
You Have Looked upon the Lowly (G) CBW 624
- 292/CBW 62/JS2 399/JS3 366/OF 441/WC 576/WS 503/BB 142/SS 809
He Is King of Kings LMGM2 346
Hosanna W4 1042/GC2 423, 425/G3 499, 1032/LMGM2 831/JS2 396, 397/JS3 365, 367/CBW 59, 60, 61/OF 994/BFW 101/PSL C-50/WS 114/BB 140, p. 46/SS 293, 684, 810
Hosanna, Son of God OF 449/WC 574
Palm Sunday Procession BB p. 48
Palm Sunday Processional W4 481/G3 96
Ride On, Jesus, Ride GC2 424/G3 497/LMGM2 293
Ride On! Ride On in Majesty OF 442/WC 581/WS 502
Sing Hosanna to Our King OF 447/WS 512
The Children of Jerusalem BB 139
The Children of the Hebrews BFW 104/SS 685
Psalm of the Day: Ps 22
Dios Mío, Dios Mío/My God, My God (Hurd) JS2 21
My God, My God PSL C-51/SS 363
My God, My God (Alstott) JS2 22/JS3 898
My God, My God (Guimont) GC2 892/G3 1035
My God, My God (Harbor) LMGM2 833
My God, My God (Haugen) W4 35/GC2 22/G3 33
My God, My God (Hunstiger) SS 507
My God, My God (Manion) MI-BB 746
My God, My God (Proulx) OF 230, 994/WC 420/WS 115, 353
My God, My God (Schivone) JS2 918/JS3 21
My God, My God (Schoen) W4 1049
My God, My God (Smith) JS3 22/MI-BB 745
My God, My God (Vervoort/Murray) CBW 63
My God, My God (Willcock) SS 631
Other Songs for the Liturgy
Adoramus Te Christe (2) GC2 400/G3 476/SS 668
All You Who Pass This Way (G) W4 492
*At the Name of Jesus (2) W4 561, 563/G3 596/JS2 400, 483/JS3 369, 465/CBW 427/WS 645/MI-BB 734, 735
Behold, before Our Wond'ring Eyes (G) JS2 381/JS3 149
Behold the Cross (1) JS3 381/BB 155
- Behold the Lamb of God (1) JS2 809/JS3 386/GC2 824/BB 153
Behold the Wood (G) JS2 411/JS3 388/GC2 437/GC3 514/CBW 379/BB p. 66
Calvary (G) LMGM2 296
Crux Fidelis (2, G) OF 675/WC 794/WS 668
*Do This in Remembrance of Me (G) OF 534/WC 669
Down at the Cross (G) LMGM2 282
Faithful Cross (G) BB 136
Glory in the Cross (G) W4 486/G3 501/JS2 523/JS3 375/MI-BB 719
*If I Must Drink This Cup (C) PSL C-52/SS 316
In Manus Tuas, Pater (G) W4 493/G3 513
*In the Cross of Christ (2) GC2 436/G3 515/SS 818
Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross (G) LMGM2 300/OF 674/WS 668
*Jesus the Lord (2) JS2 484/JS3 467/GC2 403/G3 491/CBW 432/MI-BB 731
Keep in Mind (G) OF 734/W4 651/GC2 658/G3 646/JS2 589/JS3 559/WC 841/WS 711/MI-BB 679/SS 968
Lift High the Cross (G) W4 885/GC2 785/G3 881/LMGM2 726/JS2 522/JS3 500/OF 703/CBW 435/WC 792/WS 699/MI-BB 720/SS 1054
Lord, We Adore You (1, G) JS2 413/JS3 382/BB p. 66
My Song Is Love Unknown (G) W4 490/JS2 415/JS3 390
No Greater Love W4 698/GC2 607/G3 701/CBW 599/BB 143/SS 936
Now We Remain (2) W4 764/GC2 696/G3 785/WC 678/WS 583/MI-BB 506/SS 983
*O Christ, What Can It Mean for Us (2) W4 567
O Cross of Christ OF 676/CBW 368/WC 795/SS 819
O Love of God Incarnate (G) JS2 410
*O Lowly Lamb of God Most High (2) SS 955
O Sacred Head (1, G) W4 489/GC2 435/G3 512/LMGM2 297, 299/JS2 409/JS3 383, 393/OF 448/CBW 378/WC 585/WS 510/BB 148, 150/SS 816
Only Love (2) LMGM2 302
Only This I Want (2) JS2 766/JS3 732/GC2 701/G3 782/CBW 516/MI-BB 510

PALM SUNDAY OF THE LORD'S PASSION

March 20, 2016

Opening Antiphon and Procession

All Glory, Laud and Honor W4 483, 1048/GC2 421/G3 498/LMGM2



EASTER SUNDAY

March 27, 2016

Psalm of the Day: Ps 118

Aleluia/Alleluia (Reza) JS2 94
Surrexit Christus (Berthier) W4 525/
GC2 455/G3 529

This Is the Day PSL C-72/SS 442

This Is the Day (Alstott) JS3 902

This Is the Day (Chepponis) W4 93/
SS 663

This Is the Day (Fisher) JS2 444/JS3
421/MI-BB 574

This Is the Day (Guimont) CBW 90/
GC2 987/G3 1065

This Is the Day (Haugen) W4 92/GC2
65/G3 81

This Is the Day (Hommerding) OF
286, 1009/WC 469/WS 143, 404

This Is the Day (Hunstiger) SS 597

This Is the Day (Joncas) JS2 97/JS3
98/G3 82/CBW 89/MI-BB 809

This Is the Day (Proulx) W4 1079

This Is the Day (Roberts) LMGM2 853
This Is the Day/Éste Es el Día (Rubal-
cava) WS 405

This Is the Day (Schiavone) JS2 922

This Is the Day (Soper) JS3 99/MI-BB
810

This Is the Day (Willcock) SS 662

Sequence (sung before the Alleluia
today)

Christ Is Arisen JS3 398/BB 163

Christ the Lord Is Risen Today (VICTIMAE
PASCHALI) W4 520, 528/LMGM2 311/
JS2 422/JS3 397/OF 467/CBW 385/
WC 598/WS 515/BB 175/SS 836

Christian People Sing Your Praises OF
456/WC 606

Christians, Praise the Paschal Victim
(Chant) W4 1080/GC2 444/G3 1065/
LMGM2 854/OF 464/CBW 690/WC
601/WS 521

Christians, to the Paschal Victim JS2
421/JS3 396/BB p. 88/SS 824

Let Christians All Their Voices Raise
OF 460/WC 599/WS 531

Sprinkling Rite/Renewal of Baptismal
Promises

Alleluia (Nestor) W4 314

I Saw Water Flowing JS2 543/JS3
256, 509/OF 176/WC 383/WS 324/
MI-BB 936, 937

If We Have Died to Ourselves GC2 135
Lord Jesus, from Your Wounded Side
W4 313/G3 315

May This Water Keep Us Aware CBW
236

Springs of Water W4 315/GC2 155,
189/G3 205, 316/JS3 399/OF 177,
503/CBW 88/WC 382/WS 140, 325/
BB 179/SS 1186, 1187, 1188

Streams of Living Water JS2 254
Sweet Refreshment GC2 802/G3
899/SS 671

There Is One Lord W4 921/GC2 796/
G3 905/LMGM2 745/JS2 699/OF
512/CBW 530/WC 638/WS 556/MI-
BB 495

Vidi Aquam JS3 167/SS 1174

Wash Me LMGM2 211

Water of Life – Dean JS2 255/JS3
255/BB p. 80/MI-BB 934

Water of Life/Agua de Vida – Cortez
JS2 252/JS3 254/MI-BB 935

Waters of Life OF 175/WC 385/WS
142, 323

We Shall Draw Water JS2 117/JS3
118/MI-BB 823

With Joy You Shall Draw Water GC2
81/G3 97/CBW 237

You Will Draw Water Joyfully G3 98/
OF 174/WC 384/SS 626

Other Songs for the Liturgy

All Things New GC2 450/G3 541

All You Nations OF 258/WC 444/WS
379

All You on Earth OF 450/WC 602/WS
520

Alleluia! Alleluia! Hearts and Voices
(2, C) JS2 437/JS3 415/OF 469/WC
607/WS 534/BB 170

Alleluia, Alleluia! Let the Holy Anthem
Rise (G) GC2 440/LMGM2 318/JS2
434/JS3 411/OF 451/WC 613/WS
526/SS 842/BB 171

*Alleluia! Christ Is Risen (E) IH 22

Alleluia, Christ Is Risen (1, 2, G) G3
518

Alleluia No. 1 GC2 462/G3 524/JS2
439/JS3 413/OF 620/CBW 383/WC
760/WS 631/MI-BB 573

At the Lamb's High Feast We Sing (2,
C) W4 512/GC2 463/G3 536/LMGM2
316/JS2 424/JS3 407/OF 453/CBW
375/WC 593/WS 518/SS 845/BB
169

Baptized in Living Waters (1) OF 662/
WC 787/WS 664

Be Not Afraid – Taizé (G) W4 522

Bread of Life from Heaven/Pan de
Vida Eterna (2, G) W4 948/GC2 803/
G3 943/SS 1063

Christ Has Arisen LMGM2 314

Christ Has Risen (G) W4 505/GC2
465/G3 530

Ours Were the Griets He Bore (G)
JS3 389

*Philippians Canticle (2) W4 129/
G3 105

*Psalm of Hope (Ps) G3 684

Sing, My Tongue, the Glorious Battle
(G) W4 491

Sing, My Tongue, the Savior's Glory –
Good Fri (G) JS2 414/JS3 384

Sing, My Tongue, the Song of Tri-
umph (G) CBW 69

*Take and Eat (G) W4 940/GC2 812/
G3 950/LMGM2 765/CBW 611/WC

686/WS 585/MI-BB 360/SS 1087

Take Up Our Cross (2) JS3 502/MI-
BB 721

Take Up Your Cross (2) W4 761/GC2
688, 690/G3 801/JS2 524/JS3

501/OF 679/CBW 485/WC 793/WS
669/MI-BB 718/SS 985

The Cross of Jesus (1) W4 465/GC2
396/G3 482

*Though in the Form of God (2)
CBW 687

Tree of Life – Haugen GC2 401/G3
475/CBW 373/SS 799

Unless a Grain of Wheat JS2 760,
802/JS3 725, 801/W4 759/GC2

699/G3 783/MI-BB 346, 509

Up to Jerusalem (G) OF 445/WC
575/WS 513

We Acclaim the Cross of Jesus (G)
OF 677/WC 797/WS 666

We Glory in the Cross (G) W4 884

We Have No Glory JS2 671

We Remember W4 938/GC2 578/
G3 681/WC 691/WS 562/MI-BB
497/SS 922

We Should Glory in the Cross (G)
JS2 686/OF 443/WC 573/WS 500

We Who Once Were Dead CBW 402

Were You There (G) W4 488/GC2
438/G3 511/LMGM2 301/JS2 412/
JS3 385/OF 439/WC 582/WS 508/
BB 154/SS 817

What Wondrous Love Is This (2, G)
W4 641/GC2 614/G3 642/LMGM2

500/JS2 755/JS3 719/OF 738/WC
757/WS 704/MI-BB 479/SS 932

When I Survey the Wondrous Cross
(G) W4 494/LMGM2 725/JS2 417/
JS3 387/OF 678/CBW 382/WC

796/WS 667/BB 152

When Jesus Wept (G) JS2 418/JS3
376

*Wood of the Cross (Ps) JS2 407/
JS3 380/BB 151

Your Only Son (2) JS3 391

PREPARATION: MUSIC



Christ Is Alive! W4 510/JS2 441/JS3 418/OF 455/CBW 384/WC 590/WS 522/SS 840
Christ Is Risen OF 477/WC 595
Christ Is Risen! Shout Hosanna! W4 498/GC2 449/G3 521/OF 459/WC 610/WS 524/SS 830
*Christ Our Pasch (C) PSL C-70/SS 238
Christ the Lord Is Risen! W4 523
*Christ the Lord Is Risen Again (E) PSL C-71/SS 239
Christ the Lord Is Risen Again JS2 442/JS3 420/OF 461/WC 617/BB 172
Christ the Lord Is Risen Today (E, 1, 2, G) W4 496, 520, 528/GC2 439/G3 523/LMGM2 311/JS2 427/JS3 397, 403/OF 462, 467/CBW 385/WC 594, 598/WS 515, 528/BB 175, 178/SS 836
Come, Ye Faithful, Raise the Strain W4 509/GC2 448/G3 533/JS2 426/JS3 402/OF 466/WC 616/BB 160/SS 846
Day of Delight (G) W4 499
Do Not Be Afraid (G) JS2 731
Earth, Earth, Awake! W4 504/GC2 441/G3 531/SS 848
Festival Canticle: This Is the Feast of Victory W4 515/GC2 458/G3 520/JS2 428/JS3 424/OF 834/CBW 396/MI-BB 568/SS 829
Good Christians All, Rejoice and Sing! OF 465/CBW 386/WC 614/SS 847
Goodness Is Stronger than Evil W4 500/GC2 451/G3 528/LMGM2 313
Hail Thee, Festival Day (Ps) W4 524/JS2 450/JS3 428/OF 470/CBW 388/WC 605
He Arose LMGM2 307
He Is Lord LMGM2 304
If Christ Had Not Been Raised from Death (2) W4 497
Jesus Christ Is Risen Today W4 516/GC2 457/G3 540/LMGM2 315/JS2 425/JS3 401/OF 473/CBW 389/WC 591/WS 530/BB 164/SS 839
Jesus Is Risen JS2 447/JS3 425/BB 184
Join in the Dance JS2 438/JS3 410/MI-BB 571
Keep in Mind OF 734/W4 651/GC2 658/G3 646/JS2 589/JS3 559/WC 841/WS 711/MI-BB 679/SS 968
Let Easter Alleluias Fill This Place (G) OF 475
Lift Up Your Hearts JS2 711/JS3 593/GC2 543/G3 624/MI-BB 534

May We Be One (1, 2) GC2 322/G3 394
Now the Green Blade Rises W4 495/GC2 456/G3 534/JS2 443/JS3 422/OF 476/CBW 403/WC 603/WS 527/BB 166
Now We Remain W4 764/GC2 696/G3 785/WC 678/WS 583/MI-BB 506/SS 983
*O Sons and Daughters, vss 1-4 (G) W4 507/LMGM2 312/GC2 446/G3 532/JS2 420/JS3 405/OF 468/CBW 404/WC 608/WS 516/BB 173/SS 823
*Our Paschal Sacrifice (2, C) BB 181
Praise the Risen Lord OF 471/WC 592/WS 533
Rejoice! LMGM2 310
Resucitó GC2 443/G3 535/JS2 309/JS3 404/BB 177
*Sing to the Mountains (Ps) JS2 601/JS3 580/GC2 452/G3 519/MI-BB 546
Singers, Sing OF 472/WC 604/SS 837
Surrexit Christus (2, G) W4 525/GC2 455/G3 529
*Take and Eat, v 4 (Ps) W4 940/GC2 812/G3 950/LMGM2 765/CBW 611/WC 686/WS 584/MI-BB 360/SS 1087
*That Easter Day with Joy Was Bright (G) W4 514/G3 542/CBW 392/SS 825
The Day of Resurrection (2) OF 481/WC 612/WS 523/BB 167/SS 835
The Strife Is O'er W4 511/GC2 459/G3 525/LMGM2 308/JS2 431/JS3 408/OF 452/CBW 395/WC 589/WS 529/MI-BB 566/SS 828
The Tomb Is Empty (G) GC2 464/SS 834
Thine Be the Glory (G) OF 463/WC 596/WS 519
*This Is the Day (*Ref based on today's psalm refrain, but verses are not from Ps 118*) LMGM2 305/JS2 311, 588/OF 482/CBW 592/WC 611/SS 831
This Joyful Eastertide W4 502/JS2 305/JS3 414/OF 479/CBW 397/BB 185
Three Days JS2 423/JS3 406/BB 180
We Know That Christ Is Raised (2) OF 508/CBW 398/WC 615/SS 832

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Spaces

When I have spaces in my day I usually try to fill them up instead of using them to reflect, to rest, to relax. In-between pauses provide time to breathe, savor aromas from the kitchen, watch turtles on the patio, listen to bird song and trees rustling in the breeze, take a walk down to the cemetery.

Lord, thank you for spaces in my life, for periods of quiet to notice the new leaf on my philodendron, to read a poem, to see the sun sliding into the lake, to visit with a dear friend. Let the spaces renew my energy and lift my flagging spirit.

Barbara Mayer, OSB

Barbara Mayer is a member of the Benedictine monastic community of Mount St. Scholastica in Atchison, Kan.

March 6, 2016

Mercy and Joy

Fr. Lawrence Mick

This Sunday brings us to the middle of Lent and also to the heart of the Year of Mercy. This is traditionally known as Laetare Sunday or Rejoice Sunday, and the theme of joy is evident in the prayers and readings today. The entrance antiphon in the missal sets the tone: “Rejoice, Jerusalem, and all who love her. Be joyful, all who were in mourning; exult and be satisfied at her consoling breast.”

That note is not sounded quite as clearly in the readings today, but what we find there provides the basis for rejoicing. The reading from Joshua recalls the entry of the Israelites into the Promised Land and their first celebration of the Passover there. St. Paul says that God is doing something new, reconciling the world to God; in Christ we have become a new creation. The Gospel account of the return of the wayward son is an image of the reconciliation that God offers, and in the parable, reconciliation clearly leads to rejoicing.

In this Year of Mercy, we should be coming to a deeper awareness that God’s mercy is a cause for deep joy. St. Paul says that the ministry of reconciliation has been entrusted to us. Reconciliation is much broader than just the sacrament of reconciliation, though it certainly should include that. Forgiveness and welcome for imperfect people should be a hallmark of the church. But we are unlikely to be effective

ministers of reconciliation if we are not aware of our own need to be reconciled.

Part of what makes Pope Francis’ words so appealing to many is his focus on the mercy of God more than on our sinfulness. He does not ignore our sins; in fact, he has challenged us on many issues for which we need to repent, including the devastation of the planet. But his stronger emphasis is on the love and mercy that God offers to us sinners. The reform of the sacrament of penance after the Second Vatican Council also sought to emphasize God’s mercy, but that reform has not taken hold very well. This Year of Mercy offers us the opportunity to help people embrace the reconciliation that God offers us in Christ and to rejoice in that gift of love.

The readings from either the A or the C cycle of Lent are rich with texts that you could use for a penance service, linking that celebration to the Sunday liturgies. Make sure that the focus is on God’s mercy and the joy it brings us. You might even consider a brief party after the service to share the joy of God’s love.

Daylight Saving Time: DST begins next Sunday. A reminder in the bulletin could be helpful.



4th Sunday of Lent

Joan DeMerchant

INTRODUCTION

Laetare Sunday calls us to rejoice, and we hear profound reasons for joy in the story of the prodigal son. Even when we make life choices that cause great pain, God is always there, ready to forgive us. How deep is God’s mercy? Today’s readings say that the only limits are the ones we place on God’s infinite love.

PENITENTIAL ACT

Lord Jesus, you teach us the meaning of forgiveness and reconciliation: Lord, have mercy.

Christ Jesus, you show us that we can rely on God’s mercy: Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you make clear that the choice for newness is ours: Lord, have mercy.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Josh 5:9a, 10-12 God has mercy on his people.

Psalms 34 Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

2 Cor 5:17-21 Whoever is in Christ is a new creation.

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32 The parable of the prodigal son

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

Presider We pray for ourselves and for all throughout the world who are in need of God’s generous mercy.

Minister For the church, who is always in need of God’s mercy: that we may share that same mercy with others ... remembering your mercy, we pray,

❖ For those awaiting the relief of something new in the midst of war, violence and inhumane actions ... remembering your mercy, we pray,

❖ For all wandering or displaced people: the homeless, migrants and refugees ... remembering your mercy, we pray,

❖ For those who offer sanctuary to the wandering or those living on the margins ... remembering your mercy, we pray,

❖ For the grace to be generous and forgiving to those who have made mistakes or who have offended us ... remembering your mercy, we pray,

❖ For catechumens and candidates who are preparing to enter a home in the Catholic community ... remembering your mercy, we pray,

❖ For those who cannot find their way home due to mental illness, addiction, fear or confusion ... remembering your mercy, we pray,

❖ For the suffering, the sick and the dying in our midst; and for those who have died ... *(names)* ... remembering your mercy, we pray,

Presider God of overwhelming generosity, you never fail to open your arms to us when we turn to you. Create in us forgiving and merciful hearts that can recognize the distress of others. We ask this in the name of your reconciling Son, Jesus. Amen.

March 13, 2016

Not Finished Yet

Fr. Lawrence Mick

Lent is always about baptism (preparing for it and renewing it), so Lent is always about conversion, which baptism celebrates. When God says, “See, I am doing something new!” in today’s first reading, it refers to a new Exodus, a new experience of freedom from slavery and the offer of new life. We see baptism as a fulfillment of that promise as we pass through the watery grave to resurrection life.

But as St. Paul admits in our second reading, this is not a one-time experience. “It is not that I have already taken hold of it or have already attained perfect maturity, but I continue my pursuit in hope that I may possess it, since I have indeed been taken possession of by Christ Jesus.” In baptism, we are claimed by Christ, but the fullness of resurrection life does not arrive in one singular moment. It is a process of growth that continues throughout our lives. Conversion is a life-long journey. God is always inviting us to embrace new life more fully.

Doing that, of course, also means dying to the old life more completely. When the woman in today’s Gospel is saved from stoning by Jesus, he does not condemn her but he does tell her to sin no more. And all of us need to hear the same message: God does not condemn but calls us to keep growing.

I wonder how today’s Catholics would have re-

acted if they were in the crowd that day and heard Jesus say, “Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” How many would claim to be without sin? Yet how few make use of the sacrament of penance! That’s an indication, perhaps, that most Catholics still do not see the value of celebrating God’s mercy, or they see the sacrament as more about inducing guilt feelings than about celebrating God’s love.

It may be that the problem stems from our approach to this sacrament in decades past, when there was an assumption that all of us were great sinners and totally unworthy of God’s love. We were taught to go to confession at least monthly because it was assumed that most of us were committing mortal sins regularly and needed confession to get to heaven (or even to go to Communion). People have rightly rebelled against that distorted mindset, but most have not yet managed to find the balance that admits that we are all sinners but that we are also loved tremendously by God. Our sins do not stop God’s love. Admitting we are not yet perfect is healthy and necessary; anything else is a false self-image. Like Paul, we have not “already attained perfect maturity.”



5th Sunday of Lent

Joan DeMerchant

INTRODUCTION

Jesus has mercy on the woman accused of adultery. Those who judge her are confronted with their own need for forgiveness, and she who has been shown mercy is challenged to live out the new thing God is doing on her behalf. Where mercy abounds, all kinds of new things can happen.

PENITENTIAL ACT

Lord Jesus, you showed mercy to the woman caught in adultery: Lord, have mercy.

Christ Jesus, you challenge those who judge others as sinners: Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you call us to live as forgiven and forgiving people: Lord, have mercy.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Isa 43:16-21 The Lord is doing something new.

Psalm 126 The Lord has done great things for us.

Phil 3:8-14 Being one with Christ is worth everything.

John 8:1-11 Parable of the woman caught in adultery

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

Presider Brothers and sisters, we who are all sinners bring our hopes and prayers to the God of endless mercy.

Minister For the whole church that is need of forgiveness and mercy ... remembering your mercy, we pray,

❖ For those whose lives have been wasteful and unproductive and for all of us who have sinned ... remembering your mercy, we pray,

❖ For those of us who lay heavy burdens on others by judging or condemning them ... remembering your mercy, we pray,

❖ For those whose past mistakes cause them to live with burdens of guilt or shame ... remembering your mercy, we pray,

❖ For the grace to forgive those who have offended us, or to make amends with those whom we have offended ... remembering your mercy, we pray,

❖ For peace in a world in turmoil, especially for women, men and children who have never known peace ... remembering your mercy, we pray,

❖ For those preparing for baptism or reception into the church at Easter ... remembering your mercy, we pray,

❖ For the sick, the dying and the grieving; and for those who have died ... (*names*) ... remembering your mercy, we pray,

Presider Merciful God, we know that we are all sinners. Help us to be compassionate toward one another and to remember that you are always ready to offer us forgiveness and new life. We pray this in the name of your compassionate Son, Jesus. Amen.

March 20, 2016

Find prayers and rites for Holy Thursday on our website at celebrationpublications.org.

Church Week

Fr. Lawrence Mick

Palm Sunday begins what we have long called Holy Week. We might also call it “Church Week,” since it calls for us to gather as church to celebrate four major liturgies in one week.

Of course, the reality in most parishes is very different from that ideal. Lots of people come on Palm Sunday (free palms!) but much smaller assemblies gather for Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil. Many Catholics today have never taken part in any of the Triduum liturgies. They are seen as extras for those who are especially devout rather than the central celebrations of the year for the whole church.

What can you do to encourage more people to assemble for these rich liturgical experiences? If there are parishes in your area that have larger Triduum assemblies, ask them how they reached that attendance level. See if their experience can be adapted to your situation.

A good place to start, of course, is with some catechesis. Many Catholics do not even know that they are expected to take part in these liturgies. For many, it is just a week like any other, except for buying Easter clothes and candy and dyeing some eggs. Simply explaining to parishioners the importance of these days might lead some to consider taking part. We might call them the “Christian High Holy Days,” where we gather to celebrate the core events of

our salvation.

Holy Thursday offers another possible drawing card. Some parishes have a supper that night before the liturgy. Though some have tried to celebrate a modified Jewish Seder meal, such a plan may not be ideal. The Seder is a Jewish ritual meal that should be led by someone of that faith without trying to Christianize it. But a simple meal for the parish community can lead well into the celebration of the Last Supper that night.

Friday is perhaps a more difficult challenge. Since most people are not off work and many children are not out of school that day, an evening celebration of the liturgy is probably best. Would it help simply to explain the different parts of that liturgy: the Liturgy of the Word with the proclamation of the Passion, the veneration of the cross, and Communion? Would some pictures from previous years help them get a sense of the liturgy?

One of the most effective motives for people to gather at the Vigil is a personal relationship with those who will receive the sacraments of initiation that night. How fully are the catechumens integrated into parish life throughout the year? What efforts have been made to foster relationships with members of the parish? Have parishioners been invited to “adopt” a catechumen to pray for during Lent or even throughout the catechumenate?

Palm Sunday

Joan DeMerchant

The usual introduction and Penitential Act are omitted today, replaced with the Commemoration of Our Lord's Entrance into Jerusalem and the Blessing and Procession with Palms.

PENITENTIAL ACT

Lord Jesus, you fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: Lord, have mercy.

Christ Jesus, you entered Jerusalem with deep courage: Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you embraced your passion and death for our sake: Lord, have mercy.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Luke 19:28-40 Jesus enters Jerusalem to fulfill his mission.

Psalms 22 My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?

Phil 2:6-11 God exalted Jesus, who emptied himself.

Luke 22:14-23:56 The story of Jesus' passion and death

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

Presider Brothers and sisters, on this day we ponder all that it means to follow Jesus. Let us pray for ourselves, our loved ones, and all people throughout the world.

Minister For all the church and for all Christians called to continue the mission of Jesus ... remembering your mercy, we pray,

❖ For peace throughout the world, especially between and among Christians, Jews and Muslims ... remembering your mercy, we pray,

❖ For all who have given their lives on behalf of others ... remembering your mercy, we pray,

❖ For justice and comfort among all who feel abandoned, especially the poorest and most marginalized ... remembering your mercy, we pray,

❖ For the courage to embrace suffering for others in a culture that espouses comfort, self-promotion and excess ... remembering your mercy, we pray,

❖ For those preparing to enter the church at Easter ... remembering your mercy, we pray,

❖ For the suffering, the sick and the dying among us; for those who have died ... (*names*)... remembering your mercy, we pray,

❖ **Presider** God who entered into our suffering through Jesus' own suffering and death, we are humbled and silenced. We bow our heads in deep gratitude and ask for the courage to steadfastly follow him wherever it may lead us. We pray in the name of your Son, Jesus, who emptied himself for us. Amen.

March 27, 2016

Details, Details, Details

Fr. Lawrence Mick

The Easter Vigil is the most important liturgy in the whole liturgical year. It is also the longest, the richest and the most difficult to prepare. Celebrated well, it is a beautiful experience that deeply touches people's hearts and souls and generates lasting memories.

For planners, though, it can be a difficult challenge. So many things are different and the rituals are complex, which means there are dozens of little details that need attention and that can be easily overlooked or forgotten. Sometimes that's no big deal, when it is truly a minor detail. But sometimes one missed cue or missing item can sabotage a lot of effort, like a spotlight on a timer that comes on just when you are trying to start around the Easter fire in darkness.

If you have not already done so, start a written checklist of all the things that need to be prepared. This column is too short for any kind of comprehensive list, but a few examples may help you to avoid some of the pitfalls. One major challenge is beginning in darkness. Make sure the time of the Vigil is late enough for that to happen. Then make sure you know where every light control is located and put someone in charge of turning each one off at the proper time (and turning them back on later). If the switches are in public places, you might even place a strip of mask-

ing tape over the switch so some helpful person doesn't turn them on at the wrong time! Make sure you have thought through all the issues around the fire itself — amount of wood, when it should be lit, safety precautions, who puts it out, plan B if it rains, etc.

Ushers are key ministers on this night. Make sure they know how to guide people to and from the fire, how to help with lighting tapers, how to assist those with difficulty walking or climbing stairs, etc. Carefully consider the route of the procession into the church to determine any bottlenecks or potential safety issues (e.g., steps in the dark).

If you are celebrating baptisms, list all the items that are needed and determine where to place them and who is in charge of them. Consider safety issues from water dripping on the floor, especially if you use immersion. Figure out what you will do while the newly baptized leave the assembly to dress. Make sure that whoever will bring the Paschal candle to the font knows how to get it out of the holder safely and how to put it back.

Cue sheets for the music minister and others with special tasks (e.g., turning on lights, lighting tapers) can help avoid problems. Keep them and refine them from year to year.

Easter Sunday

Joan DeMerchant

These prayers may also be used at the Easter Vigil.

INTRODUCTION

Christianity is summed up in this most ancient of feasts. What makes Jesus' life and ministry unique and our lives meaningful is the Resurrection. We know that following Jesus is demanding, even costly. But there is much more ... Jesus promises us life on the far horizon. His followers weren't expecting it. Are we?

PENITENTIAL ACT

Lord Jesus, you were absent from the tomb on that morning: Lord, have mercy.

Christ Jesus, you showed your followers that you are the Son of God: Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you promise us everlasting life in you: Lord, have mercy.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Acts 10:34a, 37-43 Peter preaches the good news to the gentiles.

Psalm 118 This is the day the Lord has made.

Col 3:1-4 The baptized will appear with Christ in glory.

John 20:1-9 Mary of Magdala calls Peter and John to the empty tomb.

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

Presider My friends, we witness to our belief in the promise of life over death by praying for our own needs and those of the whole world.

Minister For the whole church and for all Christians: that we may be vibrant witnesses to the Resurrection and to life ... we pray,

❖ For all who promote or protect life in all its forms, from the environment to human life ... we pray,

❖ For the desire to seek out and work with all those committed to enhancing life, regardless of their religious affiliation ... we pray,

❖ For all who struggle to live in the face of sickness, poverty, oppression, violence or war ... we pray,

❖ For those who do not believe in or have lost hope for life beyond death ... we pray,

❖ For all those who help us to find meaning in life, especially our teachers and guides, families and friends ... we pray,

❖ For those who are most in need of our parish ministries directed toward saving and sustaining life, especially the poor, the sick and the dying ... we pray,

❖ For those who have entered into eternal life and those who grieve for them ... (*names*) ... we pray,

Presider God of life, today we celebrate the fullness of life shown to us by your Son, Jesus, in the Resurrection. Help us to live as Easter people, confident that life will prevail over death and eager to share our joy with others. We pray in the name of the Risen One. Amen.

Loose Change from Church and World

Bible Verses about Mercy

Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. —Heb 4:16

“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.” —Num 6:24-26

But go and learn what this means: “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners. —Matt 9:13

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. —Psalm 51:1-2

The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. —Psalm 103:8

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved. —Eph 2:4-5

And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. —1 Pet 5:10

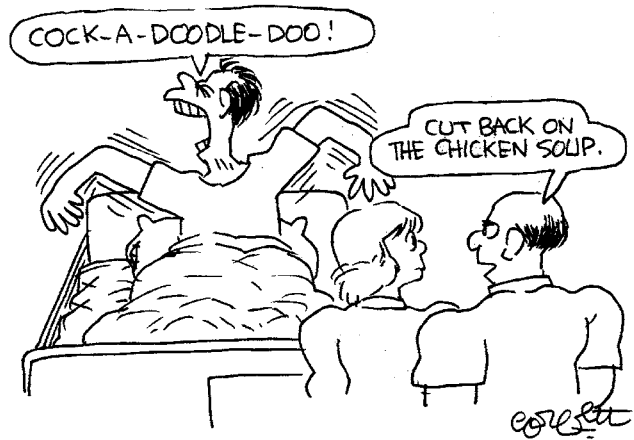
For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age. —Titus 2:11-12

Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy.—Mic 7:18

He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time. —2 Tim 1:9

Remember, Lord, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you, Lord, are good. —Psalm 25:6-7

Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him! —Isa 30:18



Cartoons

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PREPARATION: GRAPHICS



March 6
Fourth Sunday of Lent

“Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.”
— Luke 15:21



March 13
Fifth Sunday of Lent

“Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”
— John 8:10



March 20
Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion

Jesus proceeded on his journey up to Jerusalem.
— Luke 19:28



March 27
Easter Sunday

On the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning.
— John 20:1

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Mark Bartholomew is a member of the Holy Family Catholic Worker Community in Kansas City, Mo. These same graphics are available on our website for easy downloading for use in bulletins and parish newsletters. To access *Celebration* online, go to www.celebrationpublications.org. Register by clicking on the link REGISTER NOW and filling in the required fields. A username and password for your account will be sent immediately by email. Use this to enter the site through the Administrator Panel on the same web page.



Ambassadors for Christ

Behold, God has reconciled us to himself through Christ



— Amelia Kunhardt, Photojournalist
Visit kunhardtphoto.com for her biography and a gallery of her work.

Brothers and sisters:

Whoever is in Christ
is a new creation:
the old things have passed away;
behold, new things have come.
And all this is from God,
who has reconciled us to himself
through Christ and given us
the ministry of reconciliation,
namely, God was reconciling
the world to himself in Christ,
not counting their trespasses
against them
and entrusting to us
the message of reconciliation.
So we are ambassadors
for Christ, as if God
were appealing through us.
We implore you
on behalf of Christ,
be reconciled to God.
For our sake
he made him to be sin
who did not know sin,
so that we might become
the righteousness of God in him.

— 2 Cor 5:17-21
March 6, 2016
Fourth Sunday of Lent

Celebration

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Preaching Resources

CELEBRATION:
A Comprehensive
Worship Resource
CelebrationPublications.org

**ROMAN
LECTIONARY**
March 6, 2016
4th Sunday of Lent
Josh 5:9a, 10-12
Psalm 34
2 Cor 5:17-21
Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

**REVISED COMMON
LECTIONARY**
March 6, 2016
4th Sunday of Lent
Josh 5:9-12
2 Cor 5:16-21
Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

**ANGLICAN
LECTIONARY**
March 6, 2016
4th Sunday of Lent
Josh (4:19-24); 5:9-12
2 Cor 5:17-21
Luke 15:11-32

Patricia Sánchez has been contributing to *Celebration* for over 35 years. She holds a master's degree in literature and religion of the Bible from a joint degree program at Columbia University and Union Theological Seminary in New York.

Welcome Home

Dutch theologian, scripture scholar and prolific author Henri Nouwen first encountered Rembrandt van Rijn's "The Return of the Prodigal Son" on a poster on the door of an office at the L'Arche community in France. That encounter prompted Nouwen to go to the Hermitage museum in St. Petersburg, Russia, in order to see the original. There, he received permission from the curators of the museum to be alone with the painting. Nouwen spent hours in prayerful contemplation, the result of which was his fine book *The Return of the Prodigal Son* (Doubleday, New York: 1992).

Hoping to know a similarly prayerful experience, I visited the Hermitage a few years ago and sought out Rembrandt's painting. I don't know if the painting has been moved since Nouwen sat before it, but it hangs now in a stairwell, and there is no chance of stopping before it to take it all in. With the thousands of visitors that crowd their way through the Hermitage, one can hardly get a good glimpse, let alone pause for quiet contemplation. In order to make the best of my visit, I went up and down that stairwell, pushed along by the crowd until I lost energy to continue. With each glimpse of the painting, I longed for more.

*The father had
been waiting and
watching for his
son's return.*

At first, I went away from that encounter frustrated and disappointed. Only later and gradually did I realize what Rembrandt and Nouwen were communicating, each in his own way — and how my own experience fit in with their insights. God, the forgiving and merciful Father, is there, ever-present, ever welcoming each and all of us. As we go up and down through all the "staircases" of life, and as we go from heights to depths, God remains constant, our center, our focus, our home where we shall always find a welcome.

Throughout their long and checkered history, the people of Israel knew well the experience of coming home to God. From the time they were called to follow Moses into the desert and then onward to the land promised them by God, a strong sense of homecoming urged them on. When they sinned and turned their backs on their Creator and Redeemer, God did not relent. Time and time again, God's mercy brought them home to healing and forgiveness. As is reported in today's first reading from Joshua, God's mercy was celebrated each year on the feast of Passover. Then, they remembered the story of their beginnings and praised the God who never ceased calling them home.

This truth is reflected all throughout the sacred texts and especially in those chosen for Lent. During this season of fasting, prayer, penance and special attentiveness to the poor, we are shown mercy as we remember the extent of God's love revealed to us in Jesus. Paul tells us in his Corinthian correspondence (second reading) that through Christ, we and all the world are reconciled to God. All has been made right; all has been made new. Moreover, those who are blessed with such a gift are thereby charged by God with the ministry of reconciliation: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." This is indeed the season for making things right with family, friends and all others.

Turning again to the uniquely Lucan parable of the prodigal son, we might sense an invitation to find ourselves in the text. With whom do you identify at this time in your life?

Are you the wayward son, whose dreams of a good, happy and wealthy life evaporated in a pigsty in a foreign land? Now returned home in shame and sorrow, he is disheveled, kneeling before his father. He knows he has

March 6, 2016

Lent

4th Sunday

Welcome Home

dishonored his father and himself. He knows he does not deserve it, but he relies on the goodness of his father and surrenders himself to his love and mercy.

Or perhaps you see yourself in the dutiful but resentful elder son? His anger makes him bitter; he refuses to rejoice or share in the celebration because he doesn't understand his father's love.

Do any of us see ourselves in the father? Any parent can sympathize with this generous man whose child's actions hurt him, even cut to the quick of who he was. We can sympathize — but can we be as welcoming and forgiving? This is the challenge put before each of us today and every day.

Sr. Sue Mosteller, a companion and fellow community member of Henri Nouwen at Daybreak (L'Arche community) in Richmond Hill, Ontario, once told him, "Whether you are the younger son or the elder son, you have to realize that you are called to become the father." And so are we all.

JOSH 5:9, 10-12

One of the several books included in the Deuteronomic history, Joshua purports to be an accurate account of the infiltration, conquest and division of the land of Canaan among the tribes of Israel. However, in telling of the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham (a land, posterity, prosperity), the ancient author used quasi-cultic terms. Rather than detail sieges, skirmishes and armed attacks, the author described processions, liturgical music and religious rites.

Today's first reading is an excerpt from a longer narrative that described a period of rest at Gilgal before the siege of Jericho. Some verses omitted from this pericope (vv. 2-8) explained the need for rest: After being circumcised in accordance with the law, the men needed time to recover before returning to battle. Circumcision, an ancient practice, predated the Bronze Age and the Israelite conquest of Canaan (3000-1200 B.C.E.). It was a rite of initiation and a symbolic offering of oneself to the gods. Since the

Egyptians practiced circumcision, scholars are unsure why the Hebrews were not circumcised while they were enslaved among them. Nor is it known for certain when the rite acquired religious significance for Israel, as a sign that they were covenanted to God (Gen 17:8-14; Exod 12:43-48; Lev 12:13).

With this explanation as background, some have interpreted the "reproach of Egypt" that God removed from the people (v. 9) as the Hebrews' failure to be circumcised while they were in Egypt. Others are of the mind that "the reproach of Egypt" referred to the ritual impurity of a foreign land. Still others have suggested that the "reproach" now removed by God was the suffering of slavery that had been endured for generations by the Hebrews; many feel this to be the most likely interpretation.

In the remainder of this text, which shows definite signs of priestly editing, the ancient author describes the first observance of Passover, the feast that celebrated the people's freedom from slavery and their covenantal bond with God. The exodus from Egypt by God's hand became the pivotal event in Israel's history and one by which all other events were measured and interpreted. The

name of the place where God spoke to Joshua, Gilgal, means "circle of stones." It remained an important sanctuary until Josiah centralized the cult in Jerusalem and the one temple replaced all the outlying shrines as the place of worship.

By the casual mention that the manna ceased that day "after they ate the produce of the land" (v. 12), the ancient author told his readers that something quite significant had occurred. Those who had been a pastoral, Bedouin people had now become sedentarized; they were no longer nomads but settlers in a land of their own. There they could grow their own food, and because of God's blessings, could provide for themselves and their own.

Some have seen in Israel's experience an analogous understanding of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. Like the manna, the eucharistic bread of life sustains the faithful on life's journey until the ultimate Passover through death to life everlasting.

2 COR 5:17-21

"Before-and-after" pictures are a popular tactic used by advertisers to boost the sale of their products. The "after" pictures are so dramatically improved that customers cannot help but be convinced of the effectiveness of a certain diet or medicine or beauty aid. In today's second reading, Paul used a similar technique to compare life before and after coming to Christ. Being "in Christ" (v. 17) was a favorite Pauline term of explaining the difference between life "before" and life "after." By this term, Paul meant a radical (i.e., "from the roots"), continuing process of transformation that is at the heart of the life of faith. This process was much more than simply bettering oneself. Paul understood that being in Christ made of the believer a *new creation*. This transformation meant that the old order (death, sin and darkness) had been replaced by a new order (life, holiness and light) made possible by God, who has been reconciled to all of humanity "in Christ."



Among the most important scriptural passages on the subject of reconciliation, this text is rendered all the more poignant because it is part of Paul's personal defense of his ministry and his role as an apostle. The text is part of a longer description in which Paul tells the rigors of apostleship and makes it clear that he regarded the ministry of reconciliation as one of his foremost privileges. As an evangelist and a teacher of Christian faith and values, and by virtue of his own conversion, Paul had become an "ambassador" (v. 20) of God's reconciling grace. His life and his mission were "sacramental" — that is, a living sign of what God has done for all people in Christ. It was Paul's conviction that all believers were charged with the same responsibility to be living sacraments of God's loving mercy and forgiveness.

Jesus made it possible to appropriate these graces by "becoming sin" (v. 21). Actually, the term *hamartia*, which means "to be sin," would be better rendered as "to be a sin-sacrifice." Christ did not know sin by way of personal experience, but he fully embraced the contradiction and alienation of sin in order to make holy all who had been enslaved by it. For Paul, the sin-sacrifice of Jesus on the cross was the dividing point between the old and the new orders.

Because of Christ and the Christ-event, the common calendar observed by much of the world has long measured time as B.C. (Before Christ) and A.D. (Anno Domini). Today, many still use these designations, while others use B.C.E. (Before the Common Era) and C.E. (Common Era).

LUKE 15:1-3, 11-32

At the heart of this Gospel is the joyful, good news of reconciliation. Whereas Paul explained reconciliation in a doctrinal and theological manner, Luke has conveyed the same message in the moving and eloquent narrative of a father and his two sons. Because much of the story centers on the younger son and the father's magnanimous forgiveness, we might miss the fact that this is a

double-edged parable. In the exchange between the father and the elder son, there is a warning issued to the self-righteous whose meanness and resentment hardens them against the joy of God's mercy and love.

Originally, this parable was probably addressed to those who criticized the fact that Jesus associated and ate with sinners (see vv. 1-3). Such "reprehensible" behavior was an affront to scribes and Pharisees alike; nevertheless, Jesus did not relent in his outreach to sinners. After all, he had come to reveal the Father's love for sinful humankind while they were still sinful and before they repented. Is it not this great love of God that makes the sinner's repentance possible? Such was the experience of the younger son in Luke's parable.

Having demanded his share of his father's property and converted it into cash, the wayward son soon squandered all he had and was reduced to the ritually unclean (Lev 11:7) task of feeding pigs. In that moment, Luke tells us, he "came to his senses" (v. 17). Literally, this phrase is rendered "he entered into himself," and in both Hebrew and Aramaic, it is an expression for *repentance*. Having hit bottom and with nowhere else to go, the son could rely on nothing else except his father's mercy and goodness. The fact that his father ran out to meet him "while he was still a long way off" meant that the father had been waiting and watching for his return. For a grown man to run was

regarded as completely undignified; but the returning son was far more important than any supposed dignity.

Not only did the father welcome this son home, he would not even listen to his apology. He ordered an extravagant feast and restored the son to his former status; the robe and the ring were a sign that he was being welcomed as a son, not as a servant. Celebration and rejoicing were the order of the day because the son who was dead had come to life again (v. 32).

In the elder son's anger and resentment and in his litany of his righteous deeds, we can almost hear the prayer of the Pharisee in Luke 18. He had yet to understand his father or to accept that his father's love was unconditional and not a reward for good behavior. Through this parable, Luke reaches out to his readers with three characters, each of whom we can identify with at various times in our lives.

Brendan Byrne suggests that this parable also prompts us to ask ourselves if we really know God, and if we are comfortable with the God who loves so lavishly, forgives so freely and wishes to be reconciled with every sinner (*The Hospitality of God*, St. Paul's Publications, Strathfield, New South Wales, Australia: 2000). Our consideration of these questions should lead us to a fuller appreciation of God and a deeper desire to emulate God's love and mercy in our dealings with our fellow sinners.

Sermon Starters

Deacon Dick Folger

A classic Charles Schulz "Peanuts" cartoon gives us a lesson in forgiveness. The cartoon opens with Lucy chasing after Charlie Brown and shaking her fist at him. "I'm going to get you, Charlie Brown," she cries.

Charlie Brown comes to a sudden halt and calmly turns to face her. "Lucy, if we don't forgive each other as children, how will our parents learn to forgive each other? And how in turn will the world learn to forgive?" Exasperated by his question, Lucy hauls off and punches poor Charlie in the face. In the last frame, Lucy turns and looks out at the readers. "I had to," she explains. "He was beginning to make sense."

Today's Gospel story is the familiar parable of the prodigal son. When we hear it, we are amazed at the enduring love of the father who gives us a powerful lesson on how to forgive. It makes sense.

Preaching to Youth

Jim Auer

KEY VERSE(S) / MAIN IDEA (2 Cor)

“And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” (Luke) “Coming to his senses he thought ...” “While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him.” Aspects of reconciliation.

STARTER A catechist was telling his class about the time his 6-year-old daughter got lost in a crowded mall. “I was panic-stricken. I thought of all the bad things that could happen. The possibility of losing her for good — such things do happen — turned every fiber of my body and soul into one huge scream: *‘I want my kid back!’* And that’s just extremely imperfect me. Imagine how much more, how infinitely intensely God wants us back if we stray, if we get lost and enmeshed in a sinful lifestyle.”

LEADING QUESTIONS * The younger son’s reconciliation actually prompted the need for two other reconciliations. What were they? Imagine this scenario: You screw up pretty badly; you get forgiven and even get special treatment. But your siblings don’t take that well. They resent the special treatment. How would you feel toward them? * Do we have to sin outrageously in order to need reconciliation with God? * What are some lesser failings that create the need for reconciliation?

DIRECTIONS TO EXPLORE * In both 2 Corinthians and the Gospel, it’s God who initiates the reconciliation. * It’s up to us to “come to our senses.” * Conversion and reconciliation are ongoing and lifelong.

MEDIA LINK “But those forgiven much should be quicker to give it / And God forgave me for it all, Jesus bled forgiveness / So when the stones fly and they aimed at you / Just say forgive them, Father, they know not what they do” (Christian rapper TobyMac).

HOMILY

Deacon Ross Beaudoin

Exile and Return

The liturgy this Sunday begins with “Rejoice.” Traditionally, this Sunday halfway through Lent became known by its Latin name: Laetare (“Rejoice”) Sunday.

The responsorial psalm invites us to “Look to [the Lord] that you may be radiant with joy ... and your faces may not blush with shame.” Perhaps easier said than done for us guilt-ridden human beings.

All three readings give reasons to rejoice, to “be radiant with joy” and “not blush with shame.”

The Gospel presents a story that illustrates a significant reason for joy. Jesus tells us of a God who knows us, allows us to make good and bad decisions and who is at hand for us, no matter what! This God is especially attentive when we need understanding, mercy and forgiveness.

Jesus addresses this story to the scribes and Pharisees because of their efforts to undermine his message. The story is of two sons who had a falling-out with their father. Neither son had a grasp of his true relationship with the father. Each operated out of his own desires and suppositions. And neither was “filled with joy.”

The younger son didn’t see what he had. He imagined that he could have a better life away from his father and family. That son broke away after demanding his inheritance.

The older son also did not see what he had. However, this son stayed at home and did what was expected of him. But his heart was not in it. Inside, he may have been jealous of his brother, who had the nerve to ask for his inheritance and then skipped out to squander it on loose living.

The first reading from the Book of Joshua speaks of the Israelites in their exile and return. This can be seen as a parallel situation with the younger son. The Israelites’ famine

and later enslavement in Egypt was seen as a punishment, a “reproach” from God for their infidelities. Now, with their return to the land of Canaan, they feel delivered from their infidelity and able to rejoice in the Lord for deliverance and entry into their homeland.

Both the Israelites and the younger son had come to realize their folly while they were in exile. Their reaction was to think that God was punishing them. However, God had not been out to get them. God accompanied them, and God sorrowed over their distress. The father in the Gospel story is a figure of God, who sorrows over the son’s loss and yearns for the son’s return and reunion with him and the family. The Israelites, too, in retrospect could see God’s faithful mercy at work in their exile. “Look to [the Lord] that you may be radiant with joy ... and your faces may not blush with shame.”

The scribes and Pharisees could not see the true face of God in their own lives and in their dealings with others. They projected their preference for judgment and retribution on God, and tried to force that on struggling people. There’s no “Rejoice!” in that.

We also judge and dismiss those who are in trouble. Whether other people have problems because of their own choices, or because of conditions beyond their control, our all-too-frequent response is to pass judgment and condemn them.

Jesus addressed this parable to the scribes and Pharisees — and to us. We are all sinners. We are in need of God’s loving kindness, God’s ever-available mercy. Like the father in this parable, the God of love and mercy is always waiting for our return. In gratitude, we share the mercy of God with others.



Preaching Resources

CELEBRATION:
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**ROMAN
LECTIONARY**
5th Sunday of Lent
Isa 43:16-21
Psalms 126
Phil 3:8-14
John 8:1-11

**REVISED COMMON
LECTIONARY**
5th Sunday of Lent
Isa 43:16-21
Phil 3:4b-14
John 12:1-8

**ANGLICAN
LECTIONARY**
5th Sunday of Lent
Isa 43:16-21
Phil 3:8-14
Luke 20:9-19

Patricia Sánchez has been contributing to *Celebration* for over 35 years. She holds a master's degree in literature and religion of the Bible from a joint degree program at Columbia University and Union Theological Seminary in New York.

Be Merciful as God Is Merciful

When Saint John Paul XXIII opened the Second Vatican Council 54 years ago, he set the tone for that great gathering with these words: “Now the Bride of Christ wishes to use the medicine of mercy rather than taking up the arms of security. . . . The Catholic Church. . . wants to show herself a loving mother to all; patient, kind, moved by compassion and goodness.” As the council drew to a close, Blessed Paul VI spoke in a similar manner at the council’s close: “Charity has been the principal religious feature of this Council. . . a wave of affection and admiration flowed from the Council over the modern world of humanity.” Instead of depressing diagnoses, we heard encouraging remedies; instead of direful predictions, messages of trust issued from the council to the world, whose values were not only respected but honored. Its efforts were approved, its aspirations purified and blessed. This same message of mercy, hope, and solidarity with all of humankind has come alive again in Pope Francis, who bids us to look anew at God and at God’s face of mercy as it is revealed in the biblical word, and ultimately in God’s Word made flesh, in Jesus.

*God’s newness
will bring
peace for all.*

Through page after page and from beginning to end, both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures form a litany of God’s countless and undeserved acts of mercy for sinners. “It is hardly an exaggeration,” wrote Pope Francis, “to say that God’s is a visceral love. It gushes forth from the depths naturally, full of tenderness and compassion, indulgence and mercy” (“Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy,” April 11, 2015).

This same visceral love of God is underscored in each of today’s sacred texts. Deutero-Isaiah was a comforter of his people and their companion during their years of exile in Babylonia. He promised that God would repeat the wonders of their exodus from Egypt and lead the Israelites home. When the circumstances threatened their hope and it seemed that all was lost, God, with great mercy, encouraged the people not to dwell on or drown in the sins of their past: “I am doing something new!” This newness meant forgiveness and reconciliation for all who would welcome God into their lives and would be faithfully responsive to God’s overtures of love and mercy.

In his letter to his beloved Philippians, Paul shares his love for and commitment to Jesus. Mercifully, the risen Lord had appeared to him on the Damascus road, and Paul allowed himself to be transformed; the persecutor of Jesus’ followers became the preacher of the good news of salvation. He had become aware — and he shared that awareness with others — that salvation was not based on any righteousness of his own that came from the law, but on the merciful gift of God, mediated by Christ on the cross and appropriated by faith. He knew that Christ had taken possession of him, and he attempted to live each day as an authentic reflection of the Lord to whom he belonged. As believers, we are heirs of the same mercies extended to Paul. Like him, we are to count all else as “rubbish” (Phil 3:8) so as to gain Christ and to be found in him.

In today’s Johannine Gospel we see the mercy of God incarnated in the words and actions of Jesus. While others were willing and even eager to stone the woman for adultery, Jesus asked them to look within themselves, to see themselves for who they were — sinners. He challenged them to look beyond the law, which legislated such an action, and to look to God. If they stood in truth before God, could they, in all honesty, condemn and execute a fellow

sinner? How often had they known God's mercy? Shouldn't they allow the woman mercy, too? Elsewhere in the Gospel, Jesus would say, "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge and you will not be judged. Do not condemn and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (Luke 6:36-38).

With these challenges of Jesus in mind, how will we tend to the poor who need and deserve our mercy? How will Jesus' words affect the manner in which we forgive those who wrong us? Can we, in mercy and justice, deny a welcome to the world's refugees and seekers of asylum? If we dare to pray to "Our Father" and profess to belong to Christ, then there can be no other way for us than the way of mercy. "This mercy of God is the beating heart of the gospel, which in its own way must penetrate the heart and mind of every person. ... It is absolutely essential for the Church and for the credibility of her message that she live and testify to mercy" (Pope Francis, *op. cit.*). Be merciful as God is merciful.

ISA 43:16-21

Deutero-Isaiah was a companion to his people during their exile in Babylonia. When he wished to raise their spirits and call them to remain faithful to God, he recalled happier times. Remember, he urged, the time when our God led us out of slavery to freedom. God can and will do this again.

So pivotal was the exodus event and many of the particulars that surrounded it (such as the Sea of Reeds, Moses, the desert trek, manna, water from the rock) that these things were later understood as *types* of other events that succeeded them. The *typical sense* of scripture is the meaning possessed by persons, places and events because, according to the intention of the author, they foreshadow future events, persons or places. Because types and their antitypes (those they foreshadowed) appeared at two different points in time,

March 13, 2016

Lent

5th Sunday

Be Merciful as God Is Merciful



the texts' typical sense became apparent only when its antitype appeared. Given this explanation, contemporary readers can appreciate the insight of Deutero-Isaiah, who saw the exodus from Egypt as a type of the exiles' release from Babylonia (the antitype). For that reason, the prophet described the return to Judah in terms borrowed from the exodus narrative (chariots, horsemen, mighty waters, etc.).

The prophet of mercy and consolation encouraged his people to look to the future and to the new beginning God would effect for them, instead of dwelling on what would soon be their past (exile). To that end, he urged them also to prepare themselves not only for a repetition of God's wondrous acts but for the continuation of the process of redemption, which began with the exodus. Deutero-Isaiah did not want the people to look at themselves and what had happened to them as merely historic occurrences. He described the circumstances in which they found themselves in terms of a relationship endangered by infidelity, but one in the process of being healed and made strong once again. This reconciliation would require their sincere efforts at repentance as well as God's merciful

forgiveness. As Paul D. Hanson has explained, the realm of the sacred does not impose the mold of the past on those suffering under the weight of the present. Instead, it reveals to the people a vision of the new thing God would do (*Isaiah 40-66*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Ky: 1995). "Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" presents a challenge. The exiled Judahites must be open to what God can do and be humbly receptive to the opportunity to turn over a new leaf that God affords them.

In the final two verses of this beautiful pericope, the prophet reprises a theme, one of his favorites, to which he returned again and again in his writings — the ultimate purpose of all creation. God is creative, merciful and redemptive, committed to the healing, wholeness and harmony of the entire cosmos. The iniquity of its inhabitants will not be allowed to defile the world; God's "new thing" will result in wild beasts, jackals and ostriches honoring God, and in the desert and wasteland being made lush and arable by rivers.

PHIL 3:8-14

If anyone chose to research Paul's life before he met Christ on the Damascus road, their results would indicate that he was quite a fortunate person. Born of Jewish parents in the Hellenistic city of Tarsus, Paul enjoyed the best of both worlds. He was a Roman citizen and was fluent in the Greek language, culture and philosophies. Paul was also schooled in his Jewish faith and traditions by an eminent rabbi (Acts 23:3). He had achieved a certain status among his fellow Jews as a recognized authority and teacher, as was evident from the authority he wielded against the Jesus-movement prior to his conversion (Acts 9:1-2; 22:5; 26:12). Nevertheless, Paul regarded all of his advantages and privileges as a "loss" and as "rubbish" (v. 8) when compared to the graces and blessings he had received in Christ Jesus. With this harsh assessment of his previous life, Paul sought to defend Christianity against certain elements in Philippi who threatened the healthy spiritual development of the community.



Paul's remarks were directed either at Judaizers or gnostic enthusiasts. At one extreme were the Judaizers, who were extremely conservative Jewish Christians who insisted that all who wished to come to Christ must first go through Moses. Therefore, they wanted to impose on new converts the requirements of the law, circumcision, and all the purity rituals of Judaism. At the other extreme were the gnostic Christians, who believed that they were already perfected and justified by virtue of their baptism into Christ. In the middle of these two extremes stood Paul, who understood and taught that justification is God's gift to us in Christ and is to be humbly, gratefully appropriated by faith.

For Paul, faith in Jesus meant becoming like him in every thought, word and deed, and that entailed "sharing his suffering by being conformed to his death" (v. 10). "Conformed to" was a term based on the root *morphe*, which indicated that such formation involved an essential, radical conformity to or solidarity with the sufferings of Jesus. This conformity could not be achieved by the law, nor was it automatic at baptism. Rather, it is a gradual process of knowing and becoming like Christ expressed in continuous conversion. Paul's subtle analogy of the runner in the race ("straining forward," "continuing my pursuit toward the goal," vv. 13-14) is an apt illustration of the gradual, rigorous process of being formed into the pattern of Jesus' life, passion, death and, finally, resurrection. Like runners who have already committed themselves to the course, baptized Christians have been grasped or "taken possession of" by Christ Jesus — that is, initiated into the process and hard work of a lifetime conversion. However short or long, the entire span of a person's life can be likened to that race. The goal, union with the risen Lord, is in sight, but is not yet fully achieved until the race is faithfully finished and we hear God's "upward calling in Christ Jesus" (v. 14). Until then, let us help one another, as Paul has helped us, to keep a steady pace and our eyes on the prize.

JOHN 8:1-11

A consensus of reputable scholars

agrees that this narrative of the woman who was accused by others but forgiven by Jesus came from a pre-Johannine source and did not appear in any of the earliest known manuscripts. Nevertheless, it appears in the scriptural canon, where it portrays Jesus as a living expression of God's mercy, a wise and just judge who was more concerned with forgiveness and rehabilitation than with punishment and death.

Prior to Jesus' encounter with the woman, he had been teaching daily in the temple while spending his nights on the Mount of Olives (John 7:53-8:1). Crowds had been coming to hear him, and this may have angered the scribes and Pharisees, who regarded themselves as Judaism's official teachers. Although they were respected for their astute knowledge of every minute detail of the law, they were also feared because of how they wielded their authority. The fact that the scribes and Pharisees brought the woman to Jesus was quite irregular and points to their true agenda: to trap him. Ordinarily, the Sanhedrin would have handled such a matter.

With the accused woman standing in full view of everyone, the scribes and Pharisees goaded Jesus for his opinion. He responded by writing on the ground, twice (vv. 6, 8). For centuries, there has been much speculation as to what he wrote. A tradition that is said to have originated with St. Jerome proposed that Jesus was detailing the sins of the accusers. Others think that Jesus was imitating Roman legal practice, where

the judge wrote down the sentence before declaring it aloud. Some propose that Jesus was inspired by Daniel 5:24 and the mysterious writing on the wall that provided divine commentary on the situation. Or perhaps Jesus was recalling Jeremiah 17:13: "Those who turn away from you shall be written on the earth, for they have forsaken the Lord." Another text that may have inspired Jesus is Exodus 23:1, the prohibition against offering malicious witness. While we cannot be certain what Jesus wrote, his actions showed that he was unmoved by the accusations of the self-righteous. However, his statement about casting the first stone (v. 7) stopped the scribes and Pharisees where they stood and rendered them wordless. Their argument could not stand. All that was left for them to do was to slink away.

Alone with the woman, Jesus exercised his authority — not as judge and jury, but as Savior. Without denying or ignoring her sin ("do not sin any more," v. 11), Jesus pardoned her. He who transcended the law invited the woman to do the same. She was sent on her way contrite and resolute, not only to obey the law for the sake of the law, but to be renewed in her conscience and to reform her behavior in accord with the loving mercy that had been shown her. God affords each of us this same mercy. Let us rejoice in that fact, and instead of being quick to condemn one another, let us rejoice when God's mercies are shown to them, as well.

Sermon Starters

Deacon Dick Folger

The theme of last Sunday's parable of the prodigal son continues this Sunday, but with a woman who has been caught in the act of adultery. Instead of the prodigal son's father, we have Jesus, who asks her, "Has not one condemned you?" She replies, "No one." Jesus forgives her: "Then neither do I condemn you." Jesus hears the woman's confession and then absolves her: "You may go. But from now on avoid this sin."

By intervening, Jesus rescued the woman from stoning, lifted her up and set her onto a new path. Lent presents us with the chance to look more deeply at our own lives. In the Rite of Reconciliation, we, like the woman, receive counsel, absolution and a penance. The sacrament reveals Jesus offering us mercy and showing us a path forward that will avoid the consequences of sin that can rain down like stones upon us.

Preaching to Youth

Jim Auer

KEY VERSE(S) / MAIN IDEA (John)

“The scribes and Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery.” “Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger.” “Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” “No one, sir.” “Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin anymore.” Divine compassion. Learning from the compassion of Jesus.

STARTER Because of today’s Gospel, we’re going to begin today with some stupid questions. Here we go: How long is a piece of string? How do you know when you run out of invisible ink? How do astronauts see anything on the moon when there’s a lunar eclipse?

LEADING QUESTIONS * Do you see any connection between stupid questions and today’s Gospel? * Jesus was alone with the woman. Time for a long lecture, right? Why does he ask stupid questions instead? (“Where are they” — as if she would know. “Has no one condemned you?” — as if no one had!)* As the woman begins to play along with the silly game, what silly answer does she give? * What does this silly question tactic tell you about Jesus? * Who’s absurdly missing in this story? * Does this story show that God is actually pretty soft on sin or doesn’t consider it all that big a deal?

DIRECTIONS TO EXPLORE * The unjust double standard: The girl was a slut but the guy was just a normal, hot-blooded male. * Jesus didn’t leave out an admonition to reform, but he issued it after he had shown compassion and calmed the woman down. * We’ve all been sinners, whether we were “caught” in sin or not. We must exercise the compassion of Jesus toward those who have hurt us.

QUOTATION “Our hearts of stone become hearts of flesh when we learn where the outcast weeps” (Brennan Manning).

HOMILY

Deacon Ross Beaudoin

Something New

We are painfully aware of how violent the world is. There are acts of mass violence perpetrated by individuals and groups. There are acts of individual violence. No country on earth is spared.

Now we are in the last two weeks of Lent. The violence inflicted upon Jesus is on our minds as we approach his final days. Jesus, the prophet of peace, is the victim of unbelievable violence.

In today’s Gospel reading, the scribes and Pharisees are setting up a situation of violence that was accepted by some in Jesus’ time: the stoning of a person caught in adultery. We read the story like we always have. We don’t really think about this hideous form of execution. But the injustice and violence hit home this past November when a raging group in the Middle East stoned a woman to death. That clinched it. How can one human being do that to another?

In today’s Gospel, the scribes and Pharisees are proposing just such an execution. They drag a woman caught in adultery into the center of a crowd where Jesus is teaching. Can you imagine this awful scene? The woman fearing for her life. The men all around, threatening.

The underlying reason the scribes and Pharisees dragged that woman there was to trap Jesus. In doing so, they were using this woman and risking her life.

The first reading tells us: “Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago consider not; see, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? In the desert I make a way” (Isa 43:18-19).

In his life and teaching, Jesus was “doing something new,” and the scribes and Pharisees could “not perceive it.” Their perception

was only of their own status and authority. Jesus was a threat to that because he knew the law, too, but he understood its intent and what lay behind it: a loving and caring God.

In Jesus’ encounter with the woman caught in adultery, he turns a page for all humankind; he renews hope for every person. Jesus rejects condescending and dismissive attitudes toward women and the prevailing legalistic approach. Jesus replaces those with a loving glance and merciful heart.

In that setting, Jesus challenges the scribes, Pharisees and others to take inventory of themselves, not of other people. For some, that was a new thought — not passing judgment on others and instead making an honest judgment of your own life. Is that not a difficult task for any of us, even in our “enlightened” age? How much easier (even satisfying?) it seems to be for us to pass judgment on other people. How hard it is for us to see our own true selves.

We live in a complex and conflicted world. We have to make value judgments all the time. But that is different from judging the lives and motives of others. Our egos are so needy that we often seek approval by declaring that others are not right or valuable.

The “new thing” that we learn from the scriptures today is: “Let the one ... who is without sin cast the first stone.” Judgment is mine, says the Lord. And fortunately, that judgment of God is done with compassion and mercy.

“See, I am doing something new!” “I put water in the desert and rivers in the wasteland.” We can all drink of this water — the redeeming mercy and love of God — and share it generously with others.

Solemnity

Our Path to Follow



Preaching Resources

CELEBRATION:
A Comprehensive
Worship Resource
CelebrationPublications.org

**ROMAN
LECTIONARY**
Palm/Passion Sunday
Luke 19:28-40
Isa 50:4-7
Psalm 22
Phil 2:6-11
Luke 22:14-23:56

**REVISED COMMON
LECTIONARY**
Palm/Passion Sunday
Luke 19:28-40
Isa 50:4-9a
Phil 2:5-11
Luke 22:14-23:56

**ANGLICAN
LECTIONARY**
Palm/Passion Sunday
Luke 19:29-40
Isa 45:21-25
or *Isa 52:13-53:12*
Phil 2:5-11
Luke (22:39-71) 23:1-49(50-56)

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Passion (Palm) Sunday is one of the all-out favorite celebrations of the church year. Following Christmas and Easter, Palm Sunday ranks with Ash Wednesday — all days made special because people leave the celebration with a tangible reminder of the experience. Our sacramental procession with the palms is one of those very Catholic, whole-body experiences that can mildly embarrass us and still nudge us to enter more deeply into a unique experience of our participation in the events of salvation history. Two questions we might ponder as we process and sing “Hosanna” are “Who is he that we celebrate?” and “What does it mean to walk this path?”

The first two readings offer meditations on the first question. Isaiah’s famous third song of the servant of God paints such a prophetic portrait of Jesus that it’s easy to understand why the early church used it: It explains their suffering savior. More than anything, this song is a proclamation of humble obedience and purity of heart. If we imagine Jesus reciting it, the first thing we hear is his awareness that everything he has come from God for the purpose of giving new life to the poor or weary. Next, he explains that his entire life, morning by morning, has been one of listening in order to understand and carry out God’s will. Then, just as he had with the disciples, he speaks of freely accepting his suffering. Finally he reveals the key to his integrity and why he can accomplish what he does: “The Lord God is my help ... I shall not be put to shame.”

Our reading from Philippians offers the early church’s poetic reflection on Christ as the perfect servant of God. Beginning with the assurance that he was indeed divine, it explains that status held no sway over him. Long before he began to teach others about humility, he freely dispossessed himself of privilege, assuming the condition of the needy and accepting the human vocation to listen to and obey God — no matter the consequences. Then, as if to prove Isaiah’s statement “I shall not be put to shame,” the song goes on to explain how that attitude opened the way for God to exalt him.

The two readings offer us more than enough material on which to meditate as we ask for whom we are processing on this day. This is Jesus, the obedient Son of God, the one in whom God was well pleased. This is the one who lived in utter transparency, whose life and death gave witness to his teaching about serving the lowly and disdaining prestige. This is the Christ whom God exalted so that everyone could proclaim him as Lord and see in him the glory of God.

The second question is more costly: “What does it mean to walk this path?” Luke’s Passion invites us to enter the scene and find ourselves in one or more of the characters. We may be among the disciples who, after following cryptic orders, enthroned Jesus on the back of a never-before-ridden colt — learning faith through ritual. Others may identify with the crowd crying, “Hosanna! Lord, save us!”

We’re here today in solidarity with this crowd who wants to honor Christ. The proclamation of the passion invites us to walk with Jesus through his last day of mortal life. Before ever entering the trial, he offers us communion, as he tells Peter, to strengthen us when we fail. Then he warns us that being a traitor is easier and less dramatic than we think; lording it over others will accomplish the task.

From Sunday through Friday, this is the Holy Week during which we are urged to walk the way of the cross with our ancestors and our

*Luke’s Passion
invites us to
enter the scene.*

contemporaries. We take our place among them and learn from Jesus as he prays, accepts the counterfeit sign of companionship, and heals the innocent one injured in the fray. Then, through the trial, the procession to Calvary, and his final expressions of forgiveness, promise and trust, we are invited to hear which of those words he addresses to us today and what difference they might make.

We process today as a reminder that salvation is a historical, whole-body experience. It's not just our mind, but our hands and feet and voices that must participate, because this drama is ongoing. Because we cannot avoid meeting the suffering Christ as we walk through life, we keep the palm as a reminder that we want to honor and be faithful to him in all his lowly incarnations. We continue to seek communion because morning after morning, we need God's help to become faithful disciples of God's servant. We process today, looking forward to the fulfillment of his Easter, when sin and suffering are but memories and "Alleluia" is our only song.

ISA 50:4-7

We can read this third servant song as a Passion portrait of Christ. The well-trained tongue had been obvious throughout his ministry — that tongue that could regale and rebuke, that could speak a word of healing or, as in the narrative of Jesus' trials, maintain a silence more powerful than any speech could be. The word the servant concentrates on is the one to rouse the weary, to give hope when all seems hopeless. We hear strains of Jesus' own prayer in the idea that morning after morning, the servant listens to God, ready to carry out the divine will. Then we can't miss the irony in "I have not rebelled," precisely because Jesus was condemned as a rebel.

Next we contemplate Jesus, the nonviolent one who tried to reveal to his torturers that there is a power greater than coercion, a strength that renders brutality impotent. This Jesus who underwent unjust

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Solemnity Palm/Passion Sunday

Our Path to Follow



persecution is the teacher who shows how to unmask the frightened, fragile bullies, revealing them for who they are.

Finally, in the last verses of the poem, we are reminded of why and how the servant can accomplish his task. The Lord God is his help. Because he relies on God, he will have divine power — and *only* divine power — to aid him. Although we don't frequently allude to it, this is a poem about the absolute purity of heart of the servant of God.

We know that the early Christian community found Isaiah's servant songs a key that helped them understand Jesus' suffering and death. The events of his passion seem almost planned to reflect this poem. For the early community, as for us, the suffering of the innocent, the seeming victory of brutality and inhumanity, is a most profound and wrenching test of faith. The servant songs don't offer an explanation, only a path to follow. They call for a trust in God that is so pure that it puts evil to shame.

PHIL 2:6-11

If the song of Isaiah 50 can be seen as a prophetic model for the type of servant Jesus would be, this hymn

from Philippians offers an early Christian theological reflection on how Jesus more than fulfilled that role. There could hardly be a better selection from Paul to accompany and interpret the reading of the Passion.

Paul begins by saying "Christ Jesus" was "in the form of God" (vv. 5-6), meaning he was divine and pre-existent. The next phrase uses a term found nowhere else in the New Testament to say that Jesus did not regard equality with God something to be "snatched" or used for his own advantage. Rather, this person who is God and the image of God for humanity reveals the divine personality through a purposeful decision to abandon all that could be his for the sake of taking on everything implied in being human.

In this, Jesus, the new Adam, reverses the first parents' attitude, embracing his humanity with its most limited and fragile implications. Paul goes on to point out that not only did he freely take on humanity, but became obedient to the point of experiencing the most despicable, scandalous death known to his culture. Through the use of this hymn, Paul is proclaiming that Jesus' death was a willing act of obedience, the most thoroughgoing putting aside of self possible, in order to witness to the potential of human life and the power of God. Because of this, says Paul, God could super-exalt him. That idea reflects what Jesus taught his disciples time and again as he insisted that the honors they sought were less than insignificant in the light of what God had in store for them, if only they could stop their blind grasping.

Paul's hymn also offers a meditation on the question of power that we will meet in the Gospel. The drama of the Passion will expose the weakness of the powers of manipulation, human authority and brute strength as they are defeated by the One who knows who he is. Jesus Christ, one in being with God, became human so freely and thoroughly that people of every time and culture can look to him as model and as Lord.



LUKE 19:28-40 / 22:14-23:56

Luke offers us some unique details about the palm procession. Like Matthew and Mark, he notes the scene's solemnity, pointing out that the colt on which Jesus rode had never been mounted before — as if it were consecrated for this precise moment. Luke then adds the detail that the disciples put Jesus on it, as if enthroning him. Additionally, Luke doesn't emphasize the entry into Jerusalem as such, but rather the move from the Mount of Olives to the temple (19:45). This follows Luke's emphasis on temple from the beginning to the end of the Gospel.

Another of Luke's special touches is his statement that the "whole multitude of his disciples" (19:37) took part in the joyous celebration — a subtle inclusion of those who would come later, even those who process today. In this, Luke is inviting the participant/reader into the procession that celebrates Christ's entry into the heavenly temple, the completion of his mission, which includes the peace and glory that the angels proclaimed at his birth (2:13).

When it comes to the events of the day of the Passion, from the supper through the crucifixion, Luke continues with his own emphases. In the early verses, he somewhat downplays the betrayal and emphasizes Jesus' deep desire to share the supper with his disciples. Luke's talk of betrayal will come after the disciples have shared the bread and cup, making the point that betrayal of him is directly related to the competition that corrupts their dedication to service. This reflects John's portrayal and explanation of the washing of the feet. In regard to Peter's vacillating discipleship, Luke not only records the prediction of his denial, but adds Jesus' assurance that he has prayed for him that his faith will not fail so that he can eventually strengthen the others.

Continuing his highly personal account, Luke emphasizes that the disciples must pray that they will not enter into temptation. That recalls

the Lord's Prayer, as does the detail of Jesus repeating its core petition as he prays, "not my will, but thine be done" (22:42). Only Luke records Jesus' tragic question to Judas: "Would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?" (22:48). Only Luke mentions that Jesus healed the man Peter attacked. Then, when Peter fulfilled his thrice-sworn denial, Luke adds that Jesus turned to look at him as the cock crowed.

During the trial, Luke more than the other Gospel writers reveals the weakness of imperial power. Pilate, who claims to have great power, knows what is right but cannot find it within himself to accomplish it. In this trial, Pilate fails while Jesus stands out as the only one who knows how to exercise true power and authority, the only one who has the strength and courage to carry out what he knows is good.

On the way to Golgotha, we witness another procession — the antithesis of the procession with palms. Again, the great multitude is there, but hardly in the role of disciples. In the place of Jesus' frightened and absent followers, a presumed stranger is compelled to play a role that looks like discipleship. Shouldering the cross, Simon, unlike Peter, cannot hide, but neither is he the willing servant that Joseph of Arimathea will be when he braves the authorities to request permission to bury Jesus' body.

All through the day of the Passion, Luke invites the readers to find their place in the drama. Thus he adds the meeting with the women along the way. Luke, who has so emphasized the role of women as disciples, now has Jesus turn to look at them just as he earlier turned toward Peter. As they weep for him, he deflects their attention from himself to the implications of what is happening. This is the opposite of the time of blessedness; now evil is having its day, and that means woe for humankind. While this may be remembered as a prediction of the fall of Jerusalem, the truth of the cross is that in all times there are moments when it seems that evil has won the day.

Jesus' last human words are recorded very differently by the evangelists. Mark and Matthew have the lonely cry "My God, why have you forsaken me?" while John portrays Jesus as declaring the fulfillment of his mission, saying, "It is finished." Luke records three statements summing up Jesus' mission of forgiveness, the hope he offers and his faith. The Gospel of the day ends with death and absence. Too late, a centurion proclaims his innocence. Faithful disciples do what they can to dignify the tragedy; Joseph buries the body, the women make ready to anoint it for the last time. They do all that is humanly possible, and they know it is not enough.

Sermon Starters

Deacon Dick Folger

Jesus entered Jerusalem amid the cheering crowds while riding on a borrowed and lowly beast, a small colt.

In a similar way, when Pope Francis arrived in Washington D.C. last year, he declined the traditional impressive black limousine. Instead he climbed into a small Fiat 500-L sedan for his triumphal journey into the capital.

"Preach the Gospel at all times. If necessary, use words" is a saying frequently attributed to St. Francis of Assisi. While there's no evidence he actually said this, it's certainly implied by his teaching and the way he lived.

Without using a single word, Pope Francis gave us an eloquent and unforgettable homily as he squeezed into the small car.

Preaching to Youth

Jim Auer

KEY VERSE(S) / MAIN IDEA (Isa)

“The Lord has given me a well-trained tongue, that I might know how to speak to the weary a word that will rouse them.” “The Lord God is my help, therefore I am not disgraced. I have set my face like flint, knowing that I shall not be put to shame.” (Psalm 22) “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” (Phil) “Christ Jesus ... humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted him.” Suffering: meaning, value, and ... glory? Yes, glory.

STARTER In some card and board games, players’ positions can change. Apparent losers can become winners after all. (“Chutes and Ladders” is one example.) Isaiah and Paul talk about something much like that. But it’s more than a game. Much more.

LEADING QUESTIONS * How can someone’s suffering become a gift for someone else? * Has your suffering (e.g., a significant loss or “bad break”) ever enabled you to understand and help someone in a similar position?

DIRECTIONS TO EXPLORE * Examples of suffering becoming a gift for others: Athletes whose careers were prematurely ended by injury can console and inspire those who are similarly afflicted (and those who are not). People with paraplegia and quadriplegia can do the same. Recovery programs for addicts are often led by those who have “been there.” * Jesus — God — knows what it’s like to feel abandoned; to be “unfriended,” the victim of vicious gossip, and falsely accused. * In the midst of our own suffering, we may, like Jesus, feel abandoned even though we know better (“knowing I shall not be put to shame” vs. “My God, my God, why ...?”)

QUOTATION “Reality is an illusion, albeit a very persistent one” (Albert Einstein). The apparent “reality” of winners and losers in this life is often drastically misleading. Did Jesus look like a winner when he hung on the cross? Did his followers feel like winners?

HOMILY

Ted Wolgamot

Palms Tell the Story

When I was young, I used to spend a lot of time at my grandma’s house. She was a refugee from Ireland, who, like so many others, came to this country to find work.

To this day, one thing in particular stands out in my mind whenever I think about my grandma: her deep faith. On every wall of her house, for example, it seemed there were pictures of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary and the baby Jesus, and a multitude of other faith-related artworks that were popular at that time.

But what caught my eye even as a kid was that these works of art were often enhanced by the presence of a single palm leaf — leaves like the ones we hold in our hands on this Sunday.

I later came to realize that these same palm leaves show up in the unlikeliest of places: behind bedroom mirrors, tucked away in taxicab visors, woven into crosses, and placed behind crucifixes and other holy pictures.

All of this has made me wonder why these palms are so important to people, why bits of palm have been given so much prominence. What is it about them?

Maybe it’s because these simple palms remind us of The Greatest Story Ever Told — a story so boundless that we Christians repeat it every year and revere it as the most significant spiritual event that ever took place. But maybe it’s also because the palms go even further than that. These palms also tell our story, the story of our own faith life.

Five weeks ago, we received ashes on our foreheads and were once again reminded of our sinfulness and our need for a radical change in our lives. But those ashes did not just come from the bottom of someone’s fireplace. They were

the result of blessed burned palms.

Today we are five weeks older. The palms we now hold in our hands are new green leaves, reminding us that we are a part of this great story; that it isn’t just something that took place 2,000 years ago; that this drama is ongoing; and that we are each involved in our own way in being a part of the conspiracy and the betrayal that happened that night.

These palms can remind us, for example, that we have played the role of Peter in our own lives: lying and denying. They can remind us that we have played the role of John: abandoning. They can remind us that we have played the role of all the rest: arguing about who among us is the greatest. They can even remind us that we have played the role of Judas: betraying.

But here’s the good news about these palms: They can also remind us of the miracle of reconciliation that can be ours.

They can do that by reminding us of that great meal we celebrate together to this day, the meal at which Jesus told us, “I am among you as one who serves.” They can do that by reminding us of Jesus’ words of indescribable mercy spoken to the thieves crucified on either side of him: “Today you will be with me in Paradise.”

These palms that five weeks ago reminded us that we are dust, and to dust we will return, now remind us that we are also graced by love, an abundant love that goes before us and beckons us to follow.

Lent begins with palms and ends with palms.

The question is: What will we do with their promise and their challenge?

Real Change

Our Easter Gospel readings may leave us surprisingly disappointed. As we go to the garden to celebrate the first day of the new creation, these narratives leave us disoriented in the ambiguous land of an open tomb. The closest we get to Easter faith is the statement that the Beloved Disciple saw and believed something: The Gospel does not tell us what he believed and adds that neither he nor the others understood the scriptural teaching that Jesus “had to rise from the dead.” These two Gospel fragments are almost as unsatisfactory as the original ending of Mark’s Gospel, which said that the women who had seen the angels went away and said nothing to anyone because they were afraid.

Faced with these disenchanting accounts, we might look to the first two readings for Easter Sunday to save the day. From Acts we hear the now courageous and still loquacious Peter proclaim a simple and satisfactory creed, the real point of which seems to be that faith in the resurrection implies giving witness. Following that, Paul exhorts the Colossians about living out the implications of their baptism. These two readings at least recognize the resurrection instead of leaving us standing with the disciples, staring into a vacant space.

Because we know that the story goes on and gets better, we ought to suspect that these Gospels were chosen to teach us something very particular about Easter faith. By bringing us up short with an unfinished story, they seem to be inviting us into an event still in process rather than a *fait accompli*. Through our observance of Holy Week, we walked the way of Jesus’ last days and faced the apparent triumph of evil. On Friday we listened to Jesus say, “It is finished,” and heard how they disposed of his body. Now we accompany Mary and then Peter and the beloved to encounter a scene of absence seemingly worse than the one symbolized by the body of the deceased Jesus.

These Easter readings, like all the resurrection accounts, caution us against a facile faith, an assumption that the Third Day was a quick fix for evil. It took the disciples time to grasp the reality of Christ’s resurrection both in what it meant for him and what it implied for them. We see that clearly in Paul’s call to the Colossians. Reminding them that they were raised with Christ, he still warns them that their new status is tenuous; they have received it, but only with effort will they experience its efficacy. They don’t yet live in the heavenly realm. Therefore they must continually bring Christ’s life to bear on everything that would otherwise be limited to worldly values. Peter’s homily/creed says much the same as he explains that the experience of meeting the Risen Christ necessarily implied a mission to preach his message of forgiveness.

With the stories of the open tomb, our Easter Sunday Gospel readings unexpectedly lead us to contemplate Jesus’ absence. That of course leads us to Mary of Magdala’s implied question: “Where is he?” The other two readings for Sunday morning may not offer a direct response, but they do give us clues; without telling us exactly where to find the Risen Christ, they point out what happens when he has been found.

Peter says that those who know the Risen Christ become apostles of forgiveness. They recognize themselves as forgiven sinners, they freely offer forgiveness, and they live giving witness to their effective conviction that the evil found in the world will never have the last word. As we celebrate Easter, the prime baptismal day, Paul reminds the Christian community that baptism confers both grace and a vocation. The grace is

Easter is a mystery to be comprehended slowly.

Preaching Resources

CELEBRATION:
A Comprehensive
Worship Resource
CelebrationPublications.org

**ROMAN
LECTIONARY**
Easter Sunday
Acts 10:34a, 37-43
Psalms 118
Col 3:1-4
or *1 Cor 5:6b-8*
John 20:1-9

**REVISED COMMON
LECTIONARY**
Easter Sunday
Acts 10:34-43
or *Isa 65:17-25*
1 Cor 15:19-26
John 20:1-8
or *Luke 24:1-12*

**ANGLICAN
LECTIONARY**
Easter Sunday
Acts 10:34-43
or *Isa 51:9-11*
Col 3:1-4
Luke 24:1-10

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that of being offered Christ's perspective on the world. The vocation is to make that perspective operative in our day-to-day lives.

In reality, today's readings reveal as much as they conceal. They tell us we will never encounter the Risen Lord in the realm of death. Whether that is war, tragedy, sickness or evil, all we will find there are signs, even if cryptic, that death has been overcome. At the same time, the readings invite us to open our eyes to the unexpected signs of Christ's presence in mercy, forgiveness and a vision that goes beyond our earthly expectations. We have the next 50 days to celebrate and continue to grapple with the meaning of Easter. Our readings will continue to involve us in the ongoing find-and-hide-and-see rhythm of understanding what it means to know the Risen Lord. As we strive to decipher the signs, we may be guided by Peter and Paul's unambiguous conviction that where there is real presence, there is real change.

ACTS 10:34a, 37-43

As we walk in on Peter's speech in Acts, we find ourselves in the midst of a string of unusual events capped by a discourse. Peter is speaking to the Roman centurion Cornelius as the outcome of a rather complicated plan put into action by the Holy Spirit (Acts 10). Instead of a homily, Peter recited a creed explaining the core of his belief about Jesus and his relationship to God and the world. It seems that what Peter said in these verses was sufficient because at precisely the point where our reading comes to an end, the Holy Spirit interrupted him and descended on all the gentiles present in the room. Peter could hardly have asked for a better confirmation of his summary of faith.

Peter's creed is quite simple and direct. First, Peter situates Jesus in human and divine history and explains Jesus' mission as "doing good" by healing those oppressed by the devil. He then briefly describes Jesus' execution and the fact that God did not leave things as they were. All of that is, in a sense, preamble to the

March 27, 2016

Easter

Easter Sunday

Real Change



final statements.

Peter explains that God's raising of Jesus had concrete consequences. The resurrection was not simply an event affirming Jesus; it included a process of understanding and a mission. Peter proclaimed that the Risen One was also the crucified, and that the solidarity they had shared before continued after his death and resurrection. Jesus was made visible and interacted with chosen people who shared communion with him after he was raised from the dead. The second point Peter makes is that the resurrection implies a mission for everyone who knows the Risen Lord. This is a definitive charge to carry on what he started. For those who believe in the Risen Lord, there is no option but to preach about him.

In Peter's words, they are to preach about Jesus as God's final word to humanity (judge), to whom the prophets (the entire history of God's Chosen People) testified. They are to proclaim that forgiveness comes through him, that through Jesus, all oppression is overcome — whether that is the oppression of being tethered to one's own checkered past or that of being limited by the evil that seems to permeate history. As the Holy

Spirit indicated by stopping Peter's discourse, that's all we really need to know about the Easter mystery.

COL 3:1-4

This short reading is easy to misinterpret by assuming that it is encouraging the baptized to abandon earthly cares in favor of a heavenly existence. In reality, it is quite the opposite. While the letter emphasizes the Cosmic Christ, it is very much this-worldly in the sense that the cross of Christ is an ever-present backdrop and that baptism into Christ has very concrete consequences for behavior in everyday life.

Paul begins with the assumption that the baptized have been raised with Christ. While for him that is a simple and clear consequence of their baptismal sharing in his Passion, for us it may require a bit more consideration. What we need to comprehend is that Paul sees baptism as the most life-changing event possible.

Baptism has a mystical dimension as a graced experience to which a person can respond with acceptance or rejection. Harkening back to the experience of the Risen Christ, which led to Paul's own baptism, this involves new life, which implies a thoroughly new orientation and perspective. This is what Paul means when he states that the Colossians have been raised with Christ: They have been brought into a new realm of existence in the world.

The more practical dimension of the experience is that each person must continue to grow in the grace that has been given. Thus, Paul says, "seek" and "set your mind on what is above" (v. 1). Paul is encouraging his readers to take on the mind of Christ, to do all that is possible to see things from Christ's perspective rather than from the ground level that has always weighed them down. If they can live convinced of Christ's victory over sin and death, then their lives will be thoroughly different from the lives of those around them who do not know faith. What will be in the future is not theirs to know, but keeping their mind on what is above will make all



the difference today and tomorrow.

JOHN 20:1-9

The Gospels we hear on Easter are both seemingly ambivalent accounts of the absence of Jesus. The Gospel read at the Vigil (Luke 24:1-12) tells only of the empty tomb. On Sunday morning, we seem to have the same story from another viewpoint. But this is John's Gospel, and knowing that clues us in to expect each detail will be charged with meaning on various levels. Thus, perhaps the way to start is with a few points from each movement of the story.

Mary of Magdala opens the scene. Unlike in the Synoptics' versions of the story, she goes out alone, carrying nothing—having no apparent task in mind as she approaches the garden. Then we have the odd description of the hour: early in the morning/in the dark. John used that contradiction to explain that although the first day of the new creation had dawned, Mary (and the rest of the disciples) were in the dark.

The next detail is equally contradictory. Mary saw that the *stone* had been removed and announced that the *Lord* had been taken away. That stone was the definitive sign of death, the door locking away a cadaver. Even when she saw that the stone had been moved, she was unable to imagine anything other than a grave robbery that doubled the sense of Jesus' absence. Thus Mary's first pronouncement as spokesperson for the community was the false statement that "they" had taken the Lord away and the unwittingly true admission that "we" don't know where he is (v. 2).

Mary made this announcement to Peter, the official representative of the community, and to the one male disciple who had risked remaining with Jesus from the courtyard of the high priest to the foot of the cross. The two of them ran to see what had transpired, the faithful one leading Peter but ceding to him when it came to entering the tomb. Both saw the remains of the burial garments, but they did not perceive the same thing

in them. In our last verse, we hear the final enigmatic incongruity: He saw and believed but "did not yet understand the Scripture that he had to rise from the dead."

The first question we might ask at the end of this story is: what did the disciple believe while failing to grasp the scriptural proclamation that Jesus would rise from the dead? Countless commentators have offered explanations about the meaning of the linens inside the empty tomb. Some see signs of the wedding chamber of the Risen Bridegroom sought by the community. Others see the contrast to the raising of Lazarus: Lazarus came forth from the tomb still encumbered by the trappings of death, while the folded cloths reveal that those are empty symbols in regard to Jesus.

Sister Sandra Schneiders suggests that the second cloth, the facecloth that awakened belief, would have immediately reminded traditional Jews of the cloth that covered Moses' shining face in Exodus 34 (*Jesus Risen in Our Midst*, Michael Glazier, 2013). Just as Moses wore the veil except when he met God face to face on the mountain, the Incarnation veiled Jesus' glory during his earthly ministry. At the resurrection, it was set aside because Christ had already been lifted up and his glory was no

longer veiled. This is what the beloved disciple was able to perceive when he saw the cloths lying as they were. He believed that Christ had entered his glory just as he had said he would. In the Gospel of John, that had been clear from the moment at which Jesus had said, "It is finished."

For Jesus' followers, the Gospels of the Easter weekend offer only a beginning. They don't tell us what it means to rise from the dead and they don't bring us into an encounter with the Risen Christ. We are left wanting more. But the greatest importance of these seemingly underdeveloped readings may be the feeling of incompleteness they leave with us. We are reminded that Mary, the first apostle of the resurrection, started out on a blind journey and first proclaimed a message of Jesus' disturbing and unexplained absence. We see Peter run to the scene only to enter into it without understanding. Finally, we hear that even the beloved disciple grasped only a portion of the mystery.

Easter is not the quick and easy answer to Good Friday. John tells us that it is a mystery to be comprehended slowly, with lots of false starts along the way. Peter and Paul tell us that we will know we've begun to comprehend it only as we see how much we are changed by it.

Sermon Starters

Deacon Dick Folger

A video about a man and his dog in Argentina offers us this touching story. They were inseparable, doing everything together, the dog waiting patiently outside as the man made his rounds. One night he had a heart attack, and an ambulance rushed him to the hospital. The dog raced behind and took up its station outside the hospital.

Days passed. It rained, and the dog sought shelter under a ledge. Then one morning, the dog lifted his head with hopeful eyes. He sensed the arrival of his master. But instead, it was a smiling woman in a wheelchair, being discharged after liver transplant surgery. Part of her recognized this tail-wagging dog, and the dog recognized his master in her.

After his resurrection, Jesus appeared as a stranger on the road to Emmaus. The disciples sensed a vital connection to him as he explained the scriptures to them, and then they recognized him in the breaking of the bread. We know the master because we are now united to his risen body in the world.

Preaching to Youth

Jim Auer

KEY VERSE(S) / MAIN IDEA (John)

“The other disciple ... arrived at the tomb first ... and he saw and believed.” “They did not yet understand the scripture that he had to rise from the dead.” Bringing our full and real selves to the Easter table.

STARTER I greet the fervent young souls on fire with Easter joy, your minds uncluttered by any distractions or problems, focused serenely and totally on the mystery we celebrate today. (Pause.) That was for all the perfect young Christians among us. Now the rest of this homily is for regular, ordinary folks. Including myself.

LEADING QUESTIONS * How much do you know about exorcism? (Explain if needed.) In a little while I’m going to ask you to perform one, sort of. Yes, there may be demons lurking within you — not the actual, supernatural variety, or the computer-generated variety, but adversaries nevertheless that can keep us from feeling and celebrating Easter.

DIRECTIONS TO EXPLORE * “Demons” can be: disappointment with ourselves over a very imperfect Lent in spite of initial good intentions; guilt over not having been faithful in attending Mass or “just not being very religious.” * “Secondary guilt” — guilt about not feeling much guilt! * There will be more Lents, and (great news here!) Catholics are allowed to do penance outside of Lent. * Totally normal distractions: financial worries, problems at home, problems at work, academic problems, relationship problems, spiritual and faith problems. * “Exorcise” these demons right now, not by telling them to go to hell, but by acknowledging and owning them, then turning them over to the risen Lord Jesus. * If you find faith easy, be grateful, humble and patient with those who struggle. * If faith comes slowly, after periods of feeling nothing religious at all, even Mother Teresa felt that for several years. But she hung in there, doing what she felt she should with her life. * Jesus died and rose for all of us. Trust in that.

HOMILY

Pat Marrin

At the Dawn

The Gospel for Easter Day is really the culmination of the rich scriptural narrative from the Vigil service the night before. Salvation history comes full circle from the Garden of Eden, where sin brought death into the world, to the garden tomb of Jesus, the new Adam.

Mary of Magdala is the first witness to the resurrection as she arrives at first light to discover the empty tomb. She runs to find Peter, representing the church, and the Beloved Disciple, who shows that the heart sees before the mind understands. They depart, leaving Mary in tearful bewilderment. But her baptism of tears will end in the Easter proclamation that love is truly stronger than death. Jesus is alive, and he is now the source of life for us all.

Our own Easter faith must make the same journey to faith through love, even though all we see at first is loss. Death appears to triumph, but first light reveals that something mysterious has happened here. These burial cloths and the face cloth rolled up nearby tell a different story. Death could not contain Jesus; no winding shroud or heavy stone could keep him entombed. Liberation has occurred, a new and final Exodus that confirms that death is not the end. Our older brother Jesus has made passage through death to eternal life and has opened up the way for all those who follow him.

How appropriate that we hear this proclamation at Eucharist, where Jesus is always among us. His Real Presence in the Word, in the bread and wine and in one another, reveals our holy Communion as the risen body of Christ.

Jesus is now in the world through us and wherever his Spirit moves and inspires people. We will hear further accounts of the appearance

of the risen Jesus — to Mary and the other women, to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, to the apostles in the upper room and on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. We will be challenged to find him in the world, especially in the poor. The stranger on the road, welcomed to our table, will reveal Jesus. The wounded neighbor, crucified by poverty and injustice for the sins of the world, will reveal Jesus.

The liturgy gives us 50 days to find Jesus in the Word, in the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup, in our prayers and in our going forth to serve others. We are formed and prepared for Pentecost by entering the sacred rites and by looking for Jesus in our world. Everything reveals God, and everywhere is holy ground; all our thoughts, words and actions are illuminated by grace and overflow with new life.

The Holy Week we began in sorrow ends in joy. The altar table of Jesus’ self-sacrificing love is strong enough to bear our suffering and despair, our unanswered prayers and inexplicable losses. In retelling the story of Jesus, our minds are opened and our hearts burn within us. What we bring to God through Jesus is consecrated and transformed. The broken lives we place on the altar, we take up again suffused with light and power.

Easter sets our lives in motion. The first disciples ran to and from the tomb. Two disciples ran all the way from Emmaus to Jerusalem to tell the others they had seen the Lord. The first faith community, broken by failure and sorrow, regrouped on Easter Sunday to begin their mission to the world. A new day has dawned, for them and for us.

“This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad” (Psalm 118).



Daily Bread

*Homiletic starters
and scriptural
reflection points for
each day of the month*

CELEBRATION:
A Comprehensive
Worship Resource
celebrationpublications.org

Daily Bread is now available in an email sent directly to your computer each morning. To receive this email, sign up at www.celebrationpublications.org/dailybread. Consider placing this email link in your parish bulletin or on your parish website.

Find the daily readings at www.usccb.org/bible/readings/

The Lectionary provides a kind of spiritual script for the universal church that keeps us, literally, all on the same page as we journey through the liturgical seasons. These short reflections, written by four authors who meet regularly to share the readings, are intended to help daily preachers and others who pray from the assigned scriptures each day to orient themselves to the Living Word addressed to the church in the world. Authors are identified by their initials, with short bios provided on the last page.

March 2016

Third Week of Lent (continued)

Tues., March 1: Dan 3:25, 34-43; Matt 18:21-35

Peter approached Jesus and asked him, "Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him?" Most of us can remember a time in our lives when an important relationship was broken because of betrayal, dishonesty or an unkind remark. It was personal. It was unfair. And the hurt went so deep that we feel like we can't forget, much less forgive. Did Jesus mean we are to forgive someone who hurts us 77 times, but on the 78th we can retaliate? Most scholars agree that Jesus never intended for us to keep score. Instead, Jesus wanted our willingness to forgive to come from our experience of God's forgiveness. Instead of trying to forgive and forget, which we're never quite able to do, we gradually learn to forgive and move on. *Guide us, Holy God, on our journey toward genuine forgiveness and reconciliation.* JL

Wed., March 2: Deut 4:1, 5-9; Matt 5:17-19

Take care and be earnestly on your guard not to forget the things which your own eyes have seen, nor let them slip from your memory ... but teach them to your children and to your children's children. Long before the scriptures were written down and printed, the stories of our faith were told and retold, from father to son and mother to daughter. Likewise, we are all teachers of the faith, whether or not we have ever taught Sunday school. We teach children by our words, our actions, our attitudes, our example. *May we be mindful of the lessons we are teaching others, O God.* JL

Thurs., March 3: Jer 7:23-28; Luke 11:14-23

Every kingdom divided against itself will be laid waste and house will fall against house. Those of us who live in the United States are in the midst of the presidential campaign. Over and over again we see the candidates' commercials, which very clearly delineate one side from another and divide the nation against itself. We do this in the church, as well; one branch is sure it has the truth, and others are vilified. But Jesus prayed for us to be one. Why? Because any group divided against itself is expending tremendous energy to keep the division alive. Imagine the good that could be accomplished if we worked with each other rather than against each other. *May we recognize that we are more alike than not, O God.* JL

Fri., March 4: Hosea 14:2-10; Mark 12:28-34

"You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love God, love neighbor: these commandments are well known. But how often do we forget or ignore those final words: "as yourself"? According to Jesus, we are *commanded* to love ourselves. Loving yourself does not mean that you become self-centered and egotistical. Instead, it means that you see yourself as a beautiful, beloved child of God — unique, precious and valuable. For Jesus, love of God, others and self form a never-ending circle that begins and ends with God. God loves and accepts us. We respond by loving God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind. We live our love for God by loving neighbor and self. *By our deeds, by our very lives, may we live our love for God, neighbor and self.* JL

Sat., March 5: Hosea 6:1-6; Luke 18:9-14

Jesus addressed this parable to those who were convinced of their own righteousness and despised everyone else. The Pharisee is the model of faithfulness and piety. He devoted himself to the law of Moses. Meanwhile, tax collectors in Jesus' day were hated, for two reasons: They were collecting taxes for the Roman government, and it was assumed that the job involved dishonesty, even extortion. Sometimes, we are like the Pharisee — self-centered, proud, quite sure that God is terribly pleased with our faithfulness. But at other times, we are like the tax collector — all too aware of our shortcomings and deeply needing God's strength and guidance and mercy. *O God, help us to recognize the sin in ourselves instead of being so quick to judge others.* JL



Fourth Week of Lent

Mon., March 7: Isa 65:17-21; John 4:43-54

There shall always be rejoicing and happiness in what I create. It saddens me when tragedy strikes and I hear people express the sentiment: "It must have been God's will." People even said this to my mother upon my father's sudden death. Was it God's choice to make us suffer? Of course not! Over and over, scripture tells us that God does not desire our pain or wish to punish us for our weaknesses. Instead we are urged to turn to God as the source of life, wholeness and joy amid the turmoil of our lives. As disciples of Christ, we are called to be messengers and instruments of this same life and hope. You have turned our mourning into dancing, my God. For this I give you thanks. MJ

Tues., March 8: Ezek 47:1-9, 12; John 5:1-16

Do you want to be well? When Jesus asks the lame man by the Bethesda pool this question, it sounds like a no-brainer. But is it really? How often do we ask for healing for persistent weaknesses, but secretly find comfort in their familiarity? Changing long-held behaviors is scary and leaves us vulnerable when we step into the unknown. True healing only begins when we give permission for the "healing waters that flow from the sanctuary" of Christ to refresh and make whole the wounds within us. It is offered, not forced upon us, and we need to step into its flow with both feet, without knowing its depth or direction. Give us the courage, O Lord, to accept and to trust in your healing touch. MJ

Wed., March 9: Isa 49:8-15; John 5:17-30

Can a mother forget her infant? ... Even should she forget, I will never forget you. These verses from Isaiah often come to mind when I visit my mother, who lives with Alzheimer's disease. In the building where she now lives, I see female residents cradling dolls like babies in their arms. Many no longer remember the names or faces of their own grown children, but they have not yet forgotten how to nurture. In time, they will forget even this powerful instinct. What comfort it is to know that even if they forget who God is, or even their own names, God will never forget them or who they are. When we neglect to acknowledge you, O God, thank you for never forgetting or abandoning us. MJ

Thurs., March 10: Exod 32:7-14; John 5:31-47

You do not want to come to me to have life. My husband has noted that people do not always value services or gifts that have been bestowed without cost. Charging a fee for something, even a nominal one, seems to give it greater worth to the recipient. The same could be said of our faith. We are often willing to spend a great deal of time and money on secular solutions to our mental and physical concerns, but do not avail ourselves of quality time to rest in God's healing presence, either in prayer or simple silence. God's love is available 24/7 and is freely and abundantly given, yet we sometimes undervalue its power. O Lord, help us to slow down long enough to absorb your gifts of peace and wholeness. MJ

Fri., March 11: Wis 2:1a, 12-22; John 7:1-2, 10, 25-30

They [did not] count on the recompense of holiness nor discern the innocent souls' reward. My mother once claimed that a guilty conscience was like a pebble in your shoe. It is so persistently annoying that the only remedy is to stop what you're doing and fix the problem. Like the people in today's reading from Wisdom, I sometimes go to incredible lengths to justify or minimize my "screw-ups." Only when I summon the courage to deal with my mistakes head-on does the heavy burden of guilt begin to ease. I have found that there is no greater sleeping medication than a mind that is at peace with its soul. As St. Augustine wrote, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you." MJ

Sat., March 12: Jer 11:18-20; John 7:40-53

Does our law condemn a man before it first hears him and finds out what he is doing? As I write these reflections, our world has been shaken by abhorrent violence perpetrated against innocent people in Paris. While many people around the world gather together in prayer and solidarity with the victims, other voices are calling for revenge, even upon equally innocent people simply because they are Muslims. Like Nicodemus in today's Gospel, we need to counter knee-jerk reactions of fear and hatred with voices of calm and reason. Our faith calls us to stand against all violence and to work toward a justice rooted in mercy. Do not let our minds close or our hearts harden in fear, O Lord, but give us the courage to love more deeply. MJ

Fifth Week of Lent

Mon., March 14: Dan 13:1-9, 15-17, 19-30, 33-62; John 8:12-20 (or John 8:1-11 if Year A readings were used on Sunday)

Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her. The scene of Susanna and the Elders, in which Daniel rescues a young woman from false accusations of adultery, is paired with the account of Jesus' rescue of a woman guilty of adultery. Daniel refuses to join the mob: "I will have no part in the death of this woman!" Jesus respects the dignity of the woman who stands before him. Susanna is saved by her innocence as her accusers are confounded by their own lies; the woman is saved by the mob's guilt, as they slink away. "Has no one condemned you?" Indeed, who am I to judge? I love you, Jesus, with all my heart. MD

Tues., March 15: Num 21:4-9; John 8:21-30

Whenever anyone who had been bitten by a serpent looked at the bronze serpent, he lived. The Pharisees assume that when Jesus says, "Where I am going you cannot come," he's contemplating suicide. In fact, Jesus is planning something even more unexpected: "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I AM." He applies to himself the image of the snake Moses made when seraph serpents were biting the rebellious Israelites. That such a repellent image is the revelation of God leaves the door open for us to find Christ in any and every moment, no matter how ugly. Lord, you know me and you love me; show me your way! MD



Wed., March 16: Dan 3:14-20, 91-92, 95; John 8:31-42

The truth will set you free. Even when threatened with the fiery furnace, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego will not bow to King Nebuchadnezzar, because “our God can save us.” Then they add the words that have inspired folks for centuries when they are faced with impossible odds: “But even if our God will not save us, know, O King, that we will not serve your god!” Jesus resists the same kind of pressure; he does not yield an inch from “the truth that I heard from God,” even though “you are trying to kill me.” Lent reminds us that faith in our God saves us, no matter what the outcome of our crises or challenges may seem to be. *Dear God, give me strength to live your truth!* MD

Thurs., March 17: Gen 17:3-9; John 8:51-59

Abraham rejoiced to see my day; he saw it and was glad. Abraham, “the father of a host of nations,” is such a huge presence in the whole history of Israel that it’s sad to see Jesus’ foes dismiss their own heritage: “Abraham died.” Their charges are becoming more and more reckless: “Now we know that you are possessed.” But Jesus gives as good as he gets: “If I should say that I do not know the Father, I would be like you, a liar.” Ultimately, Jesus plays the Yahweh-card: “Before Abraham came to be, I AM.” Blasphemy! “So they picked up stones to throw at him.” Do I have any appreciation for the transcendent conflicts Jesus actually endured? *Dear Jesus, let me finish this Lent more committed to your cause.* MD

Fri., March 18: Jer 20:10-13; John 10:31-42

You, a man, are making yourself God. As his enemies closed in for the kill, Jesus might have had Jeremiah’s persecution in mind: “I hear the whisperings of many: ‘Terror on every side! Denounce! let us denounce him!’ ” Jesus is at a loss; nothing’s working. They call his words “blasphemy,” and even raising Lazarus from the dead only makes his foes more determined to kill him. Lent is ending and we’re more confused than ever. Aren’t we supposed to be feeling better, holier? Jesus returns to his roots, across the Jordan, “where John first baptized.” Can he find his purpose again? Let me stay with Jesus while I find my own roots. It’s not too late to start all over again. *I love you, O Lord; you are my only strength.* MD

Sat., March 19: 2 Sam 7:4-5a, 12-14a, 16; Rom 4:13, 16-18, 22; Matt 1:16, 18-21, 24a or Luke 2:41-51a

Solemnity of Joseph, husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary

You are to name him Jesus. Today’s feast makes a lovely prelude to Holy Week. Joseph is the last in a long history of fathers, all the way back to Abraham, even to Adam, whose faith blesses this moment: “Do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home, for it is through the power of the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her.” Joseph does not say a word in the Gospels, but perhaps when Jesus grasped the cross, he remembered how Joseph taught him to make even the roughest wood a thing of beauty. *Joseph, teach us to make our lives a beautiful thing for God.* MD

Holy Week

Mon., March 21: Isa 42:1-7; John 12:1-11

You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me. What will we do differently this week? Will we slow down, pray more, set aside time for the Triduum and really experience the summit of the liturgical year? Jesus reminds us that the busyness, the craziness and the concerns that keep us from focusing on him will always be there. Let’s step away from our normal routines this week, the distractions and excuses, and plan time just for our Lord. Now we gather around Jesus, serve him like Martha, recline at table with him like Lazarus, and lavish him with love and devotion like Mary. *Let’s fill our homes with the fragrance of his glorious presence.* PR

Tues., March 22: Isa 49:1-6; John 13:21-33, 36-38

Amen, amen, I say to you, one of you will betray me. While Jesus speaks of Judas, he hints at Peter’s impending denial and suggests the other disciples may falter, too. They are oblivious to Judas’ blatant plotting. It’s just as hard to acknowledge such failings within ourselves. How long does it take for us to recognize when we slip, let alone outright deny Jesus? We don’t see ourselves actively undermining the Lord, but neither did Peter, who one moment was willing to lay down his life for Jesus and the next was denying any association with him. It’s a fitting challenge for each of us today. *Give me the grace to follow you, Lord.* PR

Wed., March 23: Isa 50:4-9a; Matt 26:14-25

What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you? Judas receives 30 pieces of silver to betray his friend. By his thinking, quick money is more important than an everlasting relationship with Jesus. How much value do we place on our bond with the Lord? What do we accept in place of an intimate connection with him? Each time we let temporal desires take his place, we essentially haggle his price. We negotiate his worth by short-term logic. In the end, we risk trading an eternal covenant for a contract filled with loopholes and limitations. *Jesus, give me the strength to value you above all else.* PR

Thurs., March 24: Exod 12:1-8, 11-14; 1 Cor 11:23-26; John 13:1-15

Mass of the Lord’s Supper

Do you realize what I have done for you? Can we fathom what Jesus Christ has done for us? We know he gave himself freely to atone for our sins and to ensure our salvation. We profess that in the Eucharist, our union with Christ intensifies. But while we are on earth, can we ever fully know the saving gift Jesus instituted in the Eucharist and fulfilled on the cross? Jesus guides us to a deeper understanding through his actions. He models what we should do and how we should live, even if we don’t quite get it right now. He assures the disciples that they will understand later, and offers us the same promise. *Lord, help us to follow your example and trust that when we are finally united with you in your kingdom, we’ll truly comprehend.* PR



Fri., March 25: Isa 52:13–53:12; Heb 4:14-16; 5:7-9; John 18:1–19:42

Good Friday of the Lord's Passion

And bowing his head, he handed over the spirit. It's easy to look at the cross in despair. That's certainly what those who persecuted and crucified Jesus wanted. They sought to shame, discredit and silence him. Yet even his torment and death reflected his mission. He didn't buckle under pressure and pain. Stripped, bloody and vulnerable, he still taught, loved and forgave, comforting both friends and criminals and exonerating his executioners. He modeled how to place complete trust in the Father's promises. Even in our darkest hour, no matter what anguish we experience, there's no better path than to follow the Father's will and put our suffering in his hands. *We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.* PR

Sat., March 26: Vigil Readings

Easter Vigil

They found the stone rolled away from the tomb; but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. Death is not the end of the story. Darkness does not win. Our Lord lives. Some people still call it a nonsense fairy tale, but we know better. Still it's tempting to want to run to the tomb like Peter does upon hearing the women's puzzling and glorious news — not in doubt, but to be amazed at the power of the Almighty and to leave all pain and anxiety there. So roll back the stone, bury your fears, seal the entrance and walk away in faith and hope. *He is risen. Alleluia.* PR

Octave of Easter

Mon., March 28: Acts 2:14, 22-33; Matt 28:8-15

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went away quickly from the tomb, fearful yet overjoyed, and ran to announce the news to his disciples. "Fearful yet overjoyed." I suspect this is a common response to the good news. There is a deep-down quickening of new soul life within us when we hear the true truth. But along with that quickening is the flutter of fear: What will this true truth mean for my life and for the lives of those precious to me? What if, for instance, we cannot escape the idea that "welcome the stranger" includes people foreign to us, people who may worship God by a different name, people who bear a resemblance to those we fear? What if even suggesting that the Gospel requires the risk of such hospitality means we might be shunned by our friends and family who disagree? Fear certainly. But joy, too. Because the truth is the truth and it does set us free. *For courage, clear thinking, and more courage, we pray.* PBS

Tues., March 29: Acts 2:36-41; John 20:11-18

Jesus said to her, "Mary!" I have sympathy for pastors and teachers who are poor at remembering names. It means so much to be addressed by one's name, and leaders who struggle with that skill (I'm one of them) often know it. But even if names escape us, we can stop and be attentive to those placed on our path. We can realize that there may be no chance meetings, and that each person we encounter — the teller in the bank,

the person who delivers our mail, someone just standing in line with us — is someone to whom we can give undivided attention and thereby the feeling of being known and valued, if only for a moment. *For the grace to love as Jesus loved, we pray.* PBS

Wed., March 30: Acts 3:1-10; Luke 24:13-35

Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way. The Emmaus story is the stuff of great drama: confusion, heartbreak, a dash of humor ("What sort of things?" asks Jesus, who knows perfectly well; and the final "aha" enlightenment as Jesus explains the scriptures and is recognized). It's a story that illustrates what it is to be human, no matter the chronological or cultural distance between us and those two disciples on the road. It's the same road. Within any congregation, there is bound to be a manifestation of each of these moments — some are in the midst of confusion or heartbreak; some experiencing a certain lightness of being; some ready for the truth of the Gospel. If we preach this story, we can minister to everyone, counseling the currently blessed to be grateful and assuring those in dark times that darkness passes. *For those to whom we are called to minister, we pray.* PBS

Thurs, March 31: Acts 3:11-26; Luke 24:35-48

Now I know ... that you acted out of ignorance. Repent, therefore, and be converted. In this passage there is evidence of incredible forgiveness and incredible humility. Peter is addressing those who participated in, at least by their silence, the execution of his friend and savior, but he does so with loving honesty and the promise of comfort and salvation. The story is concluded in the next chapter: Many who heard Peter are humbled by the truth and accept baptism and forgiveness. Every one of us has the opportunity, at some point, to participate in this chain of mercy. Let's pray that we accept the invitation to forgive and to be forgiven. *For the grace to live mercy, we pray.* PBS

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