The Eschatological Imagination

The resurrection invites us to a transformed understanding of life

In this issue:
Parish formation  6-16
Columns by Pat and Rafael Sánchez, Gabe Huck, Melissa Musick Nussbaum, Peg Ekerdt, Denise Simeone, Biagio Mazza and Jim Smith

Worship preparation  17-27
Music, Planning, Prayers and Graphics

Preaching resources
Folders for each Sunday in April: Patricia Sánchez, Roger Vermalen Karban, Ted Wolgamot, Paige Byrne Shortal, Deacon Dick Folger and James Auer

Daily Bread reflections for preaching and prayer
EDITOR’S CORNER

April makes preaching the Paschal Mystery easier because it coincides (in the northern hemisphere) with spring, the season of renewal and restoration after the long winter months. Seeds go into the ground, and soon flowers and gardens appear: New life.

Yet Easter remains far more mysterious than a seasonal return or the metaphors this inspires. Something happened to Jesus after his death on the cross and burial in a borrowed tomb. Something happened that sent shock waves through his first followers into history that altered the lives of millions upon millions of people and has continued to challenge and transform millions more in our own time and generation.

Preachers will tell the story again, drawing from the scriptural accounts, interpreted by scholars and other believers who have built their lives on the blessed assurance that death does not end life but transforms it with glory because Jesus is alive. What is critical to preaching the resurrection is that it is not a past event but a present reality, a defining pattern that gives our ordinary lives a special quality and sense of purpose. Life in Christ is always here and now.

We are Easter people, able to let go of ourselves in serving others, in advocating for justice even at the risk of losing our place in line in the competition to consume, win and be important. We are disciples who welcome the invitation to find Jesus among the poor, the hungry, the sick, those in prison or coming over the border. We can live lives that might make little sense to others, because we know this is only the first stage of an eternity of love.

Living in the bright shadow of the risen Christ, we are able to die with him today in order to rise with him tomorrow, big of soul and warm of heart, more joyful than we could have imagined without his presence and the community he inspires to share his life. Let our song be simple and sure. Christ is risen. Alleluia!

The Eschatological Imagination
Mary McGlone

April Lectionary Themes
Patricia and Rafael Sánchez

We Must Wash Each Other’s Feet
Gabe Huck

The Quest for Light
Melissa Musick Nussbaum

Our Journey Forward
Denise Simeone

Your Faith Will Be Shaken
Peg Ekerdt

Becoming a New Creation
Biagio Mazza

Growing Pains
Jim Smith

Capable of a Turn
Erin Ryan

Music for the Triduum
J. Michael McMahon

PREPARATION

April Music
J. Michael McMahon

Planning and Prayers
Lawrence Mick
Paige Byrne Shortal

April Graphics
Mark Bartholomew

PREACHING

Five 4-page resource folders

Commentaries
Patricia Datchuck Sánchez, Roger Vermalen Karban

Sample Homilies
Pat Marrin, Paige Byrne Shortal, Ted Wolgamot

Youth Preaching
Jim Auer

Sermon Starters
Dick Folger

Daily Bread
Mary Joshi, Jeanne Lischer, Patricia Russell, Paige Byrne Shortal

Cover & Art
Julie Lonneman
The Eschatological Imagination

Christ’s resurrection invites us to a transformed understanding of life

By MARY McGLONE

"Hristosa înviat! Adevărata înviat!"  
For those whose Romanian is a little rusty, that’s translated “Christ is risen! Indeed, he is risen!” This is the dialogue with which Romanian Greek Catholics greet one another throughout the Easter season. (It’s actually the greeting for all who share the Orthodox tradition—each in their own language.)

When I first heard it, it seemed a lovely piety, something like my Irish ancestors might have said in their day. I also knew that when in Romania, I should do as the Romanians, and try to greet or respond appropriately whenever it was called for. That was years ago. Of late, the greeting has come to mean a great deal more to me.

In the past few years, I have been reading diverse reflections about the resurrection. In particular, I have been trying to grapple with what some theologians call the “eschatological imagination,” that is, a worldview that springs from the resurrection. I will not try here to summarize all that thought, but rather share some simple reflections about what it might mean for the Easter happening to permeate our consciousness.

I know this sounds pretty elementary. After all, if we didn’t have Easter and believe in the resurrection, we wouldn’t be Christians. We wouldn’t count the saints as a part of our lives; we would mourn death as our tragic, inescapable fate and the mockery of all human achievement. If we didn’t believe in eternal life, our sense of unassailable human dignity would undergo a revision; our moral system would need to be rethought, and the best we might hope for would be the ethics of the great existentialists—some of whom ended their days with suicide. The questions I want to explore are: At what level does the resurrection inhabit the depths of our consciousness, and what difference does it make?

The “eschatological imagination” is a highfalutin phrase that tries to describe a way of understanding the world that goes beyond everything we think of as “natural.”

Graphic Good Fridays

Someone suggested that I reflect on Easter using my experience in rural Peru, where I had the privilege to live among people who were economically very poor. My first response to that was to think that the folks I knew and prayed with were Good Friday Catholics. Their images were graphic: bloodied crucifixes; Jesus, the “Just Judge,” being flogged; the Pieta; Jesus laid out in a glass-sided coffin, etc. Good Friday processions were passionate, elaborate and long. Easter seemed to be a secondary celebration after the main event. Peruvian theologians explained that this approach was really an expression of a deeply incarnational faith. The people understood that the Son of God was truly one of them: one who suffered physical pain and humiliation. Like them, Jesus experienced ongoing injustice. With Mary, they had too often shared the sorrow of a mother whose children die out of season. Like the disciples, they had mourned the murder of well-loved and promising young people and leaders for whom they had hoped for so much. The crucified Christ was one of them.

The best we had there of an Easter celebration was a dawn procession in which an image of Christ was carried from one church and an image of the Blessed Virgin from another. The processions moved solemnly toward a central point until they were in sight of one another, and then everybody sprinted for the joyful first encounter of the risen Lord with his Mother. It was delightful—and sparsely attended. Yes, these people believed in the resurrection and heaven, but their visceral sense of Jesus’ identification with them came through his sharing the sufferings of their life and giving them meaning.

Seeds and new life

The cover of this issue of Celebration depicts a child in an urban setting seeding a tiny plot of earth. In the midst of a concrete universe, he’s doing his best to foster a life and growth that don’t seem “natural” to his environment. And maybe that’s the point: The child has not learned to settle for what’s “natural,” or for “reasonable expectations.” The first thing I thought of when I looked at our little cover guy was my mom’s favorite children’s story, “The Carrot Seed.” For those who don’t know it, it’s the tale of a little boy who planted a carrot seed. His mother gently suggested that
it might not grow, his father warned him not to be disappointed, and his big brother taunted him, repeating that nothing at all would come of it. But still the little boy watered, weeded and watched, day in and day out. Ours was the musical version of the story (45 rpm), and I can still sing the child’s proclamation of faith that “Carrots grow from carrot seeds!” That little boy was tender with the soil and hoped against hope. Finally, nature, water, the earth and his efforts brought forth the biggest carrot any of them had ever seen. “Carrots grow from carrot seeds!”

As far as Easter is concerned, our cover boy and “The Carrot Seed” are pretty good parables. They can be seen as children’s commentaries on Jesus’ teaching about seeds and new life. The seed must die before it gives new life; the buried seed grows as it will, without the planter’s understanding or control; the seed can even produce a hundredfold. All of that expresses the mystery of existence, the Creator’s sacramental gift of life to us. We might say that it expresses the hopeful “ordinariness” or the “naturalness” of our faith. As Robert Browning wrote in “Pippa’s Song”:

The year’s at the spring,
And day’s at the morn;
Morning’s at seven;
The hillside’s dew-pearled;
The lark’s on the wing,
The snail’s on the thorn;
God’s in His heaven —
All’s right with the world!

But, if that were all, if the seed and nature told the whole story, what need would we have for Christ’s passion and resurrection? Isn’t it, at least for those who have eyes to see, all already written into the story of the universe?

Beyond the natural

Asking that brings me back to the “eschatological imagination,” a high-falutin phrase that tries to describe a way of understanding the world that goes beyond everything we think of as “natural.” In terms that might be more familiar to us, I believe that the resurrection invites us to a transformed understanding of life. Surely, the seed dies and gives forth a hundredfold — if, as the little boy knew, it is planted in good soil and tended with care. That’s God’s “Plan A” for the world. It asks for the faith and hope that allow us to accept the risk of growth. But, what of the world where an enemy has sown the field with salt, where some have usurped ownership of the seeds, when global climate change has chilled spring? In a word, what happens when sin exercises a seemingly omnipotent reign?

That was the disciples’ question on Easter morn. They had heard Jesus preach about seeds and the kingdom, they had seen him raise the dead, and then they experienced his brutal death. The tomb proved the power of destruction over the power Jesus had proclaimed. As Anthony J. Kelly writes in The Resurrection Effect: “For the powers of the world … the tombs of those who challenged them are signs of their power to impose an unquestionable rule” (The Resurrection Effect: Transforming Christian Life and Thought, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2008, p. 142). The disciples were left with a seed that had rotted instead of germinating; their hope had been bloodied and buried. Perverted human nature, exercising its most destructive power, had proven to be the final, victorious author of history.

That was the scene on which the risen Jesus appeared. There was nothing natural about his new presence with those whom he loved. His encounter with his disciples left them thoroughly disoriented and quite rightfully terrified. More than the appearance of a ghost — something they could at least imagine — Jesus’ presence among them overturned reality. Jesus’ resurrection annulled everything they knew to be normal and natural. It was the sudden, amazing revelation of what he had tried to teach in so many ways: He had freely accepted death in order to unmask it publicly. He had clearly said, “I will lay down my life for my sheep … I lay down my life in order to take it up again” (John 10:15,17), and yet they had no context from which to understand that. Nothing Jesus did could prepare them for what they had to experience for themselves. The resurrection had to, in the words Luke gives to Zechariah, surprise them like a dawn from on high — a dawn that eclipsed all others. Everything that had been certain was changed because death itself was not definitive, and therefore sin had no power and every threat was eviscerated.

Hope expressed as patience

British theologian James Alison says that in in the light of the resurrection, the virtue of hope is transformed into patience. It’s quite an astonishing claim! This implies that, for those who believe, hope is no longer necessary because salvation is sure, even if slow to be revealed. Christian faith, then, is not the hope-filled belief that God will rescue us, or that tragedies of the past will be obliterated, but that reality itself is thoroughly different from what it appears to be because God is working in and through it in ways often beyond our comprehension.
That belief gives birth to a transformed faith and love of God. We might envision that new expression of faith through contemplating Mary at Cana. When there was no wine, the symbol of covenant love, she did not make a petition, but humbly described the reality to Jesus. With neither demands nor commands, she simply told the others, “Do whatever he tells you.” This is hope expressed as patience: knowing neither when nor how, but certain that reality would be transformed. Mary showed us how to wait on God’s providence, more certain than the dawn. In response, Jesus implied that her expectations were unrealistic — and that might well be the point. Once we are in the realm of resurrection faith, realism loses its luster and we abandon our myths about things being under our control.

This is what I think the Good Friday processions were about. They were expressions of clear-eyed realism and the supra-reasonable expectations that can only be born from powerlessness. The people carrying the image of Jesus’ body were processing with and for God the Father. They did not represent Joseph of Arimathea and the women who accepted Jesus’ death and cared for his corpse. They were far from being like the disciples who ran from the reality and the danger of the situation. The people carrying the crucified Lord through their town were expressing their solidarity with God’s loss, and giving sacramental expression to their faith that God was with them in their own losses. The people who carried the image of Jesus recognized their loved ones in his face, and they knew that the Father does the same. Although all evidence is to the contrary, they believe that somehow sin and death have been overcome and that God is working in their midst in hidden and powerful ways.

Hidden ways

When, in the midst of suffering and evil, people believe that God is working in powerful though hidden ways, their faith and their love of God have reached a new height. When people can be patient with God’s ways, they have purified their love and accepted a faith that exceeds their highest hopes; they no longer worship a god of their own desires, but have opened themselves to God’s unimaginable future. That sort of faith is a grace that changes everything.

In my experience, it is that sort of faith that leads people to see miracles in any and every moment of life. This is no glib or sweet, naive religiosity. It is, rather, the privilege of the poor. When people have come to faith in God’s presence in the worst, most hopeless, ever-dead-ending circumstances, then every other moment is also a clear expression of that same miraculous presence. Every birth, every sunrise, every fertile carrot seed reflects the One who gives life in abundance.

Nothing Jesus did could prepare them for what they had to experience for themselves. The resurrection had to, in the words Luke gives to Zechariah, surprise them like a dawn from on high — a dawn that eclipsed all others. Everything that had been certain was changed because death itself was not definitive, and therefore sin had no power and every threat was eviscerated.

A transformed perception

People who have come to this sort of faith no longer understand the resurrection through the sign of the seed. Rather, because they believe in the resurrection, the seed and everything else gets interpreted in its light. Because they believe in the resurrection, they know that evil and injustice do not have the last word — even here and now. They can relate to others out of the deep understanding that every enmity will be healed, and thus, even in the present moment, enmity itself is nothing more than a false perception. They can live out of a patient love of God that rejoices in the faith that God’s imagination is vaster and far more loving and creative than our own. If they can’t fully agree with Browning’s poem, it’s because they no longer separate heaven and earth and would therefore rather say, “God’s right, right here, with the world.” That is, I believe, the eschatological imagination: a transformed perception that seeks the meaning of absolutely everything in the light of the resurrection of our crucified Lord.

Many of the Romanians who proclaim “Hristos a inviat” are people who suffered under 50 years of Communist dictatorship, whose bishops and fellow church members were imprisoned, tortured and martyred. They had risked their own liberty to celebrate the sacraments in the underground church. That experience forged in them a unique sense of the profound meaning of Easter faith. They, the poor, and all who bring faith to their own suffering give living witness to Resurrection faith.

Easter is dawning upon us. Christ is indeed risen! Let us ask for the grace to perceive and proclaim it with our lives.

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Una Forma de Ver

El culto y la vida para el mes de abril 2014

PATRICIA DATCHUCK SÁNCHEZ y RAFAEL SÁNCHEZ ALONSO

¿Por qué murió Jesús? Cuando el autor y teólogo N.T. Wright hizo esta pregunta a unos niños del sexto grado en Montreal, estos reflexionaron unos momentos antes de darle sus respuestas. La mitad de los estudiantes alegaron razones históricas: Jesús murió porque chocaba con los sumos sacerdotes; murió porque los Romanos lo veían como un peligro; murió porque no les gustaba a los Fariseos. Otros niños dieron respuestas más teológicas: Jesús murió para perdonar nuestros pecados, para salvarnos, para mostrarnos cuánto nos ama Dios. Wright dice que pasó la hora siguiente con los niños, discutiendo y elaborando sus respuestas. Wright continúa diciendo: “Todavía pienso que, cuando estudiábamos a Jesús y queriamos responder a esta pregunta, una de las tareas más importantes que podemos emprender es la de tratar de ensamblar estas dos clases de respuestas –la dimensión histórica y la teológica” (The Challenge of Jesus, Inter-Varsity Press, Downer’s Grove, Ill.: 1999). Este mes, al recordar y celebrar la pasión, muerte y resurrección de Jesús, estamos invitados a reflexionar sobre esta pregunta: ¿Por qué murió Jesús? Nuestra meditación nos llevará a contemplar de manera más plena y profunda el gran misterio de todo lo que Dios nos ha revelado mediante Cristo Jesús.

Nuestro recorrido por este misterio comienza el 6 de abril y hace que las palabras de Ezequiel cobren vida. Jesús cumplió lo que el profeta había prometido: “abriré sus sepulcros y les haré salir de sus tumbas” (Ezeq. 37:2-4). Jesús dijo una orden y quien había muerto salió con vida: “Lázaro, ¡sal fuera!” Lo que Jesús dijo a Lázaro nos lo dice a todos nosotros: Sal de tu tumba de pecado y vive. No continúes en la muerte. Antes bien, vive y ama con la vida que te da Dios.

A medida que continuamos nuestra peregrinación, el 13 de abril nos encontramos con Jesús ya a las puertas de Jerusalén, en donde las dimensiones históricas y teológicas de su vida culminarán en la cima desgarradora de la Cruz. Le estaremos humildemente y eternamente agradecidos a Jesús por ese amor que le llevó a la muerte, y apasionadamente nos alegraremos también de que su muerte no fuera el final de su historia. Al contrario, la muerte de Jesús fue su entrada a la vida de resurrección. Como consecuencia de este paso de Jesús, a cada uno de nosotros se nos ofrece una nueva manera de ver y de interpretar no sólo la muerte sino cada aspecto de la vida. En su libro And Now I See: A Theology of Transformation (Crossroad Pub., New York: 1998), Robert Barron explica que los que creen en Jesús ven la vida de manera diferente. Por eso nuestras oraciones, nuestras obras y nuestra manera de ser en el mundo poseen algo importante que las distingue de los demás, y un sabor que proviene de pertenecer a Jesús quien, por nuestro bien, pasó por la muerte a la vida. Barron cita también a Orígenes de Alejandría quien dijo una vez que ser santo es ver con los ojos de Cristo.

Esta nueva forma de ver se ve claramente reflejada en la vida de los primeros cristianos. A medida que durante los Domingos de Pascua (el 20 de abril, el 27, etc.) entramos más en contacto con ellos, seremos testigos de cómo sus vidas fueron transformadas. Primero, por la experiencia de ver a Jesús sufrir y morir, y, después, el verle aparecer entre ellos como su Señor resucitado y glorioso. Observaremos cómo la antigua manera que tenían de ver a los Gentiles (como forasteros impuros) fue reemplazada por ideas nuevas y transformadoras. El 20 de abril Pedro afirma: “Todo aquél que cree en Jesús recibirá en su nombre el perdón de sus pecados.” Es notable el gran crecimiento que experimentaron los primeros creyentes de Jesucristo quienes continuaron su ministerio sin discriminar y unieron a todos en Dios para su salvación.

También nos daremos cuenta de que su nueva forma de ver les condujo a transformar radicalmente su estilo de vida (el 27 de abril). Unidos en la oración, fieles a las enseñanzas de los apóstoles y haciendo vida comunitaria recordaban y celebraban a Jesús en el romper del pan. Ese santo compartir el pan les dio la fortaleza y capacidad necesarias para hacer muchas señales y maravillas, una de las más destacadas fue despojarse de sus propios bienes y posesiones para ponerlos al servicio de los más necesitados de la comunidad. Unidos en la oración, en la esperanza y en el servicio, esta comunidad creciente tuvo un impacto tan positivo que muchos otros los buscaron, ansiosos de ver lo que hacían y queriendo creer como ellos.

Si volvemos al punto de partida y nos preguntamos de nuevo “¿Por qué murió Jesús?” quizá podamos añadir algo a las respuestas históricas y teológicas: Jesús murió y resucitó y sigue presente entre nosotros a través de su Espíritu quien nos capacita para hacer el voto como él vio, vivir como él vivió, amar como él amó, servir como él sirvió, y, cuando nos llegue nuestra hora, demos ese paso final que él mismo lideró, de la muerte a la vida eterna.

Patricia Datchuck Sánchez y Rafael Sánchez Alonso han provisto de comentarios y homilías a Celebración desde 1979.
A Way of Seeing

Lectionary themes for April 2014

PATRICIA DATCHUCK SÁNCHEZ
and RAFAEL SÁNCHEZ ALONSO

Why did Jesus die? When author and theologian N.T. Wright put that question to a group of sixth-graders in Montreal, they thought for a few moments and then began to respond. About half of the students gave historical reasons: Jesus died because he clashed with the chief priests; he died because the Romans regarded him as a threat; he died because the Pharisees didn’t like him. Others gave more theological responses: Jesus died for the forgiveness of our sins; he died so that we would be saved; he died to show us how much God loves us. Wright said that he spent the next hour with the children discussing and making sense of their responses. “I still believe,” insisted Wright, “that the putting together of the two sides of that great question—the historical dimension and the theological one—is one of the most important tasks we can engage in when studying Jesus” (The Challenge of Jesus, Inter-Varsity Press, Downer’s Grove, Ill.: 1999). This month, as we remember and celebrate the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus, we will be called upon to consider for ourselves: Why did Jesus die? In all our prayerful considerations, we will be drawn more fully and more deeply into the great mystery of all that God has revealed to us in Jesus.

Our journey into that mystery begins on April 6, with Jesus making the words of Ezekiel come to life. What the prophet had promised (“I will open your graves and have you rise from them ... I will put my spirit in you that you may live”), Jesus fulfilled. “Lazarus, come out!” Jesus ordered, and he who had died was alive again. What Jesus said to Lazarus, he says to all of us. Come out from the tomb of sin and live. Be no longer dead but alive and in love with the God of life.

As our journey continues, we find ourselves on April 13 with Jesus about to enter Jerusalem, where the historical and theological dimensions of his life will come to a gut-wrenching climax on the cross. We will be humbly grateful for the love that led Jesus to his death, and we will be passionately joyful that his death was not the end of his story. On the contrary, Jesus’ dying was the passage unto resurrected life. As a consequence of Jesus’ passage, every human being has been offered a new way of seeing and of perceiving not only death, but every aspect of life. In his book And Now I See: A Theology of Transformation (Crossroad Pub., New York: 1998), Robert Barron explains that believers in Jesus see differently, and that is why our prayers, our actions and our way of being in the world have a distinctive accent and flavor that flows from our belonging to Jesus, who passed through death to life for our sake. Barron also quotes Origen of Alexandria, who once said that holiness is seeing with the eyes of Christ. This new way of seeing was clearly reflected in the lives of the earliest believers in Jesus. As we are reacquainted with them during the Sundays of Easter (April 20, 27, etc.), we will witness how they were transformed by the experience of seeing Jesus suffer and die and then appear to them as their risen, glorious Lord. We will watch them as they begin to see that their former way of looking at gentiles (as unclean outsiders) had to be replaced by new and transformed insights. “Everyone who believes in him will receive forgiveness of sins through his name,” said Peter (April 20). We will notice the growth in the first believers as they went forth to continue Jesus’ ministry, gathering all, indiscriminately, unto God and salvation.

We will also notice that their new way of seeing led to a radical transformation of their lifestyle (April 27). United in prayer, faithful to the teachings of the apostles and to their life together, they remembered and celebrated Jesus in the breaking of the bread. On the strength of that holy sharing, they were able to do many signs and wonders, not the least of which was divesting themselves of property and possessions so as to hold all things in common. All were cared for according to each one’s need. United in prayer, in hope and in service, the growing community had such a positive impact that others sought them out, eager to see and believe as they did.

As we come full circle to the question with which we began — “Why did Jesus die?” — we might add to our historical and theological responses. Jesus died and rose and remains with us through the Spirit so that we can see as he did, live as he did, love as he did, serve as he did, and, when our time has come, make the same passage he once pioneered, from death to everlasting life.

Patricia Datchuck Sánchez and Rafael Sánchez Alonso have been collaborating to provide Lectionary commentaries and homilies for Celebration since 1979.
We Must Wash Each Other’s Feet

An action of solidarity in troubled times

By GABE HUCK

In the February Celebration we considered Lent as a time to engage individually and communally with some of the printed and film material we need for understanding the present ills that involve us all. These ills are in the systems. They are political and economic and military. They are so much the water we swim in as Americans that we can pass through days and years, lifetimes for some of us, without noticing them. But we are blessed with voices that not only tell us the emperor is naked, they tell us how and why and some of what must be done. That was the conversation here in February.

In March we discussed how our “mea culpa” mentality toward sin and evil will never be adequate to bring about a repentance and reparation and renewal that is social, structural. We have to stop the “mea culpa” that often blinds us to the real sins of our time, and search out the “nostra culpa” that will put us — us, the church — where the Gospel and the Lenten work would have us. How do we ever grow up, leave behind our childish notion that the sin we reject is only something an individual does, and so move toward an ethic of corporate responsibility, repentance and reparation?

We now continue to struggle with these same hard questions as we approach the way our community keeps the Triduum. These are not matters only of what to preach about, but of the deeds themselves. As much as the Sunday Eucharist, the time and rites of Triduum must be deeds done by the whole assembly. And if these deeds are the rituals the assembly knows and cherishes, knows by heart, then they are lifelong rehearsing us in lives faithful to the Gospel and with eyes wide open to the present crises. The preaching here is always mystagogy rooted in these assembly-done rituals. So rooted, the preaching is to unfold the rites as they speak of us and our present hard times.

How do we all, as this local church assembled, engage in our rituals? How can those who preach do so from the very deeds we are making our own as an assembly? If that is what we seek, we have no choice about whether or not to do what we do in full awareness of the times, these times, our times. Because the Triduum is no play-acting the Gospel of passion and resurrection, but in fact the presence of passion/resurrection in our midst, within the world that we strive to love as God loves the world. But to say that is to say we rehearse, if little by little, to dwell in that costly love.

We will focus here on a single moment in keeping the Triduum.

Time out of time

All that is envisioned for the time from Thursday night through Easter Sunday is to be thought of and dealt with as a whole. Together we enter and dwell in this time, however well or poorly we have kept Lent. We do this as Lent ends on Thursday evening. Our entrance is not to a holiday weekend marked by two or three gatherings as church. Rather, it is an entrance to a whole time kept like no other days of our year. We enter Thursday evening and we live in this time until Sunday, living and keeping Triduum both when we are assembled and when we are not.

All the time is Triduum. It has a rhythm of moving in and out of gatherings, but none of them end and none of them begin because all are part of a single once-a-year deed that is ours to do. The fasting then is not simply from normal eating but from all business as usual. We see even in this basic premise of Triduum that it upsets our routines not only of time but of deciding what matters.

Triduum is not play-acting the Last Supper, then the way of the cross, and so to the empty tomb. Those stories are told within it, they are in fact vital stories, but there is no sense of a long passion play here. When we gather Thursday evening we quietly bid farewell to Lent and enter our Triduum through song and scripture and footwashing.

Entering

A reformed order of Triduum will someday have the Eucharist celebrated only at the conclusion of the vigiling night between Saturday and Sunday. The absence of Eucharist before that will be part of the fasting with which we are to prepare for the “night truly blessed.” Even now, we are able to enter the Triduum on Holy Thursday evening with a liturgy that ends in a starkly simple eucharistic prayer and Communion rite. This same simplicity and silence can characterize the holy Communion that presently ends the assembly’s gathering on Good Friday.

Our Holy Thursday evening’s entrance to Triduum is the assembly’s gathering and reception of the holy oils, then scriptures proclaimed, homily, washing of feet and intercessions. It has long seemed to me, and has been borne out in parish practice, that the washing of feet is central to this night, central to our need to enter Triduum. The alternative opening prayer from the proposed (but so far rejected and
suppressed) ICEL 1998 Sacramentary expresses that priority, which is missing from the present Sacramentary’s opening prayer:

O God, in the fullness of time you revealed your love in Jesus the Lord.

On the eve of his death, as a sign of your covenant, he washed the feet of his disciples and gave himself as food and drink.

Give us life at this sacred banquet and joy in humble service, that bound to Christ in all things, we may pass over from this world to your kingdom.

Washing of feet

I need not count the ways the washing of feet can be done badly, but the top of the list would be 1) any attempt to make this a dramatization of the way John’s Gospel tells the Last Supper; 2) clericalization; 3) (implied in the other two but possible without them) leaving the assembly as audience. In the 1992 edition of The Three Days: Parish Prayer in the Paschal Triduum I described an approach to this rite that intends to avoid such misunderstandings. This book is still in print and available, new or used, from various distributors.

My experience with this rite in the last 20 years has helped me to refine the suggestions of that book. I understand now that the whole of the assembly can be invited to participate and will do so. “Participate” is perhaps not a strong enough word for what the assembly will do here. This is usually a matter of spreading the stations around the room and preparing helpers to be busy bringing new pitchers of water and emptying basins. Each “station” is a chair, a stack of towels, a basin. Someone who is prepared to wash the feet of the first person comes to each station with a pitcher of water and a line begins to form. The first person whose feet are washed and dried and kissed then rises, kneels and washes the feet of the next in line, and so on and on. The one who began the washing stays close by to help when, for example, someone whose feet have been washed is physically unable to kneel and wash the feet of the next in line.

All over the room the lining up and the washing go on and on. I would stress:

■ The homily, which precedes the washing, can reflect on the Gospel of John (who does not include an “institution narrative” in his account of the Supper): “You must wash each other’s feet.” This washing may be seen as related to our experience of the waters of baptism and of the baptisms that will occur at the Vigil, but all of this in the larger context of our troubled world.

■ The singing, all of it with the assembly participating through refrains or choruses, never stops. Much thought and evaluation should go into the character, order and content of the music chosen.

■ The presider and all ministers at the liturgy wash feet and have their feet washed.

■ Both feet are washed and dried. It should not be too much to ask that washing is true washing: The person sits with both feet in the tub of water. One foot at a time, the one doing the washing soaks the foot then rinses from the pitcher of water, then dries the foot. No hurry.

■ Everyone knows it is appropriate to kiss the feet after washing and drying them.

■ Presider and other ministers give the example of coming forward barefoot and putting shoes on only after the rite is complete — or at the end of the liturgy. Better to leave shoes by one’s chair or pew.

■ Catechumens and elect participate in the washing of feet, but are dismissed before the intercessions.

■ Homilists: For a marvelous insight, read Alan Paton’s account of the foot washing in his Ah, But Your Land Is Beautiful.

Following the intercessions, the preparation rite differs from the usual because those present, including the ministers, are invited to come forward bringing gifts for the poor. Best to do this barefoot. This could well be the example of coming forward as a divesting of ourselves as we enter the Triduum and as a time when the alms of Lent are to be collected.

Why?

Because our rituals are rehearsals for life. What we do here, we are slowly learning to do “by heart” in our lives. It would be enough to say this of the washing of feet and the following collection for the poor in normal times. But this ritual becomes far more important in the United States of 2014 and perhaps for many years to come. This is a ritual, like others, that shapes us to act as if the world’s hierarchies have fallen. No more higher or lower based on male or female, rich or poor, scented or smelly, free or slave, legal or “illegal.” But it is “as if,” for we know these divisions do exist and we ourselves bow or not, pay attention or not, step aside or step on depending on those hierarchies and others based on religion, skin color, language, wealth, nationality. Rehearsals will continue.

We add to this our “see no evil” habits toward our own military and economic conduct in the world and also at home. We suspect that all is not well, perhaps, but we don’t want to know more about drones, prison populations, fires in foreign factories where our clothes are made, sanctions punishing the whole population in Iran, or the next massacre at a school in the United States. The rituals that belong to us — washing feet, bringing forth generous alms, embracing the cross on Good Friday, bold renunciations and affirmations around the font cross on Good Friday, bold renunciations and affirmations around the font at the Vigil — rehearse us for seeing and naming the troubles. They rehearse us for judging. They rehearse us for acting.

And there is also this. We are not only people ready to wash someone’s feet, but we are people willing to let another wash our feet. That too is dangerous, crossing lines, humble and courageous at once. We have not only the Jesus who washes feet but the Jesus whose feet are washed in peculiar circumstances (Luke 7:38). This too is ritual that rehearses us for the sort of solidarity we’re going to need.
The Quest for Light

At Easter, we must choose our way out of the darkness

By MELISSA MUSICK NUSSBAUM

Last summer, I drove a carload of grandchildren home from the swimming pool. Sleepy from sun and water and hours of splashing and jumping and calling out, “Watch me!” my noisy crew grew quiet. The sweet seasonal smells of chlorine and sunscreen filled the car. We turned down Nevada Avenue, under the canopy of the great, green trees lining the street.

Three-year-old Leo, buckled in his car seat just behind me, said softly, “Ma-Maw, when it gets dark, the trees turn into woods.”

The boy knows his fairytales. “Yes,” I told Leo, “yes, they do.” I know my fairytales, too. And my scripture.

Leo’s words will be a kind of lectio divina for me this Holy Week. For, when it gets dark, the trees turn into woods.

In his Gospel, Luke tells us how the disciples experienced Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem:

As Jesus rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power they had seen.

They were with a winner. Close to Jesus, their feet were protected from the dust and waste on the road by cloth spread out before them and, if the dust and waste on the road by Jesus, their feet were protected from it to blossom.

The very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and strewed them on the road. The crowds preceding him and those following kept crying out and saying, “Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.”

They were calling Jesus “the prophet, the one who comes in the name of the Lord.” And the disciples knew him best, knew what he liked to eat for lunch, knew where he liked to stop and rest.

Trees to sit by and eat or rest. They were striding through the trees, home as victors and heroes.

It must have seemed to them that Jesus himself brought the darkness. Charging into the temple area and driving out the merchants, turning over the tables of the moneychangers, upending the seats of those selling doves. Doves! A peaceful bird, a necessary bird for the temple rituals.

What would it hurt him to show respect before the authority of the chief priests and scribes? Why did he have to preach in the temple? Bring up the disputed question of resurrection? (There was a holiday coming, a festive meal. Did Mary and Joseph teach him nothing about avoiding religion and politics at the holiday table?)

Why did he enrage the people who welcomed him by foretelling the destruction of the temple? Bad enough that they lived under foreign rule. Why would one of their own say, “Amen, I say to you, there will not be left here a stone upon another stone that will not be thrown down”?

The crowds have thrown down their cloaks and their welcoming branches. Why would he throw down their temple?

The week is not over before darkness falls. The trees become woods. Or, as my translation of Matthew’s Gospel says in a most fairy tale-like construction, it is “The Beginning of Calamities.”

Jesus tells his followers what is waiting for them: “Then they will hand you over to persecution, and they will kill you. You will be hated by all nations because of my name.” They have tasted adulation. They will drink deep of the cup of hate.

Even the universe will know the dreadful night. Jesus tells the disciples:

The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

The quest will be as it always is in the moonless night, in the dark woods. The quest will be for light, for a light shining in the dark, piercing the gloom, leading the way to shelter and warmth.

The disciples will have to decide. They will see many lights burning in the days to come. Judas will see his own vision of their mission reflected in the light of silver coins. Peter will crowd up against a courtyard campfire and hope for a light so strong that it will blind all who look upon him — that they will see a stranger, a passerby, not a friend of Jesus the Galilean.

It would be so simple if there were only one fire burning, one light shining, one way out of the woods. But they will have to choose.

There will be fire that withers the fig tree and fire whose warmth brings it to blossom.

They will have to choose, and so will we.

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Our Journey Forward

The Psalms of April

By DENISE SIMEONE

A month of paradox, April evokes the gamut of emotion: We mark the Fifth Sunday of Lent, Palm Sunday, Easter Sunday and Divine Mercy Sunday. The childhood poem reminds us, “April showers bring May flowers,” and we shall certainly be showered with the full experience and hope of our faith journey these Sundays as we move toward the Easter season.

On the Fifth Sunday of Lent (April 6), the responsorial phrase from Psalm 130 seems a direct cry by the people of Israel, who have been resurrected from dry bones into living beings by the power of God: “With the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption” (Ezek 37:7). From their very graves, God will bring the people of the covenant to life: “thus you shall know that I am the Lord. I have promised, and I will do it, says the Lord” (Ezek 37:4).

Once again, the people know God’s loving kindness (hesed). It is God who listens, who forgives, loves, redeems, offers mercy and invites believers to trust, just as the psalmist waits and trusts as sentinels wait for the dawn. As we approach the end of our Lenten journey, Psalm 130 reminds us we could not survive the depths of our own sin and sorrow without God; we could not stand before God if we were not already forgiven.

Paul tells the Philippians in the epistle on Palm Sunday of the Lord’s Passion (April 13) that Jesus emptied himself and entered all of the human experience, including even death. We acknowledge then in the responsorial psalm the very depths of human emotion in the cry: “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” (Psalm 22:2). We can understand the church’s insertion of this psalm — in all three cycles — as a fitting one to recall Jesus’ passion.

The early church community understood the terrible suffering spoken of in this psalm, as well as the trust that God was not far from the one who suffers. Jesus demonstrated this trust, this belief in deliverance from the Lord, as he suffered and gave his life. The enormity of Jesus’ cry on the cross, in Matthew’s crucifixion account, is echoed by us all as we, too, pray the responsorial. We enter Holy Week in awe of God’s power and mercy, and also in trusting obedience, ready to respond to God’s covenant as Jesus did when he entered the garden at Gethsemane. God is never far away.

On both of the following two Sundays, Easter Sunday (April 20) and Divine Mercy Sunday (April 27), we will sing all the verses of the first stanza of Psalm 118. It will resound as a call to praise — by all of Israel, by the house of Aaron and finally by all who fear the Lord (that is, all who are in awe of God’s power). All are called to recognize and give thanks for the mercy, the love, the faithful covenant of the Lord: God’s hesed visible once again.

Psalm 118 is filled with the ways that God delivers those who are a part of God’s covenant. God is the helper, the refuge, the place of safety; God is strength, help, shelter and ultimately deliverance from death. This is the Easter message. Despite all of humanity’s anguish and abandonment of the covenant, God never rests; God constantly and faithfully waits, and opens the gate to all.

In the reading from Acts on Easter Sunday, Peter declares that believers are witnesses, called to preach and testify to everything that Jesus Christ has done. So we appropriately begin this Easter season singing with the early disciples: “This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad” (v. 24).

This Easter Sunday, we recall that like these early witnesses at the tomb in John’s Gospel, we do not always fully understand. Yet we have come to believe, as the responsorial proclaims both Sundays, that Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of our faith, rejected by many but “wonderful in our eyes” (v. 23).

The Second Sunday of Easter or Divine Mercy Sunday continues the accounts in Acts of the early followers’ community. What better image of God’s mercy and loving compassion, God’s hesed, can a community give than to hold “all things in common … to sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one’s need” (Acts 2:44-45)?

Extending to one another all that had been given freely to them by God, the believers became helpers, refuge and place of safety to one another: They became each other’s strength, help, shelter and even potential deliverance from death. That’s amazing witness and power. In John’s Gospel account, Jesus says to his disciples: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (John 20:21). We sing the responsorial knowing that the fulfillment of this merciful love is now in our hands: “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, his love is everlasting” (v. 1).

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Your Faith Will Be Shaken

In the midst of community, we find grace to persevere

By PEG EKERDT

It is April, and even at that, we won’t hit our high holy days until the third week of this month. Spring beckons and teases us to distraction, while May’s first Communions, Mother’s Day and graduations soon will be upon us. Thus it is a mental challenge to stay rooted in Lent and remain faithful to the liturgical calendar of the church year. But it is our job to be mindful of the season and the spiritual lessons it offers. So here is one thought for Lenten meditation.

Matthew’s passion narrative (26:14-27:66) tells us that after the Last Supper, Jesus and the disciples sang a hymn and then went out to the Mount of Olives. It was there that Jesus said to them, “This night all of you will have your faith in me shaken.” I have so often focused on Peter’s insistence that his faith will “never be” shaken that I have paid scant attention to Jesus’ actual words that precipitated Peter’s famous response.

On that night at the Mount of Olives, Jesus knew that his own humiliating death would challenge the hopes and presumptions of his followers. He knew that fear and persecution would test his disciples. He warned them, but he did not offer any wisdom or advice because Peter interrupted him before he could say anything more.

Nonetheless, Jesus puts a new spin on the possibility of doubt and the fragility of faith with his warning that faith can be shaken. What we do with it, however, is up to us. Perhaps we run and hide. Some of the disciples did that. Perhaps we deny that we ever knew the Lord. That was Peter’s tactic. Perhaps we struggle with the heartache of doubt. One can presume some of the disciples might have done that. Or maybe we are embarrassed that we spent years of our lives following someone who it seems has failed us. But here is the reality: Most, if not all, of us will experience times of doubt when we question where God is and what we believe.

Not to ignore my own or anyone’s struggles with faith, yet it seems that in the current time I most frequently encounter questions about faith from young adults who say they no longer are sure what or if they believe. For many of those young adults, it often is more apt to say they have lost faith in the institution of the church rather than in God. Yet the two are so intertwined that these young folks find themselves adrift and robbed of any language to talk about their experience of God.

Their faith is shaken for a variety of reasons. Some have lost trust in an institution that protected pedophile priests. Others find it impossible to follow leaders who are judgmental rather than pastoral. Some find the church to be intent on preserving a status and wealth that contradict the Gospel. More than a few are exasperated with a church that does not embrace the partnerships of their gay aunts and uncles, their friends or even themselves. And many long to serve the needs of others but find they can do that just as well, if not better, outside the church.

There is no record of what Jesus might say to these young adults. Our Pope Francis is perhaps the best responder in the present time, and I cannot imagine him saying anything to these young adults but “You are loved by God and by his church. This is your home. We need you.”

Aside from listening to Pope Francis, the best way for any of us to envision what Jesus might say is to spend time in prayer and reflection with the scriptures, putting ourselves in the action of the stories and imagining Jesus saying to us: “Your faith will be shaken.”

Given such time of reflection, I might add my own advice to those young adults. I would suggest that if they seek, they will find God as they go about their days in the love they experience and share, in the seeming coincidences, the insights of conscience, the beauty of creation and in the faces of the poor and the least among us. But I would also suggest that when faith is shaken, they are more likely to recognize the Divine Presence if they set aside time to pray with the faithful who gather in his name each week. For it is there, even when they are at odds with homilies preached or doctrines espoused, that he has promised to be. And in the midst of the community, in good times and in bad, they — and we — will find sustenance and grace to continue to seek and to find the presence of God.

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Becoming a New Creation

Vatican II helped us to recall the significance of our baptism

By BIAGIO MAZZA

Thus by baptism [we] are plunged into the Paschal Mystery of Christ. (Sacro sanctum Concilium #6)

As we prepare to celebrate the heart of the liturgical year, the Easter Triduum, it is important to remind ourselves of the meaning and significance of our baptismal call. The catechumens who will be fully initiated at the Easter Vigil vividly invite us each to recall our own initiation into the Christian life. As they are “plunged” into the life-giving waters, they challenge us to renew our own baptism, and what it signifies.

Sacrosanctum Concilium, Vatican II’s “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy,” restored a good bit of the church’s liturgical tradition, which had been either selectively forgotten or distorted over time. The significance of baptism as the act of becoming a “new creation” in Christ had progressively become a sacrament whose primary purpose was the removal of original sin. Demanding that baptism be performed “as soon as possible” after birth so as to wipe out original sin detached baptism from a great deal of its biblical roots and relevance. Sacrosanctum Concilium did much to restore the value, meaning and significance of baptism, grounding it in the Paschal Mystery of Christ (#6), which we recall, re-enact and celebrate every time we recall, re-enact and celebrate the Paschal Mystery, we are all to be actively involved.

One of the most significant restorations that Sacrosanctum Concilium initiated was the grounding of ministry not in ordination, but in baptism.

Sacro sanctum Concilium #48 clearly states that at every eucharistic celebration, “Christian believers should not be there as strangers or silent spectators...they should take part in the sacred action actively, fully aware and devoutly...Offering the immaculate victim not only through the hands of the priest but also together with him.” This radically new affirmation of the “common priesthood of all the faithful” is strongly brought forth in Lumen Gentium, “The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,” when it asserts that “in the celebration of the Eucharist these [the daily works of the laity] are offered to the Father in all piety along with the body of the Lord. And so, worshipping everywhere by their holy actions, the laity consecrate [italics added] the world itself to God” (#34).

It should then come as no surprise that all who participate at the liturgy are “celebrants” led in their celebration by a “presider.” All celebrate the Eucharist together, calling upon God to change and transform us in the same manner in which bread and wine are transformed into Christ’s body and blood through the Spirit’s action.

One of the most significant restorations that Sacrosanctum Concilium initiated was the grounding of ministry not in ordination, as it had been commonly understood, but in baptism. Being “plunged” into the Paschal Mystery demands that every baptized Christian take on the mind and heart of Jesus. In so doing, we model ourselves on Jesus, who gave of himself for us so that we might do the same for one another. Our gifts, freely given by the Spirit, are to be utilized in carrying on the mission and ministry of Jesus.

In and through our baptismal call and commitment, ministry becomes not a privilege but an obligation of all the baptized. All are called to ministry as well as discernment, the process needed to ascertain how best to use our gifts in service to others, thus living out the Paschal Mystery in all our daily works and encounters. Baptism demands that in all we do, we are called to make real Christ’s pattern of dying and rising, always being willing to give of ourselves for others the way Christ gave of himself for us.

In baptism we are made a new creation, meaning that we are remade into the pattern of the risen Christ. We join a community that has committed itself to this new way of living modeled on the risen Christ. Every Sunday we gather to celebrate that new life we have received in Christ. Whenever we treat others with justice, human dignity and respect; whenever we forgive, reconcile and work at restoring peace; whenever we work for justice and healing; whenever we care for the stranger, the foreigner, the oppressed and the outcast, we are making real this new creation as baptized children of God. We are establishing and building up God’s reign here and now.

This Easter Vigil, renew your baptismal promises with greater meaning and depth, thanking God for the new creation we have become in the risen Christ.

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Picture this: You are in a restaurant sitting near a table with a 16-year-old, her parents and younger brother. The teen has positioned herself both physically and psychologically as far away from the group as possible. She acts like she is there all by herself — and obviously hopes that observers see her that way. When her little brother tries to engage her, she shoves his hand away. When either parent speaks to her she rolls her eyes as far as they can go without leaving her skull. She spends most of the meal looking down from a disdainful height on her unworthy, benighted family.

You want to go over and enlighten her, but you restrain yourself because you understand her situation. Because you have been there yourself. You recognize her as someone bridging the difficult gap between childhood and adulthood, yearning to be free but not too free, distant but within safe range. You realize that her present mood is not permanent but provisional; she is not a bad person, she is just unfinished. You love her in spite of her sullenness.

That scenario is a paradigm, a model of other realities. Consider the cultural situation of the modern world called secularism. Secularism is proud of being anti-religious. Even its name is opposed to sacred. It exults in getting along just fine without the quaint notion of divinity; even boasts of writing God’s obituary. It traces its noble lineage back to the Age of Enlightenment, whence it claims to derive those noble sentiments of freedom, equality and individuality.

But wait. Like that teenager, the secular world protests too much. The Enlightenment did not create freedom and equality and individuality. Those basic human realities were already embedded in the religious culture of those times. Our contemporary human rights grew in the ancient seedbed of Judeo-Christian Europe.

And secularity is not over — it is still young in historical terms. Like the teenager, it flaunts its newfound personality by going to extremes. Freedom tends toward anarchy, equality salutes the lowest common denominator, individuality promotes an aggressive individualism. Full-blown secularism is not a pretty sight. But it is not a bad thing — it is simply unfinished. And we should love it in spite of its vulgarity.

Something similar happens in our church. It is always a work-in-progress. It moves rather uneventfully from day to day; but there have been life-changing moments. The first stage was the original Jewish-Christian church; the second stage was the expansion to include Europe; the final, present stage is the first truly universal church comprising all of humanity.

The watershed moment of the current situation was Vatican Council II in the 1960s. At that historic time, the church promised to make the joys and sorrows of the secular world the joys and sorrows of the church. That dramatic decision breathed new life into a suffocating institution. A brilliant, buoyant future was envisioned, an all-encompassing church in which all the rare birds of the human species would find welcome and peace.

But a funny thing happened on the way to the new church. It was bound to happen; it happens whenever there is a dramatic, axial change in culture. One social historian wrote that the uncertain period between the death of the old order and the birth of a new order is like living with a pregnant widow. The father is dead, the child is gestating in the womb of the mother; only a paternity suit can confirm the father.

Progressives rejoiced in what they thought was the liberating, modern motion of the council. Conservatives bemoaned what they thought were the libertine excesses of the liberals. The liberals have been reeling from a resurgence of conservative values battling for the soul of the church. Like the teenager and the secular culture, our church is not an attractive sight. But we have to remember that this is not her permanent state. She is still a growing adolescent in historical years. She is an ugly duckling on the way to becoming a graceful swan. And we love her in spite of her paternalistic posturing.

What to do until the baby is born? Take care of the pregnant widow, console her, support her, befriend her. Stay with her through the full process of gestation, including the labor pains. This is the way of all birth, all growth; this is the way of all vibrant, living institutions. So, Breathe! Push!

Fr. Jim Smith, who died in January 2013, was a regular contributor to Celebration and left a treasury of unpublished reflections like this one.
Capable of a Turn

Easter faith must get past our preconceptions

By ERIN RYAN

Not long ago I read an article called “Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*: A Theological Reflection,” by New Testament scholar Joel Marcus. It was originally published in 1989 in *Theology Today*.

Austen and her novel have exploded in popularity in the years since then. *Pride and Prejudice* has been dramatized so many times on film or TV that even if you haven’t read the 1813 book, you’ve probably watched it, or absorbed the basic plot through osmosis: Elizabeth Bennet dislikes Mr. Darcy, who seems to her an insufferable snob. Eventually, their animosity turns to love.

But before that happens, Elizabeth has to get past her perceptions.

The first time Darcy proposes to her, she rejects him in no uncertain terms. One of the reasons for her rebuff is his supposed mistreatment of Mr. Wickham, who once lived on the Darcy estate. She thinks Wickham is a pretty great guy.

In Chapter 35, just after the rejection, Darcy gives Elizabeth a letter. Marcus’ article centers on Chapter 36, in which Elizabeth is coming to grips with what she has read. Through the letter it becomes clear that Darcy is the upstanding person, while Wickham is not so trustworthy after all.

Elizabeth tries at first to retain her impressions of each man. She wants to like Wickham. She wants to scorn Darcy. But as she read, says Austen, “Every line proved more clearly that the affair ... was capable of a turn which must make [Darcy] entirely blameless throughout the whole.”

Marcus quotes Toby Tanner, who introduced the Penguin edition of *Pride and Prejudice*: “The affair was capable of a turn — there in essence is the whole problem which forever confronts the interpreting human consciousness which can turn things now this way now that way as it plays ... with the varying versions of reality which it is capable of proliferating.”

The whole novel, to Tanner, is “a drama of recognition — re-cognition, that act by which the mind can look again at a thing and if necessary make revisions and amendments until it sees the thing as it really is.”

This is the very process described in so many of our liturgy’s April readings, which take us to the end of Lent, then Easter, and afterward, as the church comes to birth.

Throughout the Gospel reading on April 6, Jesus keeps getting “perturbed.” Nobody seems to think he knows what he’s doing. The disciples suggest he should rethink his travel plans. When he commands people to open Lazarus’ tomb, everyone pauses. Are you sure? There will be a stench.

In spite of all the hesitation, Jesus persists with his miracle, and in the end, “Many of the Jews who had come to Mary and seen what he had done began to believe in him” (John 11:45). The folks who didn’t get it ... are just starting to see.

On April 22, we hear that touching story of Mary Magdalene’s own realization.

She turned around and saw Jesus there, but did not know it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” She thought it was the gardener and said to him, “Sir, if you carried him away, tell me where you laid him, and I will take him.” Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rab-bouni,” which means Teacher. (John 20:14-16)

Mary had convinced herself this man could not be her dead friend — and so she saw a gardener. Only her own name, in his voice, cut through the perception that clouded her eyes.

After Jesus was no longer there in the body, his disciples had to make the case that Jesus was the way. So they bore witness to what they had seen. They preached. For listeners in the first century, Marcus writes, Christian sermons were “a presentation of a new and unexpected version of reality” — a reality in which Jesus was not a condemned criminal, but a glorious and risen savior.

Sometimes, when Easter comes around, in the midst of my joy I also wonder. Christ conquered death. Light overcame the darkness. Right? Then why do we still fight wars? Why do we still hate other people?

Why did Jesus bother with us humans at all? We’ve made such a mess of things.

Yet in the midst of all our stupid pride and prejudice, we humans do have a wonderful quality. “How despicably I have acted!” Elizabeth Bennet cries, when she realizes the truth. “I, who have prided myself on my discernment! I, who have valued myself on my abilities! ... Till this moment, I never knew myself.”

Marcus explains: “In Elizabeth’s case, perception leads to repentance, a word which literally means a ‘change of mind’ and which signifies the movement from the old, distorted way of seeing and the way of acting it entails, to a new way of seeing and of being in the world.”

Jesus bothers with us because he believes we’re capable of a turn.

Let’s live up to his expectations.

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Preparing the Triduum Music

Singing the processions of Holy Thursday

By J. MICHAEL McMATHON

Preparing music for the three major liturgies of the Easter Triduum is one of the most daunting — and important — tasks that pastoral musicians face each year. This task is complicated by the wide variety of musical forms employed at these liturgies, including responsorial psalms, acclamations, responses, antiphons, litanies, hymns and more.

Among the important rituals to consider in planning music for the Triduum are the many processions that take place over the course of the great Three Days. These processions are not only occasions for moving people, but they also highlight and give expression to various aspects of the Paschal Mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection. The choice of music is very important for each of these processions because the music becomes an integral part of the processional action. For this brief article we will consider the processions of Holy Thursday only.

The song for the entrance procession on Holy Thursday should focus not on the Last Supper or the Eucharist, but rather on the cross, because this procession begins the entire celebration of the great Three Days and of the Paschal Mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection. The Roman Missal provides the traditional entrance antiphon, which begins, “We should glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.” A choir may sing the traditional Gregorian chant setting, perhaps immediately before a congregational hymn. This antiphon has been used or adapted in settings by several composers, including Steven Janco (GIA), Ricky Manalo, CSP (OCP), and Dan Schutte (OCP). There are other hymn texts that express glory in the cross of Christ, such as “Lift High the Cross” or “O Cross of Christ.”

On Holy Thursday the Roman Missal directs that the procession with the gifts should include only bread and wine and gifts for the poor, in keeping with the Gospel command to wash the feet of others.

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The Communion antiphon for Holy Thursday connects the eucharistic action to the sacrificial death of Jesus: “This is the Body that will be given up for you; this is the Chalice of the new covenant in my blood …” When choosing a song to be used in place of or in addition to this antiphon, it would seem most appropriate to seek out texts that also focus on the sacrificial aspect of the Eucharist, such as Michael Joncas’ “Take and Eat” (GIA) or Steven Janco’s “Draw Near” (WLP).

On Holy Thursday there is no dismissal, but rather the liturgy concludes with a procession with the Blessed Sacrament to the place of repose. The assembly joins in a hymn expressing awe and reverence for the saving presence of Christ under the forms of bread and wine. The Roman Missal suggests Saint Thomas Aquinas’ richly poetic and deeply theological hymn “Pange lingua gloriosi,” which has long been associated with this procession. Another eucharistic hymn may be used, but the traditional “Pange lingua” is an excellent choice, perhaps making use of both Latin and vernacular texts sung to the Gregorian chant tune.

One way to foster active participation in singing the Triduum liturgies is to develop a body of familiar music that is used from year to year. At the same time, it can be tempting merely to fall back on previous years’ selections without taking a critical look at each piece in light of the “three judgments, one evaluation” outlined in the U.S. bishops’ 2007 document “Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship” (#126 ff).

This year might provide an opportunity to review your community’s processional music for Holy Thursday and the other two major liturgies of the Triduum.

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**PREPARATION: MUSIC**

**April 2014**

**5TH SUNDAY OF LENT**

April 6, 2014

Psalm of the Day: Ps (129) 130

Contigo, Mi Dios, Piedad/With You, O God (Hurd) GP 276

There Is Mercy in the Lord PSL A-42/ SS 437

With Our God There Is Mercy (Manion) GP 275

With the Lord There Is Mercy (Alstott) JS3 895/BB p. 93

With the Lord There Is Mercy (Bogdan) PMB 592/PRM A20/LPGA A20

With the Lord There Is Mercy (Caridan) PMB 592/PRM A20/LPGA A20

With the Lord There Is Mercy (Guillot) W3 616/RS 777/SS 960

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

God So Loved the World (G) PMB 297/WC 632/R-WS 572


*Out of the Depths (Ps) JS3 797

Now We Remain (G) GC 694/GC2 825/G3 937/CBW 608/RS 933

Jesus Has Conquered Death (G) LMGM 62

*Jesus Is a Rock in a Weary Land, v 1 (G) LMGM2 355

*Jesus Is the Resurrection (G) LMGM2 680/GC2 731/G3 840

*Jesus Is the Redemption (G) GP 185/JS2 584/JS3 552/MI-BB 691

Jesus Has Conquered Death (G) LMGM 62

*Jesus Is a Rock in a Weary Land, v 1 (G) LMGM2 355

*Jesus Is the Redemption (G) LMGM2 680/GC2 731/G3 840

*Jesus Is the Redemption (G) GP 527/JS2 817/MI-BB 364

Keep in Mind (G) GC 674/GC2 658/G3 646/RS 940/W4 651/JS2 589/JS3 559/GP 492/PMB 36/WC 816/R-WS 711/MI-BB 680/SS 968

Lead Me, Guide Me (Ps) LMGM 168/LMGM2 538/GC 574/GC2 555/G3 656/RS 712/W4 657/PMB 397/JS3 654/WC 791/R-WS 676/MI-BB 392


*Martha, Mary, Waiting, Weeping (G) W4 868

*My God, My Strength (E) PSL A-41/SS 364

*My Soul in Stillness Waits, esp refrain (Ps) GC 336/GC2 328/G3 415/RS 495/W4 404/SS 726

Now in This Banquet, Lenten ref. (2, G) GC 833/GC2 825/G3 937/CBW 608/RS 933

Now We Remain (G) GC 694/GC2 640/G3 785/RS 813/W4 764/WC 652/R-WS 580/MI-BB 512/SS 983

O Christ, Who Shared Our Mortal Life, vss 2c, 3c (G) W4 706

*Out of the Depths (Ps) JS2 107, 393/JS3 109/JS3 129/CBW 647/PMB 363/WC 736/R-WS 637/MI-BB 577/SS 843

*I, the Lord (G) GP 480/JS2 584/JS3 552/MI-BB 691

Jesus Has Conquered Death (G) LMGM 62

*Jesus Is a Rock in a Weary Land, v 1 (G) LMGM2 355

*Jesus Is the Redemption (G) LMGM2 680/GC2 731/G3 840

Jesus, the Bread of Life (G) GP 527/JS2 817/MI-BB 364

Keep in Mind (G) GC 674/GC2 658/G3 646/RS 940/W4 651/JS2 589/JS3 559/GP 492/PMB 36/WC 816/R-WS 711/MI-BB 680/SS 968

Lead Me, Guide Me (Ps) LMGM 168/LMGM2 538/GC 574/GC2 555/G3 656/RS 712/W4 657/PMB 397/JS3 654/WC 791/R-WS 676/MI-BB 392


*Martha, Mary, Waiting, Weeping (G) W4 868

*My God, My Strength (E) PSL A-41/SS 364

*My Soul in Stillness Waits, esp refrain (Ps) GC 336/GC2 328/G3 415/RS 495/W4 404/SS 726

Now in This Banquet, Lenten ref. (2, G) GC 833/GC2 825/G3 937/CBW 608/RS 933

Now We Remain (G) GC 694/GC2 640/G3 785/RS 813/W4 764/WC 652/R-WS 580/MI-BB 512/SS 983

O Christ, Who Shared Our Mortal Life, vss 2c, 3c (G) W4 706

*Out of the Depths (Ps) JS2 107, 393/JS3 109/RS 947/W4 970/GC 877/G3
88/GP 344/PMB 241/WC 537/R-WS 409/MI-BB 820
Praise to You, O Christ, Our Savior (2, G) JS2 674/J3 643/GC 515/GC2 517/G3 596/RS 652/W4 591/CBW 442/GP 662/MI-BB 599
Precious Lord, Take My Hand (1, G) LGMG 162/LMGMD2 780/GC 674/GC2 847/G3 955/RS 754/W4 980/JS2 572/J3 548/PMB 448/WC 854/R-WS 749/MI-BB 695
*Remember Your Love, vss 2, 4 (Ps) GP 474/JS2 561/J3 533/GC 881/GC2 851/G3 961/RS 550/MI-BB 668
Roll Away the Stone (G) JS2 429/BB 166
Song of the Body of Christ (G) GC 847/GC2 807/G3 924/R5 924/WC 643/R-WS 764/MI-BB 324
Take and Eat (G) GC 831/GC2 812/G3 950/RS 910/W4 940/LMGMD2 765/CBW 611/WC 660/R-WS 582/MI-BB 360
The Lord Jesus Christ (G) CBW 436
*Tree of Life – Haugen (G) GC 401/GC2 397/G3 475/RS 541/CBW 373/SS 799
Victory in Jesus (G) LMGMD 240
We Live Not for Ourselves (2) JS2 773
We Shall Rise Again (1, G) RS 872/GC 772/GC2 762/G3 871/LMGMD2 719
We Will Rise Again (1, G) JS2 714/ GP 603/MI-BB 447
When Jesus Wept (G) JS2 418/J3 376/BB 141
Yes, I Shall Arise – Alstott (1, G) GP 491/J3 590/MI-BB 686
You Are the Voice (2, G) GC 549/GC2 538/G3 609/RS 659/CBW 576
You Are The Way (G) CBW 441/PMB 365/W4 682/WC 723/R-WS 633
You Shall Be My People, v 5 (1) WC 759

PALM SUNDAY OF THE LORD’S PASSION

April 13, 2014
Opening Antiphon and Procession
All Glory, Laud and Honor (Willcock) PFS 20/SS 955
My God, My God (Willcock) PFS 20/SS 955
My God, My God (Vervoort/Murray) W3 806/W4 35/TLP 48
My God, My God (Schiavone) JS2 918/GC2 892/G3 1035/LPMG 46
My God, My God (Hurd) JS2 21
My God, My God (Proulx) PMB 140, 598/WC 390/R-WS 353/PRM 229/LPGA C29
My God, My God (Schiavone) JS2 918/J3 321/GP 177/LP 49/MI-BB 749
My God, My God (Schoen) W3 806/W4 1049/RS 42/LPGA 57
My God, My God (Smith) JS3 32
My God, My God (Vervoort/Murray) CBW 63
My God, My God (Willcock) PFS 20/SS 631
Other Songs for the Liturgy
Adoramus Te Christe (2) GC2 400/G3 476/RS 542/SS 668
All You Who Pass This Way (G) W3 440/W4 492/RS 567
*At the Name of Jesus (2) CBW 427/W3 499/W4 561, 563/G3 596/GP 424/JS2 400, 483/J3 369, 465/MI-BB 739, 742/R-WS 642
Behold, before Our Wond’ring Eyes (G) JS2 381/J3 149
Behold the Cross (1) JS2 381/BB 146
Behold the Lamb of God (1) JS2 809/J3 386/GP 360/BB 155/GC2 824/BB 153
Behold the Wood (G) GP 369/CBW 379/GC2 437/G3 514/J3 411/J3 388/RB 28
Calvary (G) LMGMD 38/LMGMD2 296/RS 568
Crux Fidelis (2, G) PMB 247/WC 769/R-WS 665
*Do This in Remembrance of Me (G) WC 641
Down at the Cross (G) LMGMD 46/LMGMD2 282
Glory in the Cross (G) G3 501/W4 486/JS2 523/J3 375/MI-BB 724
He Will Remember Me LMGM 36
*If I Must Drink This Cup (C) PSL A-46/SS 316
In Manus Tuas, Pater (G) G3 513/W4 493
*In the Cross of Christ (2) GC2 436/G3 515/R5 221/SS 818
Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross (G) LMGMD 45/LMGMD2 300/R-WS 667
*Jesus the Lord (2) GP 370/JS2 484/J3 467/GC2 403/G3 491/RS 574/CBW 432/MI-BB 734
Keep in Mind (G) PMB 36/GC2 658/G3 646/RS 940/W4 651/JP 492/J3 589/J3 559/WC 816/R-WS 711/MI-BB 680/SS 968
Lord, We Adore You (1, G) JS2 413/J3 382/RB 29
My Song Is Love Unknown (G) W3 439/W4 490/JS2 415/J3 390/RS 572
No Greater Love GC 607/G3 701/RS 753/W4 698/CBW 599/JP 362/BB 145/SS 936
Now We Remain (2) GC2 696/G3 785/RS 813/W4 764/WC 652/R-WS 580/MI-BB 512/SS 983
*O Christ, What Can It Mean for Us (2) W4 567
O Cross of Christ CBW 368/PMB 248/WC 770/SS 819
O Crucified Messiah (G) BB 155
O Love of God Incarnate (G) JS2 410
*O Lowly Lamb of God Most High (2) SS 955
O Sacred Head (1, G) W3 434/W4 489/
PREPARATION: MUSIC

GC2 435/G3 512/RS 569/LMGM 52/
LMGM2 297, 299/PMB 255/CBW 378/
GP 367/JS2 409/JS3 383, 393/WC
556/R-WS 507/BB 148, 150/SS 816
Only Love (2) LMGM2 302
Only This I Want (2) GC2 701/G3 782/
GP 575/JS2 766/JS3 732/CBW 516/
MI-BB 514
Ours Were the Griefs He Bore (G) JS3
389
Philippians Canticle (2) W3 92/W4
129/G3 103
Psalm of Hope (Ps) RS 730/G3 684
Sing, My Tongue, the Savior's Glory (G)
JS2 414/JS3 384/BB 149
Sing, My Tongue, the Song of Triumph
(G) RS 573/W4 437/CBW 69
Take and Eat (G) GC2 812/G3 950/
RS 910/W4 940/LMGM2 765/CBW
611/WC 660/R-WS 582/MI-BB 360/
SS 1087
Take Up Our Cross (2) W3 634/R-WS
721/JS2 502/MI-BB 723
Take Up Your Cross (2) W3 634/W4
761/LMGM 50/GC2 688, 690/G3 801/
RS 808/JS2 524/JS3 501/GP 586/
CBW 485/PMB 238/WC 768/R-WS
666/MI-BB 721/SS 985
The Cross of Jesus (1) GC2 396/G3
482/W4 465
*Though in the Form of God (2) CBW
687
Tree of Life – Haugen GC2 401/G3 475/
CBW 373/RS 541/SS 799
Unless a Grain of Wheat JS2 760, 802/
JS3 725, 801/GP 579/CBW 699/G3
783/RS 804/W4 759/MI-BB 351, 506
Up to Jerusalem (G) PMB 246/WC 546/
R-WS 510
We Acclaim the Cross of Jesus (G) PMB
252/WC 772/R-WS 663
We Glory in the Cross (G) W4 884
We Have No Glory JS2 671
We Remember GC2 578/G3 681/RS
724/W4 938/WC 665/R-WS 559/MI-
BB 495/SS 922
We Should Glory in the Cross (G) JS2
686
We Who Once Were Dead CBW 402
Were You There (G) LMGM 43/LMGM2
301/W3 436/W4 488/GC2 438/G3
511/RS 570/JS2 412/JS3 385/GP
368/PMB 250/WC 553/R-WS 505/BB
154/SS 817
What Wondrous Love Is This (2, G) W3
600/W4 641/GC2 614/G3 642/RS
749/LMGM2 500/PMB 253/GP 642/
JS2 755/JS3 719/WC 732/R-WS 710/
MI-BB 485/SS 932
When I Survey the Wondrous Cross (G)
W3 433/W4 494/LMGM2 725/CBW
382/PMB 249/JS2 417/JS3 387/WC
771/R-WS 664/BB 152
When Jesus Wept (G) JS2 418/JS3
376/BB 141
Wooed of the Cross (Ps) JS2 407/JS3
380/BB 151
Your Only Son (2) JS3 391
EASTER SUNDAY
April 20, 2014
Psalm of the Day: Ps (117) 118
Aandleua/Aleagueia (Reza) JS2 94
Este Es el Dia (Manzano) GP 262
Surrexit Christus (Berthier) GC2 455/
G3 529/RS 577/W4 525
This Is the Day PSL A-66/SS 442
This Is the Day (Alstott) JS3 902/BB p.
151
This Is the Day (Chepponis) W4 93/SS
663
This Is the Day (Fisher) JS2 444/JS3
421
This Is the Day (Guimont) CBW 90/GC2
987/G3 1065/LPMG 59
This Is the Day (Hagen) GC2 65/G3
81/RS 158/W4 94/TLP 52
This Is the Day (Haugen) GC2 65/G3
81/RS 158/W4 94/TLP 52
This Is the Day (Hommerding) PMB
169, 617/WC 439/R-WS 404/PRM
A47/LPGA A40
This Is the Day (Joncas) JS2 97/JS3 98/
GP 261/CBW 89/RS 576/G3 82/MI-BB
813
This Is the Day (Keutz) PCS 15, 20
This Is the Day (Peloquin) JS2 97/JS3 98/
GP 261/CBW 89/RS 576/G3 82/MI-BB
813
This Is the Day (Proulx) GP 263/JS3 99/
MI-BB 814
Sequence (sung before the Alleluia)
Christ Is Arisen JS3 398/BB 160
Christ the Lord Is Risen Today (Victimae
Paschali) W3 452, 461/W4 520, 528/
RS 594/PMB 268/GP 387/JS2 422/
JS3 397/LMGM 57/LMGM2 311/CBW
385/WC 569/R-WS 512/BB 173/SS
836
Christian Parents Sing Your Praises
(Paraphrase) WC 577
Christians, Praise the Paschal Victim
(Chant) W3 837/W4 1080/WC 572/R-
WS 499/CBW 690/RS 980/GC2 444/
G3 1065/LMGM 284
Christians, to the Paschal Victim JS2
421/JS3 396/BB 36/PRM A48/SS 824
Eastertide Carol GP 380
Let Christians All Their Voices Raise
PMB 270/WC 570/R-WS 528
Sprinkling Rite/Renewal of Baptismal
Promises
Alleluia (Nestor) W4 314
I Saw Water Flowing JS2 543/JS3 256,
509/PMB 112/WC 349/R-WS 324/MI-
BB 930
If We Have Died to Ourselves GC2 135/
RS 315
Lord Jesus, from Your Wounded Side
W3 271/W4 313/RS 380/G3 315
Send Us Flowing Water, Lord WC 350
Springs of Water CBW 88/GC2 155,
189/G3 205, 316/RS 377/W4 315/JS3
399/WC 348/R-WS 325/BB 172/SS
1186, 1187, 1188
Streams of Living Water JS2 254
Sweat Refreshment GC2 802/G3 899/
SS 671
There Is One Lord W3 657/GC2 796/
G3 905/RS 835/LMGM2 745/GP 453/
CBW 530/PMB 287/JS2 699/WC 610/
R-WS 553/MI-BB 499
Vidi Aquam JS3 167/SS 1174
Wash Me LMGM2 211
Water of Life – Dean JS3 255/JS2 255/
BB 33/MI-BB 928
Water of Life/Agua de Vida – Cortez JS2
252/JS3 254/MI-BB 929
Waters of Living Water WC 352/R-WS 323
We Shall Draw Water JS2 117/JS3 118/
MI-BB 827
With Joy You Shall Draw Water GC2 81/
G3 97/CBW 237/GP 288
You Will Draw Water Joyfully RS 204/G3
98/WC 351/PMB 113/SS 626
Other Songs for the Liturgy
All Shall Be Well GP 396
All Things New GC2 450/G3 541
All You Nations PMB 266/WC 414/R-
WS 379
All You on Earth PMB 266/WC 573/R-
WS 517
Alleluia! Alleluia! (2, C) PMB 264/JS2
437/JS3 415/MM 170/WC 578/R-WS
512
Alleluia, Alleluia! Let the Holy Anthem
Rise (G) PMB 273/GC2 440/LMGM2
318/JS2 434/JS3 411/PP 399/WC
584/R-WS 523/SS 842/BB 174
*Alleluia! Christ Is Risen (E) IH 22
PREPARATION: MUSIC

Alleluia, Christ Is Risen (1, 2, G) G3 518
At the Lamb’s High Feast We Sing (2, C) W3 459, 460/W4 512/GC2 463/G3 538/RS 578/CBW 375/PMB 271/J52 424/J53 407/LMGM2 316/GP 394/ WC 564/R-WS 515/SS 845/BB 169
Baptized in Living Waters (1) PMB 386/WC 762/R-WS 661
Be Not Afraid – Taizé (G) W4 522
Bread of Life from Heaven/Pan de Vida Eterna (2, G) GC2 803/G3 943/W4 948/SS 1063
Christ Has Arisen LMGM 61/LMGM2 314
Christ Has Arisen (G) GC2 465/G3 530/W4 505/LMGM 65
Christ Is Risen WC 566
Christ Is Risen! Shout Hosanna! GC2 449/G3 521/W4 498/PMB 263/WC 581/R-WS 521/SS 830
*Christ Our Pasch Is Sacrificed (C) PSL A-67/SS 238
Christ the Lord Is Risen! W4 523/RS 600
*Christ the Lord Is Risen Again (E) PSL A-65/SS 239
Christ the Lord Is Risen Again (G) J52 442/J53 420/WC 588/BB 164
*Christus Resurrexit (Ps) W3 465
Come, Ye Faithful, Raise the Strain W3 456/W4 509/J52 426/J53 402/GC2 448/G3 533/RS 575/WC 587/BB 159/ SS 846
Darkness Is Gone WS 596
Day of Delight (G) W4 499
Do Not Be Afraid (G) J52 731/GP 630
Earth, Earth, Awake! GC2 441/G3 531/W4 504/SS 848
Festival Canticle: This Is the Feast of Victory W3 458/W4 515/GC2 458/G3 520/RS 583/PMB 489/J52 428/J53 424/CBW 396/WC 908/R-WS 790/MI- BB 570/SS 829
Good Christians All, Rejoice and Sing! CBW 386/RS 586/PMB 262/WC 585/ SS 847
Goodness Is Stronger than Evil GC2 451/G3 528/W4 500/LMGM2 313
Hail Thee, Festival Day (Ps) W3 444/W4 524/RS 588/CBW 386/J52 450/J53 428/WC 576/BB 182
He Arose LMGM 59/LMGM2 307
He Is Lord LMGM 56/LMGM2 304
If Christ Had Not Been Raised from Death (2) W4 497
Jesus Has Conquered Death LMGM 62
Jesus Is Risen JS2 447/JS3 425/BB 171
Join in the Dance JS2 438/JS3 410/GP 393/MI-BB 573
Keep in Mind PMB 36/J52 589/J53 559/GP 492/GC2 658/G3 646/RS 940/W4 651/WC 816/R-WS 711/MI- BB 680/SS 968
Lift Up Your Hearts GP 676/GC2 543/ G3 624/MI-BB 541/JS2 711/J53 593/ RS 691
May We Be One (1, 2) RS 477/GC2 322/G3 394
Now We Remain GC2 696/GG 783/RS 813/W4 764/WC 652/R-WS 580/MI- BB 512/SS 983
*O Sons and Daughters, vss 1-4 (G) W3 447/W4 507/LMGM 60/LMGM2 312/ GC2 446/G3 532/RS 579/PMB 274/J52 420/J53 405/GP 379/CBW 404/ WC 579/R-WS 513/BB 170/SS 823
*Our Paschal Sacrifice (2, C) BB 178
Praise the Risen Lord PMB 256/WC 563/R-WS 531
Rejoice! LMGM 55/LMGM2 310
Resuscitó GC2 443/G3 535/RS 580/J52 309/J53 404/GP 391/BB 177
*Sing to the Mountains (Ps) W3 673/ JS2 601/J53 580/GC2 452/G3 519/ RS 590/MI-BB 545
Singers, Sing PMB 261/WC 575/SS 837
Surrexit Christus (2, G) RS 577/GC2 455/G3 529/W4 525
*Take and Eat, v 4 (Ps) GC2 812/G3 950/RS 910/W4 940/LMGM2 765/ CBW 611/WC 660/R-WS 582/MI-BB 360/SS 1087
*That Easter Day with Joy Was Bright (G) W3 457/W4 514/RS 599/G3 542/ CBW 392/SS 825
The Day of Resurrection (2) PMB 272/ WC 583/R-WS 520/BB 163/SS 835
The Sun Arose in Clouds of Fire (G) J52 433
The Sun Was Bright That Easter Dawn HG 14
The Tomb Is Empty (G) GC2 464/SS 834
Thine Be the Glory (G) WC 567/R-WS 516
*This Is the Day (Ref based on today’s psalm refrain, but verses are not from Ps 118) J52 311, 588/GP 397/CBW 592/ PMB 269/LMGM2 305/WC 590/R-WS 657/SS 831
This Joyful Eastertide J52 305/J53 414/WC 582/PMB 397/SS 398/W4 502
Three Days J52 423/J53 406/BB 176
Up from the Earth RS 589/GP 386
We Know That Christ Is Raised (2) W3 721/CBW 398/WC 586/R-WS 906/SS 832

2ND SUNDAY OF EASTER

April 27, 2014

Psalms of the Day: Ps (117) 118
Alleluia PSL A-70/SS 263
Give Thanks to the Lord (Alstott) J52 96/J53 903/BB p. 155
Give Thanks to the Lord (Boschetti- Fowler) CBW 91
Give Thanks to the Lord (Guimont) GC2 988/G3 1066/LPMG 60
Give Thanks to the Lord (Hopson) PMB 618/PRM A49/LPGA A42
Give Thanks to the Lord (Hunstiger) SS 595
Give Thanks to the Lord (Petty) LMGM2 855/LPLM 73
Give Thanks to the Lord (Schiavone) J52 923/J53 100/LP 66
Give Thanks to the Lord (Smith) GP 264/MI-BB 815
Give Thanks to the Lord (Waddell) W3 838/W4 94, 1081/RS 159/LPGG 71
Suggested Common Psalm: Ps (117) 118
See suggestions for Easter Sunday.
Songs for the Liturgy
See also suggestions for Easter Sunday.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song Title</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I Come with Joy (1)</td>
<td>W3 726/W4 926/GC 806/GC2 799/G3 919/RS 854/LMGM2 754/CBW 424/PMB 320/WC 887/R-W 595/SS 1056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If You Believe and I Believe</td>
<td>G 818/4/GC 722/4/GC2 708/G3 803/JS2 839</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the Breaking of the Bread/Cuando el Pan del Señor (1)</td>
<td>JS2 808/JS3 779/JP 508/PMB 303/RS 932/GC 841/GC2 843/GC3 918/W4 944/WC 637/R-WS 564/MI-BB 336</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is Your All on the Altar (G)</td>
<td>LMGM 277/LMGM2 660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus Christ, by Faith Revealed (G)</td>
<td>PMB 369/WC 734/R-WS 639</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joyful, Joyful, We Adore You (G)</td>
<td>W3 525/W4 611/RS 669/GC 528/GC2 520/G3 614/LMGM2 435/CBW 511/JS2 617/JS3 575/GP 693/PMB 497/WC 918/4/R-WS 784/MI-BB 548/SS 901</td>
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<td>*Like Newborn Children (E)</td>
<td>PSL C-74/SS 345</td>
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<td>For Newborn Infants</td>
<td>IH 23</td>
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<tr>
<td>Father, We Thank Thee (1)</td>
<td>W3 731/W4 937/RS 917/JS2 797</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eye Has Not Seen (G)</td>
<td>GC 638/GC2 616/G3 728/RS 758/W4 713/CBW 482/WC 856/R-WS 738/MI-BB 463/SS 940</td>
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<tr>
<td>Healer of Our Every Ill (G)</td>
<td>RS 910/GC 645/R-WS 559/MI-BB 495/SS 922</td>
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<tr>
<td>This is the Feast of Victory (2)</td>
<td>W3 457/W4 514/RS 583/GC2 429/GC2 458/G3 520/CBW 396/PMB 489/JS2 428/JS3 424/WC 908/R-WS 790/MI-BB 570/SS 829</td>
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<tr>
<td>Glory and Praise to Our God (G)</td>
<td>GP 671/JS2 596/JS3 574/RS 696/GC 522/GC2 537/G3 606/W4 597/WC 909/R-WS 787/MI-BB 542</td>
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<tr>
<td>He Comes to Us as One Unknown (G)</td>
<td>W3 573/W4 675</td>
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<tr>
<td>Healer of Our Every Ill (G)</td>
<td>RS 958/GC 882/GC2 854/G3 960/W4 965/WC 868/R-WS 614</td>
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<tr>
<td>A Living Hope (2)</td>
<td>CBW 613/PMB 284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptized in Living Waters (2, G)</td>
<td>PMB 386/WC 762/R-WS 661</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bread of Life from Heaven/Pan de Vida Eterna (G)</td>
<td>GC2 803/G3 943/W4 948/SS 1063</td>
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<tr>
<td>Christ Has Risen (G)</td>
<td>GC 451/GC2 465/G3 530/W4 504</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christ, Our King before Creation (G)</td>
<td>CBW 499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church of God (1, 2)</td>
<td>RS 783/GC 664/GP 571/CBW 581/PMB 381</td>
</tr>
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</table>
| Do Not Be Afraid (G) | JS2 731/GP 630 *
| *Draw Us in the Spirit’s Tether (1) | W3 731/W4 937/RS 917/JS2 797 |
| Eye Has Not Seen (G) | GC 638/GC2 616/G3 728/RS 758/W4 713/CBW 482/WC 856/R-WS 738/MI-BB 463/SS 940 |
| Father, We Thank Thee (1) | W3 558/W4 631/CBW 528/RS 705/GC 568/GC2 547/G3 632/PMB 316/WC 630/R-WS 558/SS 915 |
| Festival Canticle: This Is the Feast of Victory (2) | W3 458/W4 515/RS 583/GC2 429/GC2 458/G3 520/CBW 396/PMB 489/JS2 428/JS3 424/WC 908/R-WS 790/MI-BB 570/SS 829 |
| Glory and Praise to Our God (G) | GP 671/JS2 596/JS3 574/RS 696/GC 522/GC2 537/G3 606/W4 597/WC 909/R-WS 787/MI-BB 542 |
| He Comes to Us as One Unknown (G) | W3 573/W4 675 |
| Healer of Our Every Ill (G) | RS 958/GC 882/GC2 854/G3 960/W4 965/WC 868/R-WS 614 |

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Evaluating Scrutinies

Fr. Lawrence Mick

This Sunday brings us to the third scrutiny for the elect. After the weekend celebrations, planners should find some time to evaluate how well the scrutinies were celebrated this year. Such evaluation might focus on several main points, revolving around the various actors in the liturgical rite.

The first, of course, would be the elect themselves. It would be good to solicit feedback from them. The RCIA team ought to be doing that after each scrutiny, so planners might seek insight from the team rather than directly from the elect. How did they experience the rituals? What did they find most powerful? Do they have any suggestions for how the rite might be better celebrated?

A second focus might be on the larger assembly. How well did they enter into the rites? Were they able to see the elect? Were they invited to participate in any ritual way, e.g., by extending hands over the elect as the main prayer was proclaimed? What could be done to heighten the involvement of the assembly in future years? Were the scrutinies all done at the same Mass or rotated among different weekend assemblies? Were issues of concern to the broader assembly included in the scrutiny petitions so that all were called to scrutinize their attitudes and actions? How were those concerns surfaced? How might you do it next year?

A third focus might be on the planners themselves. How did you experience the scrutinies? Were you able to enter fully into the ritual or were you distracted by your responsibilities? Did you let God scrutinize your life? Was the experience of these rites an aid to your own deeper conversion during Lent? It is frequently a challenge for planners and other ministers to enter fully into the liturgy. We need to remind ourselves often that we are there to pray and worship even more than to plan and minister. Reflecting on how the rites impacted our own lives can help us to discern how effective the rites may have been for others, too.

Evaluation of our worship needs to be an ongoing task. It is important for planners to look back as well as look forward. It is also essential to keep the circle of input wide enough to be effective. Beyond the planners’ own reflections and opinions, it is important to find effective ways to gather feedback from others in the assembly. This might be with a short written survey or it might be verbal input from a small “focus group,” or it might just be informal feedback gathered by asking a variety of worshipers for their input after the liturgy at coffee and doughnuts.

Fifth Sunday of Lent

Paige Byrne Shortal

INTRODUCTION

My friends, today’s Gospel is the familiar story of Jesus calling Lazarus to come out of his tomb. Jesus calls us, too, out of whatever tombs we find ourselves in. Let us pray today to answer the call of Jesus.

PENITENTIAL ACT

Lord Jesus, you call us to new life: Lord, have mercy. Christ Jesus, you call us to follow you with faith and trust: Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you call us from the darkness into the light: Lord, have mercy.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Ezek 37:12-14 I will put my spirit in you.
Psalm 130:1-8 With the Lord there is mercy.
Rom 8:8-11 You will be raised through the Spirit of Christ living within you.
John 11:1-45 “Lazarus, come out!”

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

Presider My friends, just as Jesus called his friend Lazarus out of the darkness of the tomb, so does he call our world and each one of us out of the darkness and into the light of the kingdom of God. Let us pray.

Minister We are called out of the darkness of violence. For peace among the nations, within our families and communities, and within our hearts ... we pray, God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We are called out of the darkness of injustice. For a fair distribution of goods and opportunities so that all people may have meaningful work and hope for their children’s future ... we pray, God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We are called out of the darkness of faithlessness. For those who do not know God; those who do not have a church home; and for those preparing to enter the church at Easter ... we pray, God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We are called out of the darkness of despair. For those struggling with illness, addiction, depression, loneliness or habits of sin ... we pray, God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We will all be called out of this life into that life where we will see Jesus face to face. For those who have died (names). For those who are dying today, those who fear death, and those who mourn ... we pray, God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Presider God of life and all creation, you call us to new life with you, to forsake our tombs of doubt, despair and meanness for a life of faith, hope and love with you. Hear our prayers and give us all that we need this day to become the holy men and women you intend us to be. We pray always in Jesus’ name. Amen.
Passion Sunday to Triduum

Fr. Lawrence Mick

The celebration of the Mass of the Lord’s Supper on Holy Thursday marks the beginning of the Triduum, the most sacred period of the liturgical year. It is important, then, to prepare this liturgy well and to encourage parishioners to take part in it.

This Sunday is a good chance for both a bulletin item and a verbal announcement that reminds people that the Triduum is a special time. Encourage parishioners to take part in all three of the main liturgies: Thursday night, Good Friday and the Easter Vigil. Also encourage the keeping of the Paschal fast on Friday and Saturday as preparation for the Vigil and as prayer for the elect who are preparing for the Easter sacraments.

The Holy Thursday liturgy should be planned as part of the Triduum, not just as a separate day to celebrate the institution of the Eucharist or of the ordained priesthood. Note that the opening antiphon in the missal signals this broad view of the celebration: “We should glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom is our salvation, life and resurrection, through whom we are saved and delivered.” The opening song should reflect that kind of attention to the full Paschal Mystery, which the Triduum celebrates.

Most of us think of the institution of the Eucharist as central to this celebration, and that is certainly a key element. At the same time, it is important to understand the Eucharist correctly, which is why our Gospel passage this night recounts the washing of the feet rather than the institution of the Eucharist itself. This should make us realize the importance of the ritual of foot washing, even though the missal describes it as optional. It is the key to proper interpretation of the Eucharist. Jesus gave us his body and blood as our food and drink. This central sacrament is a meal, which indicates its purpose of uniting us to one another in Christ. The Eucharist also celebrates the Paschal Mystery, the Lord’s death and resurrection, and invites us to share in his sacrifice. We are to share in it not just ritually, but by living our lives for others as he did: “I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do.”

So, take time to prepare this ritual element well. Figure out how to include the whole assembly in the action, with multiple stations for foot washing. Practice with servers and other ministers to keep an adequate supply of water and clean towels for each station. Let people know in the bulletin this weekend that all will be invited to take part, so they should come with shoes and socks that are easily removed.

Palm/Passion Sunday

Paige Byrne Shortal

The Penitential Act is replaced with the Commemoration of Our Lord’s Entrance into Jerusalem and the Blessing and Procession with Palms.

SCRIPTURE READINGS
Isa 50:4-7 The true servant of God did not protect himself from death.
Psalm 22 My God, why have you abandoned me?
Phil 2:6-11 An early Christian hymn
Matt26:14-27:66 The Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

Presider My brothers and sisters in Christ, as we enter this Holy Week, let us pray for our world and ourselves, asking God for what we need to make a holy difference.

Minister For the church spread throughout the world, for Christians everywhere who this week will remember and celebrate the life, passion, death and resurrection of Jesus ... we pray, God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

❖ For those whose work it is to serve the worshiping community: for pastors and deacons, ministers of music and ministers of the word, those who make the worship space beautiful and those who offer hospitality ... we pray, God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

❖ For those who will enter the church at Easter: for those who have been responsible for their formation this week: for pastors and deacons, ministers of the word, those who make the worship space beautiful and those who offer hospitality ... we pray, God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

❖ For those who are unable to join their faith community this week: for those who are sick or suffering; for those away from home; for those who do not feel welcome in the church ... we pray, God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

❖ For those whose work it is to serve the worshiping community: for pastors and deacons, ministers of music and ministers of the word, those who make the worship space beautiful and those who offer hospitality ... we pray, God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

❖ We pray today for each of us as we enter Holy Week. For the grace to set aside enough time so that we may come together to worship and pray for the salvation of our world ... we pray, God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

❖ For those who have died ... (names). And for those who are dying with no one to pray for them ... we pray, God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Presider Good and gracious God, hear the prayers of your people this day and grant your church and your world a Holy Week of calm and joy and love for each other and all humankind. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.
Planners all know that the Easter Vigil is the main celebration of Easter and the central celebration of the liturgical year. Many parishioners do not know this, as the often meager attendance at the Vigil reveals. Restoring the Vigil to its proper place in our liturgical life began in the 1950s, with the reforms of the Vigil and of Holy Week under Pope Pius XII. The process got a big boost after Vatican II with the restoration of the catechumenate, which recovered the core of the Vigil in the celebration of the Easter sacraments of initiation.

The Vigil liturgy is our most important celebration because it is the time we initiate adults and children of catechetical age through the waters of the font, the anointing with chrism and sharing at the eucharistic table for the first time. It is also, of course, the first celebration of Easter each year. And it is important because of the richness of its texts and rituals. It offers us rich fare to nourish our spiritual lives and to sustain us in living out the sacraments we celebrate.

It will take ongoing efforts for decades to catechize parishioners on why they should take part in this holy night. But perhaps even more important is to make sure that the celebration itself is all that it can be. It is the experience of a wondrous liturgy that draws people to come back year after year, and word of mouth often leads others to try it because they have heard how wonderful the celebration is.

The key to a good celebration of the Vigil does not lie in creating new rituals or rearranging the rituals in the missal. It simply requires doing what is there well, and that means using the symbols of this night as fully as possible. A good-sized fire kindled outside before people arrive can draw them to the opening service of light. Excellent proclamation of the scripture texts combined with psalms that are easily sung by the assembly can make the Liturgy of the Word memorable and powerful. Full use of water by celebrating baptism by immersion and making sure all come to the water or are sprinkled with it fosters deeper awareness and commitment to baptismal living. Appropriate baptismal garments and candles for the newly baptized speak of their transformation and dignity. Liberal use of chrism for confirmation spreads its wonderful aroma throughout the assembly. Good bread and rich wine speaks of a true feast. Rich décor (not necessarily lavish) communicates the importance of the night and of the season. Good music well done lifts up the whole assembly in praise and gratitude and joy. When people leave the celebration tonight, there should be no doubt in anyone’s mind that they have truly celebrated!
Prime Time for Mystagogy

Fr. Lawrence Mick

As we have gradually deepened our understanding of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, we have begun to understand more fully the role of mystagogy in religious formation. The General Catechetical Directory from Rome and documents from the U.S. bishops have insisted that the catechumenate is to be the model for all catechesis in the church. That means that we catechize both adults and children by preparing them to celebrate the liturgy and then by reflecting with them on the meaning of what they have experienced after it happens.

RCIA teams are learning that this pattern is not reserved only for the period of the RCIA called mystagogy. It is rather the way that we should be guiding catechumens throughout their formation. We prepare for prayers and ritual experiences, including the Liturgy of the Word on Sundays, and then we help them to reflect on what they have heard and seen to discern where God has been present and active in their own experience. This provides the basis for theological insights drawn from the church’s tradition over the centuries, but the experience itself is primary and the first step is to unpack its meaning and significance.

While mystagogy is gradually finding its way into other contexts and seasons, the Easter season remains a primary time for mystagogy, since it follows the celebration of our foundational sacraments at the Easter Vigil. This is the time to reflect upon and unpack the significance of those sacraments for our daily life as individual believers and as a community of faith.

Planners, then, should work closely with the RCIA team and the preacher(s) to discern what issues need to be addressed and what insights will be helpful for both the newly baptized and the whole assembly. This is a season for all of us to deepen our appreciation for the initiation sacraments and to challenge ourselves to live out their implications in our lives.

The readings of the Easter season are chosen to foster this kind of reflection. This is true in all three cycles, but it is perhaps clearest in our current Cycle A texts. Planners and preachers should look at the readings for the whole season to get a sense of how they progress. It can be helpful to list all the various themes that might be drawn from each set of readings. Then that list can be discussed with the RCIA team to see what topics might be most useful for mystagogy for the newly baptized.

Preachers can then develop their homilies accordingly and planners might put together bulletin articles or inserts that provide further materials for reflection on each topic.

2nd Sunday of Easter

Paige Byrne Shortal

INTRODUCTION

My friends, today we hear about Doubting Thomas, who struggled to believe. We all struggle to believe the good news when what we see on TV is so much death and destruction. We struggle to believe in mercy when there is so much selfish violence. Today is also called Divine Mercy Sunday. Let us choose to believe in mercy, in new life, in the good news. Let us choose to follow Christ today.

PENITENTIAL ACT

Lord Jesus, you are risen and present in word and sacrament: Lord, have mercy.
Christ Jesus, you are risen and present in prayer and common life: Christ, have mercy.
Lord Jesus, you are risen and present in our kind words and generous acts: Lord, have mercy.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Acts 2:42-47 Four signs of church: teaching, common life, breaking bread, prayer
Psalm 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24 Give thanks to the Lord for he is good!
1 Peter 1:3-9 Even though you do not see him, you believe in him.
John 20:19-31 Blessed are they who have not seen and have believed.

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

Presider Called to believe what we cannot see, let us pray for true, abiding faith and eyes open to the miracles all around us.
Minister For the suffering people of the world who wait for a miracle ... we pray,
♦ For the church: for the grace to be the face of Christ to those who do not know him and cannot see him ... we pray,
♦ For each person who comes to the table for Eucharist: for the grace to welcome each other in love, hope, joy and delight in the Lord ... we pray,
♦ For those who live with guilt: for those who have hurt another person, for those who said or did something they wish they could take back, for those impatient with the ones they love the most ... we pray,
♦ For those who have died ... (names). For those who mourn the loss of someone dear to them and for those who have died with no one to mourn them ... we pray,
♦ For each of us: that we may recognize the face of Christ in every person we meet this week ... we pray,
Presider Merciful and loving God, hear our prayers this day and be with us this week as we try to live as disciples of your son. We pray always in the name of Jesus, your Son and our risen Lord, forever and ever. Amen.
Loose Change from Church and World

Quotable Wisdom

This sentence contradicts itself — no, actually, it doesn’t.
To err is human, to arr is pirate.
To err is human, to blame it on somebody else shows management potential.
To err is human.
Today is the first day of the rest of this mess.
Today is the tomorrow you worried about yesterday.
Today’s children would be less spoiled if we could spank grandparents!
Tomorrow will be canceled due to lack of interest.
Too bad all the people who know how to run this country are busy running taxicabs or cutting hair.
Too much of everything is just enough.
True friendship comes when the silence between two people is comfortable.
Trying is failing with honors.
Two wrongs don’t make a right, but three lefts do.
Two wrongs don’t make a right, but two Wrights made an airplane.
Unix is user-friendly — it’s just picky about its friends.
Veni, vidi, Velo. I came, I saw, I stuck around.
Vidi, vici, veni. I saw, I conquered, I came.
Viewer discretion may be advised, but it’s never really expected.
Warning: Dates in calendar are closer than they appear.
We all can’t be heroes. Somebody has to sit on the sidelines and clap as they go by.
We found Jesus — he was behind the sofa all along.
We live in a society where pizza gets to your house before the police.
We never really grow up, we only learn how to act in public.
Welcome what you can’t avoid.
What happens if you get scared half to death twice?
What has been seen cannot be unseen.
What if there were no hypothetical questions?
What we anticipate seldom occurs; what we least expect generally happens.
Whatever happens, ignore it all.
When everything’s coming your way, you’re in the wrong lane.
When I am sad, I sing, and then the world is sad with me.
When I was young I was told that anyone could be president. Now I’m beginning to believe it.
When in doubt, do what the president does. Guess.
When in doubt, mumble.
When in doubt, poke it with a stick.
When it’s dark enough, you can see the stars.

Cartoons

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“I understand he hacked into the mainframe at St. Peter’s.”

“I’m not sure the key to financial success and the key to the kingdom always open the same door.”
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.
Promise Kept
This is the day the Lord has made

Thus says the Lord God:
O my people,
I will open your graves
and have you rise from them,
and bring you back
to the land of Israel.
Then you shall know
that I am the Lord,
when I open your graves
and have you rise from them,
O my people!

I will put my spirit in you
that you may live,
and I will settle you
upon your land;
thus you shall know
that I am the Lord.
I have promised,
and I will do it,
says the Lord.

—Ezekiel 37:12-14
First reading for April 6, 2014,
Fifth Sunday of Lent
A comparison of the synoptic Gospels with the Gospel of John reveals obvious differences, one of which concerns the miracles or wonders worked by Jesus. Generally, the Synoptics represented most of Jesus’ miracles as acts of power by which Jesus established the reign of God and defeated the reign of Satan. Some miracles, like the multiplication of the loaves for the many, have symbolic significance. These echo themes from the Hebrew scriptures and are represented as the fulfillment of prophecies; they also point ahead to future events — for example, the Eucharist.

But, in the fourth Gospel, the evangelist has chosen to pass on to his readers only seven events that have come to be known as signs. Through each sign, something of the person and purpose of Jesus is revealed, and those who witness the sign are challenged to come to believe in him. As Raymond E. Brown has explained, the signs in John could be compared to the prophets’ symbolic actions in the Hebrew scriptures (The Gospel According to John, Doubleday, New York: 1996). Often, the prophet performed an action that portrayed God’s coming judgment or future intervention (as in Jer 13:1-11; Isa 20:3; Ezek 12:1-16). However, in the realized eschatology of the Johannine Gospel, the signs of Jesus not only prophesy about God’s intervention but already contain it. Each sign is to be understood as testimony to the presence of God in Jesus.

In the seventh and greatest sign of the fourth Gospel, Jesus called Lazarus forth from his grave. Jesus accomplished what Ezekiel had promised in the prophecy that constitutes today’s first reading: “I will open your graves and have you rise from them ... then you shall know that I am the Lord!” In so doing, Jesus was revealed as one sent by God, as one with God, and as the resurrection and the life.

When asked if she believed this, Martha responded, “Yes, Lord!” and professed her faith in Jesus, “the Christ, the Son of God.” But her faith was still growing, as was that of the disciples, who, from the first sign at Cana to the seventh sign at Bethany, were deepening their knowledge of Jesus. Full, salvific faith, as Raymond E. Brown (op. cit.) has pointed out, “is a gift of God which, like the gift of the Spirit, can come only after the resurrection.”

As the sacred texts are proclaimed yet again in our hearing, we are to become aware that Lazarus’ story and his experience are a paradigm for every believer. Just as Jesus loved Lazarus (John 11:3, 36), so does Jesus love us. Similarly, just as Jesus wept for Lazarus (John 11:35), so is Jesus fully and even emotionally invested in our well-being. Moreover, just as Lazarus was raised, so every believer begins to live life anew at baptism and, after death, rises to live forever in glory with the Lord.

Roland Faley reminds us that the preface in the Mass of Christian Burial declares that in death “life is changed, not taken away” (Footprints on the Mountain, Paulist Press, New York: 1994). Death is a passage or a transition, not a terminal experience. This does not mean there is no pain or sorrow or wrenching separation at death. But, if we truly accept Jesus at his word, and if we truly understand Lazarus’ story as the story of us

We who profess to believe in him are endowed by his Spirit to be living signs that reveal who Jesus is.
all, then there will arise in us hope
and trust that will see us through that
passage with strength and assurance.
Until such time as God calls us
home, Paul (second reading) reminds
us that we are to live life in accord
with the Spirit of God who dwells
within. A dynamic, uncontrollable
entity, the Spirit is constantly urg-
ing us toward goodness, justice,
righteousness, peace and compassion
for others. As our teacher, defender;
guide and inspiration, the Spirit is
not content to be heeded only once
in a while or when it is convenient.
On the contrary, the Spirit compels
us to be the growth and transforma-
tion we experience in our world.
Henri Nouwen believed that
if people were more attentive to the
Spirit, it would affect everything they
touched (Eternal Seasons, edited by
Michael Ford, Ave Maria Press, Notre
Dame, Ind.: 2007). Not only would it
have an impact on personal growth
and relationships, but it would also
influence economics, politics and
all social structure. Did Jesus have
such transformation in mind when
he bequeathed his Spirit to his own?
Surely he did. We who profess to be-
lieve in him as the resurrection and
the life are endowed by his Spirit to
be living signs that reveal who Jesus
is and challenge others to share our
faith in him.

EZEKIEL 37:12-14
As persons inspired to speak for
God, the prophets, if they were
heeded, wielded considerable influ-
ence in their respective societies.
Rabbi Abraham Heschel once re-
ferred to the prophets as some of
the most disturbing people who have
ever lived; their inspiration brought
the Bible into being (The Prophets,
Their images are our refuge in
distress. Their voice and vision
sustain our faith. The prophet, said
Heschel, was not afraid to say “No!” to
his society or to condemn its compla-
cency, waywardness and syncretism.
He was often compelled to proclaim
the very opposite of what his heart
desired. His fundamental objective
was to reconcile humankind with
God, and this he did as often as neces-
sary, regardless of the personal cost
of his commitment.
Ezekiel was no exception. Identified
as the son of Buzi, Ezekiel, whose
name means “God is strong” or “God
strengthens,” was a priest of the
Zadokite line as well as a prophet.
After Josiah died in 608 B.C.E.,
the religious reform he had initiated
began to falter, and, with it, so did the
fervor of the people. Ezekiel warned
of impending doom for sinful Judah,
and he lived to see his words become a
reality in the form of the Babylonian
invasion. The prophet was among
the first to be deported. But Ezekiel’s
message of doom morphed into one
of hope as he encouraged his fellow
Jews to pray for forgiveness and
trust in God’s intervention on their
behalf. Today’s first reading is part
of a longer vision (39:1-14), which
Ezekiel shared to hearten the exiles.
Forced from their own land and
unable to worship as they wished, where they wished, the exiles were
described by the prophet as dry bones,
parched and picked bare by their
repeated infidelities. Ill-disposed to
hear the prophet’s chastisements,
they cried out against him and
against God. In order to help them
to see light at the end of a seemingly
endless tunnel, the prophet continued
his vision, his metaphor, shifting
from bones to graves.
In verse 12, where our text begins,
the prophet envisioned a time when
God would call forth the Israelites
from the “grave” of their exile and
bring them home to their own land.
No longer would they be dry bones
in a parched wilderness. No longer
would they know the shame and
pain of exile. Reconciled to God and
forgiven, they will be given the Spirit
of God, and they shall begin to live
lives anew.

Scholars recognize Ezekiel in this
text as a type of Christ, who would say
to Lazarus, “Come out!” — and Laza-
rus began to live anew. Just as God
called forth Israel from the grave of
exile and Jesus called forth his friend
from death, so does God call each of
us out of the graves of our suffering,
need, discontent and hopelessness to
live anew, enlivened and inspired by
God’s own Spirit.

ROM 8:8-11
Paul’s conviction about the impor-
tance of God’s gift of the Spirit is clear
in his correspondence, particularly in
Chapter 8 of his missive to the believ-
ers in Rome. Therein, Paul celebrated
the Spirit of God as the source of life
and vitality. The same Spirit through
whom God created and sustains all
that exists, was breathed upon the
disciples by Jesus and continues to
dwell in his followers. Whereas sin
once found a home in human beings,
those who welcome the Spirit now
become holy places, living temples
whose lives witness to goodness,
justice, peace and integrity.
To belong to Christ, to live ac-
cording to the Spirit, requires more
from us than grateful acknowledgement
of what Jesus has effected
for humankind. This commitment
requires more than an external iden-
tification or a nominal relationship
with Jesus. To belong to Jesus is to
open our minds and hearts to all the
movements, urgings and whisperings
of the Spirit. Such a “spirited” life anticipates in the here and now the realities of resurrected life. Such a life touches and tastes eternity and bears witness to the radical, absolute transformation that will take place in the end time.

This being said, Paul was not naive. He was well aware of the daily challenges faced by those who would live “in the Spirit,” and so he urged his readers to be alert to the danger of being “in the flesh.” “Flesh” should not be translated here as “body.” For Paul, flesh (or σαρξ) is “an orientation to the world, a way of living influenced by rebellion and idolatry in which the entire perspective of the human being is turned in on [the self] and the person becomes the center of all values. Life in the flesh is essentially life carried on under the lordship of the sinful self. It is a life of self-idolatry” (Paul Achtemeier, Romans, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Ky.: 1985). But for those who belong to Christ, life is no longer self-centered; rather, Christ is the focus, and, because of Christ, our life is oriented outward, toward God, toward Christ and toward others.

Paul understood well the conundrum that is the human person. We are each possessed of a deserved mortality as well as the gratuitous gift of immortality. Every believing human person lives with the tension of trying to follow Christ while keeping in check the desire to give in to the allure of the world. When this struggle threatens to overwhelm us, believers are assured of the gift of the Spirit, dwelling within to strengthen us and empower us to choose rightly. As John Paul Heil has explained, because they possess the very Spirit of Christ, Paul’s readers and all Christians are situated within a whole new sphere of power and influence (Paul’s Letter to the Romans, Paulist Press, New York: 1987). Because Christ now subsists within our very persons, we are able to overcome the intense battle in which each person experiences the push and pull of the forces of good and evil within us: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!” (Phil 4:13).

JOHN 11:1-45

As the last and greatest of the seven Johannine signs, the raising of Lazarus serves as a threshold to the passion and passover of Jesus that it introduces. At the very heart of the narrative are Jesus’ words to Martha: “I am the resurrection and the life ... whoever believes in me, though he should die, will come to life, and whoever is alive and believes in me will never die” (vv. 25-26). This proclamation will be dramatically realized in the raising of Lazarus. Jesus is the Lord of life whom death cannot conquer.

The raising of Lazarus also marks a turning point in the fourth Gospel. Unlike the Synoptics, for whom the cleansing of the temple precipitated the plot against Jesus, the fourth evangelist, with a twist of characteristic irony, attested that the action of raising a friend to life set in motion the events that would lead to Jesus’ death.

Certain details included by John in his narrative underscore the miraculous nature of the event. Notice that Jesus did not immediately respond when told that Lazarus was ill. Rather, he waited. According to Rabbinic tradition, the life breath is thought to hover around a deceased person for three days. But Jesus waited until the fourth day, when Lazarus was most assuredly and irrevocably gone. Notice also the reason why Jesus delayed: “so that you may come to believe,” for “if you believed you would see the glory of God.” As with the other six signs, Jesus’ actions glorify God, reveal him for who he (Jesus) is and challenge the faith of those who witness it.

Thomas’ words, “Let us go to die with him,” strike another chord of Johannine irony. In his fervor and love for Jesus, Thomas expressed a willingness to face whatever they might encounter in Jerusalem. But there is more than fervor in Thomas’ words. There is also a wealth of Johannine soteriology. In Christ’s death, all of us can die to sin, and by virtue of our baptism, we not only die but also rise with him. Going along with Jesus means more than being companions on a journey; it also means dying and rising with him.

Besides weeping for his friend and gently consoling Martha and Mary, Jesus showed another emotion, translated in verses 33 and 38 as “perturbed.” In Greek, embrimasthai ordinarily describes intense emotion. Some scholars suggest that Jesus was indignant and justifiably angry at the powers of evil and darkness with whom he was about to do battle. With this deep emotion and the action of raising Lazarus, Jesus’ victory is complete and absolute. Martha’s “Yes, Lord, I believe” expresses the faith of all as the days of Lent lead us near to Jesus’ passion and death. With faith and hope, we are able to humbly appreciate the cross, and are able to look beyond it to a life that never ends. What Jesus did for Lazarus, he has done for all of us. Yes, Lord, I believe.
**Preaching to Youth**

*Jim Auer*

**KEY VERSE(S) / MAIN IDEA (John)**

“He [Jesus] cried out in a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’ The dead man came out, tied hand and foot with burial bands, and his face was wrapped in a cloth.’ Our own restoration to life in baptism, reconciliation and prayer.*

**STARTER** How do you picture Lazarus as he emerges from the tomb? Like a mummy? Hollywood loves mummies. Over 50 movies have been made about mummies, beginning in 1910, many of them titled simply “The Mummy.” One of the quirkiest was titled “Bubba Ho-Tep,” in which an ancient Egyptian mummy terrorizes a retirement home in Mud Creek, Texas. But one of the residents is Elvis Presley(!), who helps save his fellow residents. The key to the Lazarus story, though, is not how he looked, but the fact that we are, in a way, very much like him. Often.

**LEADING QUESTIONS** *What similarities can you see between Lazarus and you — besides the fact that you too will die and be buried? Think symbolically.* *There’s one time when you truly were dead and then were raised to life. When was that?*

**DIRECTIONS TO EXPLORE** *Our own death and resurrection in baptism.* *The importance of faith in this reality, because we don’t remember or feel that death and resurrection.* *Restoration to life in the sacrament of reconciliation if we have severed our relationship with God through serious, intentional sin.* *Restoration in reconciliation to full vitality through cleansing of sins.* *An appeal to come clean in whatever way we need before Easter, now just two weeks away. Advise of schedules for the sacrament of reconciliation. Note your own availability (if possible) for unscheduled reconciliation.*

**MEDIA LINK** The plot in the video game “Dead Rising” has six possible endings, depending on the player’s expertise. Some are very dark. Our ending — from death to eternal life — happens not through our expertise but through God’s redeeming love.

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**HOMILY**

*Paige Byrne Shortal*

**Familiar Yet Ever New**

*I heard the voice of Jesus say, “Come unto me and rest; lay down, thou weary one, lay down thy head upon my breast.” I came to Jesus as I was, so weary, worn, and sad; I found in him a resting place, and he has made me glad.*

—Horatio Bonar, 1846

**We have heard today’s Gospel story so many times that perhaps it is too easy to say to ourselves, “Oh, the raising of Lazarus — I know that one,” and then begin to daydream. But it’s a rich story, one with more details of Jesus’ intimate life, his feelings, his friendships than any other. Also within this story are hints of three elements we need for salvation, three necessary ingredients, if you will, of the Christian life.**

**The first element is grace.** It’s the call, God making God’s presence known to us. Jesus calls Lazarus to “Come out!” Just so are we each called by God to come out of our tombs. To come out of the tomb of our habits of sin, addiction, anxiety, despair. To come out of the tomb of loneliness, greed, drudgery, a life devoid of meaning or substance. To come out of the tomb that forces us to live small and scared, hardly daring to wonder what else might be available to us. To come out of the tomb of whatever keeps us from living a free, productive, joy-filled life.

**The second element is will.** It’s our response to God’s call. Sometimes the will is like the verse from the hymn quoted above — a call to rest our weary heads and let go of what burdens us. But sometimes it’s a call like Lazarus received. He was dead — weary unto death, bruised by death. He was finally resting! And yet in response to Jesus’ call he gets up off that cold stone slab, still wrapped in burial cloths, and makes his way out of the darkness and into the light. We don’t know if Lazarus had mixed feelings about facing life, knowing that someday he would have to die again. We don’t know if he had to think twice before answering the call. We do know that sometimes it’s hard just to get off the couch, so perhaps we can imagine that leaving death and tomb behind was a difficult act of the will.

**Grace and will — these two elements are about our relationship with God. But there is a third element that I find fascinating. Jesus had just raised a man from the dead. He had power! He could have snapped his fingers to make those burial cloths disappear, but instead he directs the friends of Lazarus to “untie him and let him go.” The third element necessary for salvation, for living the Christian life, is community. It is the community who removes what binds us, who supports and sustains us when our will threatens to fail. Whatever tomb we dare to emerge from, there is a community waiting to welcome us and accompany us on the road out of the darkness and into the light.**

**On this Fifth Sunday of Lent there are people who are preparing to begin a new relationship with the Christian community. We call these people catechumens or candidates — those who will enter the church at Easter. They witness to us the need for community; and not just the need, but the desirability, the attractiveness of the Christian community to those who have been alone too long.**

**Grace, will and a community — three elements of the Christian life, summed up in this familiar but ever-new story of the raising of Lazarus.**
In his essay “The Signature of Jesus,” Brennan Manning passes on the story of an elderly man who meditated every morning under a big tree on the bank of the Ganges river (Multnomah Pub., Portland, Ore.:1996). One morning, after he had finished praying, the man opened his eyes and saw a scorpion floating helplessly in the water. As the scorpion washed nearer to the tree, the man quickly stretched himself out on one of the long roots that extended over the river and reached out to save the drowning creature. As soon as he touched it, the scorpion stung him. Instinctively, the man withdrew his hand.

A few moments later, when he had regained his balance, he stretched himself again on the tree roots to save the foundering scorpion. Again, the scorpion stung him. This time the sting was so severe that the man’s hand became swollen and bloody and his face contorted with pain.

At that very moment, a passerby saw the old man stretched out on the tree root, still struggling with the uncooperative scorpion. He shouted, “Hey, stupid old man, what’s the matter with you? Only a fool would risk his life for the sake of an ugly, evil creature! Don’t you know you could kill yourself trying to save that ungrateful scorpion?”

At that, the old man turned and, looking directly into his detractor’s eyes, calmly replied, “My friend, just because it is in the scorpion’s nature to sting, that does not change the fact that it is in my nature to save.”

With this old tale in mind, we turn to the sacred texts of this most holy week in order to remember and celebrate that it is in God’s nature to love, to forgive, to heal, protect and save. Even when human beings do what is wrong or selfish or downright evil, God’s nature does not change. It is in the very nature of God to reach out with the gift of reconciliation; it is the very essence of God’s nature to save. This we know because the nature of our God has been eloquently revealed in the person and through the mission of Jesus. Although he was God, Jesus emptied himself of all he was and all he had so as to effect the salvation of sinners. Without a thought for his own well-being, Jesus became as we are for our sakes. For us, he humbly and willingly died an ignominious death, thereby revealing how completely invested God is in the human condition (Philippians, second reading).

In fulfillment of Deutero-Isaiah’s (first reading) description of the servant, Jesus gave himself over to those who tortured him. Unyielding, he was determined to see his mission through to its bloody conclusion. In this, he exhibited the tenacious nature of God, who does not give up on sinners but relentlessly pursues them until they learn to find their home in God.

As Matthew’s version of the passion and death of Jesus is proclaimed (Gospel), every evil tendency of humankind will be revealed. We will be told of Judas’ betrayal and of Peter’s denial. We will listen as the disciples are so oblivious to Jesus that they fall asleep when he needs their support. We will hear the lies told about Jesus, as well as the people’s mockery of him. We will sense the fierceness of the crowd, the weakness of Pilate and the hypocrisy of the chief priests and elders. Then, in the most horrifying but sacred moment when Jesus gives up his spirit on the cross, the evils of humankind, grave though they are, will be eclipsed by a love that is at once intense and pure. It is this great love of God that has seen Jesus through each of his days and nights. This loving nature of God was reflected in Jesus’ gentle way with sinners, in
his willingness to welcome children, in his outreach to foreigners and outcasts. God’s loving nature was evident each time Jesus healed the sick and forgave sinners. This love was revealed most eloquently at the last supper Jesus shared with his friends, where he gave himself as food. After his death and resurrection, the disciples knew him to be present in the breaking of the bread.

As we celebrate these most holy days, let us remember, as we break open the bread of the word and share the bread of life, that God’s nature continues to be revealed to us. May we also live in such a way that God’s nature is revealed through us.

ISA 50:4-7

Whenever I read of the sufferings heaped upon, and accepted by, the Isaian servant, I am reminded of a passage from the Book of Wisdom: “Let us beset the just one because he is obnoxious to us; he sets himself against our transgressions. ... To us, he is the censure of our thoughts; merely to see him is a hardship ... because his life is not like other men’s and different are his ways” (Wis 2:12, 14-15). The just one, here described by the sapiential author, functioned, in a sense, like an external conscience who was despised because of his honest nature and upright character by those who lived according to lesser standards. Like the just one, the Isaian servant was also despised by his contemporaries — not only for the quality of his character but also because of his message. Nevertheless, and despite the mistreatment he endured, the servant knew himself to be fully equipped by God for the task at hand: speaking a word that will rouse the weary (v. 4).

Scholars remind us that the weary people addressed by the servant were in exile. As their companion, the author of the servant songs tried to make some sense of their situation and to find some purpose in the suffering that threatened to overwhelm them. For this reason, many scholars agree that, in their original context, the songs were composed so that Israel might identify itself as the servant. Through their acceptance of their plight, and because of their unceasing reliance on and obedience to God, Israel was to become, for the rest of humankind, God’s message of deliverance and salvation.

In the wake of Jesus’ suffering, death and resurrection, those who believed in him came to the realization that the servant songs described the person and mission of Jesus. These songs and other similar Hebrew texts (Ps 22) helped those early believers to explain the character of Jesus’ messiahship. While most awaited a king who would rally Israel’s armies to rout their enemies and reestablish them as a free nation, along came Jesus with an entirely different plan and message. Conventional perspective might regard the cross as a scandal and a suffering messiah as an oxymoron, but the servant songs provided insight and assurance that God’s purpose for Israel was being fulfilled in a manner they did not expect. In order to help them to accept a plan that seemed to destroy their hope and shock their sensibilities, the prophet and the servant prayed and preached morning after morning, day after day. Each year, we enter this holy week and we become reacquainted with the cost of our salvation. We renew our faith and deepen our gratitude for the One in whom the very nature of God continues to be revealed to us.

PHIL 2:6-11

Although the great apostle to the gentiles did not write a Gospel per se, he did preach the good news of salvation, and today’s second reading from his correspondence with the Philippians could readily be called his passion narrative. By incorporating this pre-Pauline hymn into his letter, Paul captured the essence of Jesus’ passion, death and resurrection in one of the most eloquent and profound Christological statements in the Christian scriptures. Scholars are of the mind that this hymn was first composed for use at early Christian liturgies, where it gave voice to Jesus’ salvific mission.

Structurally, the hymn exhibits a parabolic rhythm in which Jesus moves from his place at God’s right hand and plummets “downward,” first taking on flesh and blood, then accepting the status of a slave and then descending to an ignominious death on the cross. From those depths, and because of his obedience to the point of death, the Son was exalted, and the movement of the parabola continues “upward,” celebrating the resurrection of Jesus into glory.

Drawn together and “upward” with Jesus are all those who — by virtue of his incarnation, passion and death — have been delivered from the depths of sin and death. All who are baptized in Jesus’ name share his journey from death to life. Because of its emphasis on obedience and a suffering servant who was vindicated by God, some have called this hymn a fifth servant song. By perfectly fulfilling the servant’s mission, Jesus received the name “Lord,” and is deserving of our faith and grateful adoration.

In its original context, Paul quoted this hymn to the Philippians as part of an appeal for harmonious relationships within their community.
If every member would take for their own the mind or the attitude of Jesus (v. 5), how might that inspire and improve the manner with which each treats the other? Factions, rivalries and all disagreements both big and small would fade into insignificance. Paul was exhorting the Philippian believers to have selfless altruism, like Jesus, who had the right to assert himself as God but instead chose to empty himself. *Kenosis* or “emptying” signified a purposeful, positive and voluntary renunciation. Rather than have their possessions, talents, treasure or opinions forcefully taken away by a more domineering community member, Paul urged the Philippans to follow Jesus’ lead and share themselves and all they had, fully and freely, holding nothing back. Today, as Paul’s voice and challenging words are proclaimed in our hearing, it is we who are called upon to make the mind and heart and attitude of Jesus our own, and then be willing to be — and to do — whatever he inspires in us.

**MATT 26:14–27:66**

Scholars tell us that the first parts of the good news to be proclaimed, first orally and then in written form, were the accounts of Jesus’ passion. These four continuous narratives, which are considered the heart of the kerygma, were the product of a faith-filled community confronted with growing apologetic, liturgical and catechetical concerns.

_Apologetically_, the passion stories helped the early believers to understand and witness to the fact that Jesus’ suffering and death were integral to God’s foreordained plan of salvation. Drawing on the prophets and the psalms, the first followers of Jesus portrayed the paradox of Jesus’ redemptive action as revelatory of God’s loving nature and God’s compassion for sinful humankind.

_Liturgically_, the passion narratives helped the eucharistic assembly to remember, proclaim and celebrate Jesus’ salvific death and resurrection. _Catechetically_, these narratives represented Jesus not as the stumbling block, but as the cornerstone, who was rejected for a time by the builders but survived to become the foundation of the new and eternal kingdom of God (Ps 118).

For his part, the Matthean evangelist was intent upon presenting Jesus as the messiah for whom the Jews had waited for centuries. To that end, he structured his Gospel on a series of formula citations or quotes from the Hebrew scriptures that were fulfilled in Jesus. For example, in telling of Judas’ betrayal (26:14-16), Matthew alluded to Zech 11:12, which stated that 30 pieces of silver was the amount paid for the rejected shepherd, and to Exod 21:32, which prescribed the same amount of money as damages for a slave or servant’s life. With these allusions, the evangelist portrayed Jesus as both shepherd and servant, fulfilling God’s plan, revealing God’s nature.

At the Last Supper, Jesus’ statement about the “blood of the covenant” (26:26-29) recalled the sacrifice at Sinai (Exod 24:8) whereby God formed a relationship with the people. This phrase may also refer to Zechariah’s prophecy: “Because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your captives free” (Zech 9:9). At their last meal together, Jesus explained to his disciples that his life blood would soon be poured out, thereby setting sinners free and forming an everlasting relationship between God and humankind.

At Gethsemane, Jesus’ great sorrow was reminiscent of Ps 42:6 and Jonah 4:9, while his reference to the cup (vv. 39, 42) was a familiar Jewish symbol for one’s lot in life as fore-known by God (Ps 11:6; Lam 3:21; Isa 51:17, 22). At the time of his arrest, the Matthean Jesus is represented as interpreting all that was about to take place: “But all this has come to pass that the writings of the prophets be fulfilled” (26:56). This is not a statement of resignation or defeat; rather, it is the evangelist teaching his readers that Jesus acquiesced in obedience to God’s plan as it unfolded through people and events.

During his trial and all through his passion and death, Jesus evoked the Deutero-Isaian servant, especially as described in the third and fourth songs. Even on the cross, Jesus was evoking the sacred texts of his people. Some have suggested that Jesus’ cry “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (27:46) was a cry of despair at a time when Jesus felt completely abandoned. Others, however — and I think rightly so — understand that Jesus was praying Psalm 22. A lament that begins with great sadness and suffering, this psalm concludes on a note of joy and confidence in God. In all he did, in all he said, and especially on the cross, Jesus revealed the nature of our God, our Savior, our All.

**Sermon Starters**

_Deacon Dick Folger_

There is a legend that tells how — after a donkey carried Mary to Bethlehem, and years later, another donkey carried Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday — God caused the shadow of the cross to fall across the donkey’s back. The donkey has carried this cross ever since. Today, Nubian donkeys of the Middle East wear a distinctive black mane that runs down their neck and back. A smaller stripe of dark fur runs across their shoulders, forming a dramatic cross.

When Jesus rode on the donkey as he entered Jerusalem, it signified his coming in peace. This symbolic event was foretold five centuries before by the Prophet Zechariah, heralding the coming of the Prince of Peace: “Exult greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout for joy, O daughter Jerusalem! Behold: Your king is coming to you, a just savior is he, humble, and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”
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April 13, 2014

PREACHING RESOURCES

How to Transform the World

HOMILY

Pat Marrin

Liturgy as full participation is never so evident as on Palm/Passion Sunday, when assemblies are invited into the scriptural accounts of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem and then, just five days later, his public humiliation, trial and execution. We enter Holy Week as spectators but also as disciples who accept the full implications of following Jesus, unto death.

We wave palm branches in the entrance procession, singing praises to Jesus as God’s messiah. During the reading of the Gospel, we say the lines assigned to members of the crowd witnessing the last hours of Jesus’ life. “Crucify him!” we cry out, perhaps shocking ourselves into recognition that Jesus’ death is inseparable from our sinfulness, our failure to love. Sin is social as well as personal; our neglect and indifference are as harmful to others as our actions, for we are bound together in a shrinking, interdependent world. We watch the news and know we cannot escape complicity in the poverty of others because we have too much, or the violence fueled by the disparities in our world we have helped create with our lifestyles and consumption.

Matthew’s Gospel is particularly intent on showing how Jesus fulfilled the scriptures about the messiah. He rides into Jerusalem in humility and simplicity, on the foal of an ass, mocking the triumphal entry of conquering generals (Isa 62 and Zech 9). He cleanses the temple, quoting Jeremiah 7. His final meal fulfills the meaning of Passover — liberation from slavery by the blood on the doorposts of the cross, the new covenant, the new Exodus.

Fulfillment, within the ancient scriptures and now for us, happens when the connections are revealed, the full context of an event is illuminated. As the early church saw in the death of Jesus the converging prophesies of salvation, so we are challenged to see the ongoing crucifixion of the poor, the struggle for justice in our global economy, in our national life and culture so prioritized by the false promise of success and happiness in consuming and owning, the numbing misdirection by media that puts us to sleep while so many suffer neglect.

On Palm Sunday, Jesus chose nonviolence, humility and simplicity to challenge the illusion of power. So must we. Jesus cleansed the temple of commerce and complicity between organized religion and money. So must we. After his arrest in the garden, Jesus challenged the courts, both sacred and secular; to expose false assumptions and injustice against the innocent. This is our Christian vocation as well. Jesus died on the cross for love, laying down his life for his friends, trusting totally in God to vindicate his cause. He rose from the grave to proclaim that love is greater than death, that truth advances its own agenda at the cost of human liberation and community.

Our celebration of the Gospel is nothing less than a school for learning how to transform the world. Palm/Passion Sunday is a staging area for our mission to the world. Holy Week is our invitation to enter more deeply into the life of Christ, which is our own life and vocation from birth and baptism. Jesus is in the world through us. If we do not imitate him, our world will not know Easter.
It’s fortunate we don’t proclaim all four of the Gospel narratives of the discovery of Jesus’ empty tomb and his subsequent apparitions to his followers during the same Eucharist. Problems would logically arise if we did. And if we added Paul’s 1 Corinthians 15 account of those apparitions to the mix, our problems would multiply.

I, along with many of you, learned in my grade school religion classes that Jesus’ resurrection was simply God’s seal of approval on everything Jesus taught and did. So if he didn’t actually rise from the dead, then the religion he founded and all the rules we learned in our catechism classes weren’t binding on anyone. We’d best look for another religion.

Back in the 1960s, high-profile Episcopal Bishop James Pike made national news when he claimed he’d lost his faith in Jesus’ physical resurrection because of the contradictions he surfaced when he actually read those post-resurrection Gospel passages in one sitting. He reasoned that if such a life-changing event had really taken place, we Christians should have just one rock-solid account of the happenings surrounding it. Our personal commitment to imitating Jesus’ dying and rising demands no less.

On the other hand, in his classic book The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus, the late Fr. Raymond Brown not only surfaced contradictions in the Gospel resurrection narratives, he even supplied comparative charts to highlight them. The well-known scripture scholar showed that contradictions abounded when one dares ask questions like “Who went to the tomb that morning? Why did they go? What did they discover? How many angels were there? What did the angel(s) say? What was the women’s reaction? When and to whom did the risen Jesus later appear?”

The answers to these questions differ from Gospel to Gospel, narrative to narrative. If these Gospel writings were employed in a court case to prove Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, the judge would have no choice but to declare a mistrial because of contradictory testimony.

But, as Brown faithfully pointed out, those contradictions aren’t a reason to deny Jesus’ resurrection. There’s something going on in the Gospel narratives that most people never notice. Jesus’ resurrection is employed by the evangelists to convey more than just God’s seal of approval on his ministry.

We can only appreciate why there are biblical resurrection contradictions by understanding the nature of Gospels. Contrary to popular belief, their authors simply never intended them to be read as biographies of Jesus. My father always reminded me that tools work best when we use them for the purposes for which they were originally designated. It’s the same with Gospels. We’ll always run into difficulties when we use them in ways their creators never intended them to be used.

Quite simply, the Gospels aren’t historical documents. The four Gospels (and all scripture) aren’t the news pages of the daily paper; they’re the editorial pages, the section we turn to after reading the news in order to understand the implications of those events.

We know this in our use of the media: that different sources, in print, on television and the Internet, take different editorial stances on the same issues. Though many elements play into how we understand and interpret life, both sociologists and psychologists tell us that our life’s experiences play a crucial role in the process. My father, for instance, who grew up...
during the Great Depression, had a basic mistrust of banks until the day he died. Though I didn’t share his beliefs, I had to remember that, as a young man, he’d seen the anxious faces of people lined up in front of banks trying to withdraw their life savings before those banks crashed.

The key to understanding our contradictory Gospel resurrection narratives also revolves around people’s experiences — those of the authors and the people for whom the narratives were originally composed. Our sacred authors presumed their readers were convinced long before they heard their Gospels that Jesus had risen from the dead, but also that they had experienced the risen Jesus in their daily lives. The unique accounts of the events they narrated were prompted and shaped by those experiences. It is highly unlikely that any of the evangelists had ever encountered the “historical Jesus” — the Jewish, Palestinian, itinerant preacher who lived between 6 B.C.E. and 30 C.E. Our sacred authors and their readers “knew” only the “risen Jesus,” the person who, once risen from the dead, is no longer Jew or gentile, slave or free, male or female. It’s the risen Jesus, not the historical Jesus, to whom biblical Christians are committed. For followers of Jesus, the present is always more important than the past.

JOHN 20:1-5

Because today’s Gospel pericope flows from the experiences of John’s community, we can expect the discovery of the empty tomb to be at odds with Mark, Matthew and Luke’s account of that event. In this passage, Mary of Magdala has no vision of an angel to report to Simon Peter and the “other disciple whom Jesus loved.” She only sees the “stone removed from the tomb” and assumes, “They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don’t know where they put him.”

As Fr. Brown frequently pointed out, Mary’s consistent Chapter 20 quest for Jesus’ body was triggered by the false belief of some on the periphery of the evangelist’s readers who hadn’t experienced the risen Jesus and thought that the resurrected body of Jesus was simply the same body he had during the 33 years of his earthly existence. That misconception ran afoul of the community’s actual experiences. That’s not how Jesus entered the lives of its members.

The first-century “orthodox” Christian belief is perfectly summarized in the verses following our liturgical passage when the risen Jesus insists that Mary “stop hanging” on him. After the resurrection, we’re dealing with Paul’s new creation, a phenomenon that can’t be isolated to one place or time, or limited to one particular manifestation. The risen Jesus appears how and when he/she wishes, to people and in situations he/she chooses, far beyond just the eucharistic bread and wine. Mary tries to hang on to someone who has been transformed.

One more point about today’s Gospel. Serious readers of John are familiar with the tension the evangelist creates between Peter and the “Beloved Disciple.” We need only glance through Brown’s classic book The Community of the Beloved Disciple to see the reasons for this rivalry.

Yet when it comes to belief in Jesus’ resurrection, the beloved disciple — supposedly the community’s founder and mentor — must take a back seat to Peter. Though this unnamed follower of Jesus reaches the empty tomb before Peter, early Christian tradition forces him to wait and let Peter enter the precincts first. The reason for his act of courtesy is evident. All scriptural sources agree that Simon, the Rock, was the first disciple to conclude that the empty tomb was the sign Jesus had risen from the dead. Though some of our evangelists play favorites, all our sacred authors figure their Christian communities are rock-solid only when they’re founded on that resurrection belief. For better or worse, Peter must be given a preeminent position. Without Jesus’ resurrection, they’d have no faith on which to editorialize.

But the question that concerns us especially on Easter Sunday is, “How did our sacred authors and their readers come to experience the risen Jesus?”

COL 3:1-4

The disciple of Paul responsible for the Letter to the Colossians lays out the basics of such an encounter. As Paul constantly taught, one must first die with Jesus before rising with Jesus. They are two sides of the same action. Once we start to imitate Jesus’ death by generously giving ourselves to others, our lives start to evolve on a different level. We begin to see things we never before noticed, to espouse values we never dreamt of before.

Paul frequently referred to this turnaround as our becoming a “new creation.” We’re no longer the same people we were before we died and rose with Jesus. (One of my scripture profs once brought up the possibility of someone not being responsible for the credit card bills he or she made before they went through such a “metanoia.”) Everything changes when we die and rise with Jesus. Among other things, we start to act in different ways. “If then,” the author reminds his readers, “you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of
God. Think of what is above, not of what is on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” We’re not only looking at and judging people and things the way the risen Jesus looks at and judges them, but the risen Jesus actually becomes present to us in those people and things.

**ACTS 10:34a, 37-43**

The field of theological study that has changed most over the last 60 years is that of apologetics: the quest for the “reasonableness” of our Christian faith. Though most experts agree that people, just by employing our natural reasoning process, can’t arrive at all the truths of Christianity, they still contend that once we surface those truths by divine revelation — especially through our Christian scriptures — the faith that those writings convey is reasonable; it makes sense.

Years ago the reasonableness of that revelation was based on two Latin words: *sciens* and *verax*, “known” and “truthful.” Both adjectives were applied to Jesus’ first followers. Apologists argued that those privileged individuals certainly knew what had happened between 6 B.C.E. and 30 C.E. in respect to Jesus’ ministry, especially his death and resurrection, and that they were truthful when they reported those salvific events in our Christian scriptures.

In today’s Acts pericope, Peter first bases his invitation to believe in the risen Jesus around the *sciens* or known element: We were there and witnessed these terrific events. “This man God raised on the third day and granted that he be visible, not to all the people, but to us, the witnesses chosen by God in advance, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.” In other words, we know what we’re talking about.

Then he brings up the *verax* or truth dimension. “He...commissioned us to preach to the people and testify that he is the one appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead.” We’re truthfully carrying out that commission when we preach this word to you.

Though reasonable, there’s just one problem. As I mentioned above, over the last 100 years we’ve come to understand that no one who actually witnessed these events ever wrote anything down about them that we possess today. Jesus’ first followers could have been as knowing and truthful as the day is long, but none of those knowing and truthful individuals composed any of the scriptures in which that revelation is contained.

That’s why today’s apologists have put the *sciens/verax* argument on a backburner and concentrate much more on the turnabout Jesus’ first disciples experienced in their everyday lives.

We presume our evangelists are historically correct when they portray Jesus’ first followers as simple, uneducated working-class Jews, many of them fishermen; people who, like Peter, wouldn’t hesitate to deny they even knew this Galilean carpenter when push came to shove.

Yet something obviously happened to change them. According to Acts, they’re no longer afraid to identify with Jesus, the enemy of the state and tormentor of organized religion. They not only preach him openly, they invite others to share their commitment to become other Christs. They’re not the same people they were before Easter Sunday. Their only explanation for this drastic turnabout revolves around having experiences of their presumed-dead leader; now alive and active in their midst.

If we can’t give our people some guidelines for surfacing the risen Jesus in their own daily lives, then our preaching isn’t based on the theology of our sacred authors.

I used to wonder why the risen Jesus didn’t appear first to Pilate or the men who crucified him. I certainly would have. If they did to me what they did to him, that would be a way to get at least a little revenge.

Only after I began studying scripture did it make sense why the risen Jesus appeared only to certain people. There’s no “generic” appearances of the risen Jesus. Only those who dared imitate his dying and rising in the new ways they related to others ever came into contact with this new creation. His first followers demonstrated Jesus was alive by demonstrating they now were alive in a completely different way. It was the only proof they needed.

Perhaps that’s one of the reasons it’s so difficult to preach a good homily on Easter. We’re expected not only to reflect on the experiences of our Christian sacred authors and their communities, we’re also expected to reflect on some of our own experiences. If we’re not constantly searching for and suracing the risen Jesus in our everyday lives, our falling back on other people’s experiences will simply be a cop-out from imitating Jesus’ death and resurrection.

I suspect the new creation we hope to encounter at the pearly gates won’t be into accepting cop-outs, especially from preachers of a faith they only expect others to profess.

**Sermon Starters**

*Deacon Dick Folger*

When God chose to enter this world as Jesus, he did it in full measure, becoming one of us even unto death. He was rejected, despised, abused, mocked and murdered. He suffered, died and was quietly buried. His message was like a seed buried in darkness, deep underground.

When God chose to raise himself from the dead, he could have done it with a million-angel choir singing down from the clouds to the accompaniment of a celestial symphony orchestra. The stunned world would have fallen to its knees in humbled rapture. But, instead, Jesus rose in the darkness, folded his burial shroud, rolled the stone away and went silently before us into Galilee. Who is this wondrous God who moved so quietly on that early Easter morning so as not to disturb our sleep?
Preaching to Youth

Jim Auer

KEY VERSE(S) / MAIN IDEA (John)
“Simon Peter went into the tomb and saw the burial cloths there, and the cloth that had covered his head, not with the burial cloths but rolled up in a separate place. Then the other disciple also went in ... and he saw and believed. For they did not yet understand the scripture that he had to rise from the dead.” Faith in the resurrection; understanding its all-or-nothing importance.

STARTER Have you heard the story of the explorers who were trapped in a huge cave, deep below the surface of the earth? Actually, they didn’t know they were trapped, and they weren’t down there just to explore the cave. They were convinced a huge treasure, one that would satisfy every desire, was down there somewhere. Suddenly a man appeared in their midst and said, “The treasure’s not down here. It’s somewhere else. I’ll show you. Hang on to me.” He rose to the surface, taking them with him.

LEADING QUESTIONS * You’ve heard this story before. More accurately, you’ve lived it. What is it? * Have you ever been in danger but didn’t know it or didn’t want to admit it? * Why did the rescuer have to descend to the bottom of the cave? * Why did Jesus descend to the dead or “into hell,” as the Apostles’ Creed says? * Why is it difficult for us to believe that we (all humanity) were in danger of permanent estrangement from God?

DIRECTIONS TO EXPLORE * Define “estrangement” and why it’s so painful. * Permanent estrangement from God: “That would be hell.” We use those words about many things, but here they apply literally. That’s how Aquinas defines hell. * We participate in the death and resurrection of Christ in baptism. * The radical-ness of 1 Cor 15:14. (See below.) * Ways of showing gratitude for the Paschal Mystery.

QUOTATION “If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith” (1 Cor 15:14. NIV — a more youth-friendly translation of this verse).

HOMILY

Ted Wolgamot

Where They Have Put Him

Christ is risen! Alleluia!

These are the victorious words we shout with gusto on this greatest of all feast days.

But, in order to fully appreciate them, we need to go way back in time to the people who first discovered this reality. We need to put ourselves inside their skin and see with their eyes.

All throughout his public ministry, Jesus had so impacted the lives of a group of people that they had become radically changed. These disciples of Jesus were the very same ones who had walked and talked with him, who were present when his many healings took place, who listened to him discourse about a God of mercy beyond their farthest imagining.

For these early followers of Jesus, life had taken on a whole new meaning. In him, they believed they had found the Messiah the prophets had promised. They believed that things could finally be different: the hungry would be fed; the poor would be recognized; the sinful made whole.

Easter is initially the story, though, of how these same faith-filled people now became devastated to the point that their hope turned to despair; and their dream of a glorious future became a nightmare.

Jesus was crucified. He was executed in perhaps the most gruesome way that anyone could die at that time in human history.

The story of those hope-filled people now became a very dark one. It became instead a story of betrayal and abandonment.

And then the Gospel account we read today — an account that begins with words that reflect that gloom: “On the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark.” In the Gospel of John, darkness implies a lack of faith. It tells us that at that time, Mary had no faith, no hope. She was in a place of numbness.

And then she finds the tomb is empty!

She’s startled. She’s bewildered. She doesn’t know what to do. And so she runs. She runs to get Simon Peter and the other disciple Jesus loved. And together they run — right into that very same empty tomb.

The Easter story now begins to unfold in an entirely new direction. The darkness gives way to the bright light brought on by a sense of victory. Little by little, the earliest followers of Jesus begin to realize that what truly happened is something never heard of before in all of human history: God has raised Jesus from the dead! He is alive! He is risen!

And the wondrous ending to the Easter story is what all four of the Gospels and St. Paul tell us repeatedly: Jesus is not only alive, but he is still here, still present, still among us. Only now he is with us in a whole new way.

That’s what the really good news for each of us is: We are not alone. The Spirit Jesus promised us is alive in the scriptures we read; alive in the Eucharist we celebrate; alive in the hungry whom we feed; alive in the gathering of two or more in his name.

“They have taken the Lord from the tomb and we don’t know where they have put him,” Mary of Magdala sadly tells us in today’s Gospel.

The ecstasy of this day is that we now know exactly “where they have put him”: inside each one of us; in our hearts; in our values; in our prayers; in our reaching out to the “least of these.”

That’s why now we can truly sing together with full joy: Christ is risen! Alleluia!
Receive What You Are

Faithful readers of scripture must be well versed in the principle of Uhrzeit als Endzeit. Many of our sacred authors employed it. The German phrase can be translated as “the beginning is actually the end.” The technique is used when one is trying to direct his or her readers’ eyes to a future goal that the author is deeply committed to instilling in the minds of those readers. But instead of just stating, “This is what I expect you one day to become,” the writer paints a picture of an ideal past in which those longed-for qualities were already present and practiced. The hope is, “If we did it back then, why can’t we do it again now?”

We must especially keep this in mind when we hear the three “summaries” in the first five chapters of the Acts of the Apostles — those short passages that describe how Jesus’ first Jerusalem followers practiced their newfound faith.

**ACTS 2:42-47**

Today’s first summary reading provides us with a classic example of Uhrzeit als Endzeit. “They [the early Jerusalem Christians] devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and the communal life, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers. … All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one’s need.” They were the ideal other Christs the risen Jesus intended them to be.

There is just one problem. This isn’t the only picture of the first Christians that our sacred authors have passed down to us. Luke composed Acts about 50 years after Jesus’ death and resurrection, long after most of the Jerusalem Christian community disappeared due to the Roman destruction of the city in 70 C.E. Luke’s not giving us a contemporary picture of that community; he’s writing for a different church.

On the other hand, Paul, in 1 Corinthians 11, provides us with a very different picture of how some Christians in Corinth were practicing their faith in the late 50s, during the time he actually composed his first letter to that Greek community.

Not only does the apostle mention nothing about his readers’ commitment to the communal life, he points out that there are some in the community who can’t even die enough to themselves to become one with all who are joining in the breaking of the bread with them.

“I hear,” he writes in vv. 18-21, “that when you meet as a church there are divisions among you. … When you meet in one place then it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper, for in eating each one goes ahead with his own supper; and one goes hungry while another gets drunk.”

In an era when the Lord’s Supper was celebrated in the context of a potluck meal, there would always be some participants who relied on the generosity of the well-to-do in order to have something to eat and drink. Slaves and the destitute poor couldn’t be expected to bring much to share with others. But as we hear later in the passage, some of the wealthy would start the meal before the slaves and poor arrived, and when they finally came in and sat down at table, there was little or nothing left for them to eat and drink.

Paul eventually informs those selfish individuals that they are “eating the bread and drinking the cup of the Lord unworthily. … For those who...
eat and drink without discerning the body eat and drink judgment on themselves” (1 Cor 11:27, 29).

It was only after I had been ordained for five or six years (with a Licentiate in Theology) that I discovered in a doctoral course on 1 Corinthians that Paul wasn’t speaking about discerning the eucharistic bread as the body of Christ; he was saying that the eucharistic community was the body of Christ.

Growing up Catholic I learned a long list of sins that made one unworthy to receive Communion. There were mortal sins we were obliged to confess before we could once again kneel at the Communion rail. But I don’t recall on that list the sin of failing to recognize the person next to me in the pew as the body of Christ. Yet Paul clearly put that sin at the top of his list: an action so serious it would exclude someone from participating in the Lord’s Supper.

At first glance it would seem that the Apostle is dealing with a different church in Corinth than Luke was dealing with in Jerusalem. Or is each author simply coming at the same problem from a different perspective?

I have mentioned often in these commentaries that the trigger for our sacred authors to include something particular in their writings was always a problem they wanted to surface in the communities for whom they were writing. If there had been no problems, the Bible would not have been written.

Most Lucan scholars would say that the reason the evangelist included summaries of an ideal life in the early Christian community was because Christians in the mid-80s were having a problem recognizing the body of Christ among them. Luke’s description in the Acts of the Apostles of the church “in the beginning” was actually the church he was trying to help create “at the end.” So he was basically saying the same thing Paul had said 30 years earlier, but he said it in a less direct and a non-threatening way.

I suggest that we have never, ever had an ideal Christian community anywhere or anytime in the church’s 2,000-year history. Divisions in the community like the ones Paul addressed were, and still are, the norm for all who have committed themselves to imitating Jesus’ death and resurrection. We’ve been working at becoming the body of Christ for a long time.

**JOHN 20:19-31**

This seems to be why, in today’s Gospel pericope, John’s Jesus specifically points out that the forgiveness of sins is one of the fundamental ways in which the Spirit helps us carry on his ministry.

Counter to what some Catholics presume, this passage wasn’t originally intended to be a proof-text for the institution of the sacrament of reconciliation. In the early church, everyone in every Christian community was expected to do so. Mutual forgiveness was the only way people could form a viable community.

Married people know this. Unless each partner is constantly willing to forgive the other, the relationship quickly falls apart. Jesus’ remark that “those whose sins you retain are retained” doesn’t seem to have originally been intended to bestow power on some privileged members of the church to withhold forgiveness in certain circumstances. Rather, it was simply a reminder to the Johannine community of the lasting effects of not forgiving one another. Unless we are always willing to offer forgiveness, it is impossible to create a Christian community. We are negating our ability to carry out Jesus’ ministry of reconciliation, no matter how ingeniously we try to fake it.

We are all familiar with the Doubting Thomas part of today’s Gospel, but we might overlook the significance of Jesus’ comment to the apostles: “Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.” It only dawned on me a few years ago that I had been interpreting these words too narrowly. I supposed that the evangelist included this statement in his narrative only for the sake of readers who were living more than 60 years after Jesus’ death and resurrection. He wanted to reassure them that though they had never seen, heard or touched the historical figure of Jesus, they weren’t at a disadvantage compared to those who had.

My late insight took it one step further. I suddenly realized one day that John’s readers weren’t the only followers of Jesus who had never come into contact with the Jesus who lived between the years 6 B.C.E. and 30 C.E. Neither had the author! The authors of all the Christian scriptures had most likely experienced only the risen Jesus.

**1 PET 1:3-9**

This also includes the unknown author of today’s 1 Peter passage, who brings up the same idea John was dealing with, but in different words: “Although you have not seen him [Jesus], you love him; even though you do not see him now yet believe in him, you rejoice with indescribable and glorious joy, as you attain the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

Two words in the last part of this verse are frequently misunderstood — salvation, and souls. As Marcus
Borg consistently points out in his recent book *Speaking Christian*, biblical salvation rarely refers to “getting into heaven.” Most of the time when our sacred authors employ the word salvation, it has something to do with the saved person being free from physical want or psychological pressure, here and now. Almost always in the Bible, Yahweh and Jesus save us by helping us experience a fulfilled, complete life long before we step into eternity. Our scripture writer didn’t buy into the same heaven/hell theology that is a mainstay of many of today’s Christian denominations.

Neither does the word “soul” have the same meaning I learned in my first grade religion classes. Sr. Mary Catherine taught us that every human being is made up of a body and a soul; the soul is the immaterial part of who we are, which, when infused in the material body, makes us a living being. When we die, it is again separated from that body and goes on to eternal reward or punishment, while our body eventually disintegrates. She even drew a picture of a soul on the blackboard to demonstrate how sins could affect its appearance.

These many years later, she might be amazed to discover that our sacred authors didn’t follow any Greek notion of body/soul dichotomy. They were Semites who used the world soul to describe our real self, who we are at the depth of our being. Many modern scholars translate the word as “psyche”: that element in our existence that makes us the unique individuals we are.

So when the author of 1 Peter assures his readers that their faith in the risen Jesus will bring about the salvation of their souls, he’s not talking about the immaterial part of us one day getting into heaven. He’s saying that our faith in the risen Jesus will be the force that makes our lives worth living. It frees us and gives meaning to everything we do.

In a recent television interview, Chicago’s Cardinal Francis George was asked what word first comes to his mind when he thinks of Pope Francis. He immediately answered, “Free.” He went on to explain that the pope has integrated freedom into a leadership position that traditionally has been burdened with restrictions.

“You never know what he’s going to do next.” Then the cardinal took the interviewer one step further: “His faith in Jesus is the source of his freedom.”

Our sacred authors would certainly agree, and they might add that “Francis is an example of a saved soul.”

It now makes sense why so many of our early Christian writers were not concerned about passing on dogmas, liturgical regulations or hierarchical prerogatives, but were focused on building strong, loving communities in the churches they wrote for. The biblical salvation of their readers depended on it. They weren’t trying just to get people into heaven. As we know from Mark 10, our sacred writers presumed that good Jews before Jesus’ birth were going to heaven.

In order to preach, we must constantly listen to Jesus’ proclamation, “The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and hear the good news.” The “kingdom of God” doesn’t refer to a place where we hope to spend eternity. It is a biblical way of describing God’s presence and influence in our everyday lives. But to experience that presence, Jesus calls us to repent, to change our value systems, to look at things and people from a totally different perspective.

It didn’t take long after Jesus’ death and resurrection for his followers to shift this focus. The great scholar Rudolph Bultmann put it this way: “The preacher became the preached.”

Now, along with preaching the message of repentance this historical Jesus preached, his disciples began to preach the risen Jesus, present and working in their everyday lives. Just as they had to give of themselves to others in order to realize God’s presence, they had to intensify that selfless giving to experience the risen Jesus.

It’s no accident that Paul zeroed in on people’s behavior during the Lord’s supper. What better place do we have at which to morph into the body of Christ?

During one of our liturgy classes at the Gregorian University, Jesuit professor Hans Schmidt insisted that, historically, our “Amen” after receiving Communion, as directed by Vatican II, wasn’t a profession of faith in transubstantiation — that Jesus was present in the eucharistic bread. Rather, it was a profession of faith in the individual receiving Communion being the body of Christ. In other words, the Communion minister is reminding the recipient, “You are the body of Christ.” This echoes St. Augustine’s words, “Receive what you are, the body of Christ.”

Consider the practice being encouraged today in many parishes of bowing before receiving Communion. In some places, to save time, people are instructed to bow when the person in front of them is receiving Communion. It can appear that he or she is bowing not to the consecrated host but to the person in front of them, acknowledging them to be the body of Christ. Our sacred authors would be pleased with that idea.

Sermon Starters

*Deacon Dick Folger*

Pope Francis reminds us: “Faith must be renewed and refreshed again and again. God does not give us faith by dictating abstract truths; God revealed himself in history by entering into it with us.” Then the pope said that faith is not genuine unless it is tinged with a trace of doubt.

This Sunday, Thomas demonstrates more than a trace of doubt when he declares, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nail marks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

Our faith and its foundation are already present in our lives. We need only take the time to remember when God entered into our personal life history. When we remember, we can say with Thomas the words of contribution: “My Lord and my God!”
Preaching to Youth

**Jim Auer**

**KEY VERSE(S) / MAIN IDEA (1 Pet)**

“Although you have not seen him, you love him; even though you do not see him now yet believe in him, you rejoice ... as you attain the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

(John) “Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.” True ... but there are ways to sort of see God.

**STARTER** Imagine a meeting of high-level business executives. They’re sitting around a rectangular table half a mile long, frustrated and frowning. No one can come up with a decent idea to launch a new product line. The CEO sarcastically says, “Maybe we should contact God.” “I can do that for you,” a woman who is refilling the coffee and donuts says. Everyone looks at her. The CEO says, “I suppose you talk to God regularly?” “Why of course. And listen, too.” The CEO chuckles. “Let me guess — you see God, too.” “Yes.” “Pray tell us, what does God look like?” She smiles. “Lots of ways. Lots and lots of ways.”

**LEADING QUESTIONS** * Can we see God? The correct answer is “yes and no.” How “yes” and how “no”? * Did the people who met Jesus have an advantage over us? * If you think, “Yes, they had a huge advantage,” why did so many who met him reject him?

**DIRECTIONS TO EXPLORE** Ways of authentically seeing God without seeing God physically: * in the portraits of Jesus in the Gospels; * in the physical beauty of the natural world: flowers, sunsets, snowflakes; * in the loving actions of others; * these are like “seeing” the wind through seeing its presence in waving branches and moving clouds.

**MEDIA LINK** In the film “Gravity,” Dr. Ryan Stone (Sandra Bullock) has resigned herself to a lonely death in space after an accident, until a visit from her mission partner Matt Kowalski (George Clooney) gives her hope. But that couldn’t be. Matt was drifting in space, surely dead by now. Had she learned to see and listen to God in the memory of her partner?

Our Family Circle

**Paige Byrne Shortal**

**HOMILY**

All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one’s need. (Acts 2:44-45)

True story: Long ago in a parish far, far away, a socially prominent Monsignor was invited to preside at the baptism of an equally prominent (wealthy) family. It was the Second Sunday of Easter, and he chose to preach on today’s first reading.

Longer ago and farther away, my high school history teacher introduced me to some of the simpler writings of Karl Marx. What stuck with me was a particular slogan that Marx adapted from other idealists of the period.

Imagine my secret delight when Monsignor preached, “As it says elsewhere in scripture, ‘From each according to his ability; to each according to his need.’ I admit I hugged myself and exchanged a wink with the one person in my choir who recognized that the saying was from the Gospel of Marx, not Mark.

As an idealistic teenager this seemed to me a wonderful way to organize the world. Several years later, I was sniffling around the Catholic church and reading a little New Testament a priest gave me, trying to decide if I wanted to take the plunge into the Christian life. I was playing Scripture Roulette — close your eyes, open the book, and let your finger fall on a passage. Today’s first reading is where my finger landed and I was hooked.

The problem with such idealism is not in the sentiment, but how to legislate against human greed and selfishness without creating a world that is as ugly and repressive as greed creates. We know about the abuses of forced sharing. It was not so easy in the early church either. In Chapter 5 of Acts we hear the story of Ananias and Sapphira, a couple who held back some of their assets and lied to the community about it. For that “sin against the Holy Spirit” they fell down dead.

I soon discovered that the whole church does not live out this ideal, but a lot of people try. Women and men in religious orders and some dedicated lay communities of Christians do try. And the best of us share, giving 5 or 10 percent of our income to charitable efforts, offering our time and talent to assist others.

As I write, we have a pope who has been accused of being a socialist because he has suggested that having more than we need when others don’t have enough to survive is not what a disciple of Jesus should do. Perhaps it’s like this: We sit down to a family meal every night. How terrible would it be if we passed around the serving dishes to all but one or two members of the family, leaving their plates empty? And what if we did this night after night? Unthinkable!

I think Pope Francis, and Jesus, regard the world’s peoples as a family. It’s just as unthinkable to pass around food — and clean water, medical care, educational opportunities, and hope for the future — and routinely pass over some of the folks at the table. Unthinkable ... but we do it every day.

Like Thomas in today’s Gospel, maybe we need to be shown that there is enough; that there is an abundance of what everyone in God’s family needs to sustain and enjoy a life of comfort and opportunity. We can’t fix the world, but we could add a few to our family circle and show ourselves that there is still enough for all of us.
April 2014

Fourth Week of Lent (continued)

Tues., April 1: Ezek 47:1-9, 12; John 5:1-16
Rise, take up your mat, and walk. First there is the Rule of the Pool. The water is stirred up once a day and the first person in the pool, and only the first person, is healed. This poor guy has been waiting 38 years to be first, but he has no one to help him. Then there is the Law of the Sabbath, the day on which Jesus encounters and heals the unfortunate, friendless man. In the face of suffering, Jesus chooses a higher law — the Law of Love. There are many medical professionals today — and many patients, too — who wish they could rise above the rules and regulations (and paperwork!) that prevent them from helping and healing. Perhaps we can pray to keep our frustration in check and seek to follow the highest law. Lord Jesus, give us the grace of patience and perseverance as we seek health and wholeness for ourselves and all who suffer. PBS

The Son cannot do anything on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing. What is God like? Throughout the ages and across the planet there have been many, many, many ideas about God’s nature. The Gospel says that to know what God is like we are to look at Jesus. But from this distance of time and culture, how do we know for sure about Jesus? The scriptures give us a picture. The church gives us a picture. But the main way people know what Jesus is like is by looking at ... Christians. If that doesn’t both frighten and humble you, you’re either not paying attention or you’re well on your way to sainthood. Merciful God, forgive us when we are not signs of your love for the world and give us the grace to say and do and live as Jesus would. PBS

Thurs., April 3: Exod 32:7-14; John 5:31-47
You do not want to come to me to have life. So much evil has been done to the Jewish people in the name of Jesus, that sometimes it’s difficult for good people to read John’s Gospel without flinching. Yet, one of the ironies of John is that many of those who were waiting for the messiah — those who spent their lives studying the holy texts and giving themselves to honest worship — just didn’t recognize him when he came. The lesson is this: What and who are we not recognizing? What ideas of who God is and how God works are we so wedded to that we cannot perceive God’s presence when it appears? For humble hearts and wide-open eyes, we pray. PBS

Fri., April 4: Wis 2:1a, 12-22; John 7:1-2, 10, 25-30
To us he is the censure of our thoughts; merely to see him is a hardship for us, because ... different are his ways. I have a friend who, when I say something untoward or unkind or just plain dumb, he will sort of blink — a long, slow blink — a judgmental blink. It is the gentlest of reproofs, but perhaps because it is so gentle, I feel it and remember it. I wish I could do that with my children. When they yell at each other I get mad and ... yell. They may feel it for the moment, but unless my ways are different from theirs, nothing changes. Only the better or stronger person can change the conversation. Lord Jesus, grant us the wisdom to be different from those we wish would change. PBS

Sat., April 5: Jer 11:18-20; John 7:40-53
No prophet arises from Galilee. Back during the liturgical music wars of the late ’80s, there were two hymnals in my parish pews — the red one with more traditional music and the teal one with more contemporary music. One song, “I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light,” appears in both hymnals. The same exact song would elicit different responses, depending on which hymnal we announced. Who can’t we hear? Republican or Democrat? Factory worker or academic? Reader of the National Catholic Reporter or the National Catholic Register? (Ouch.) We all have our biases. Maybe the least we can do is recognize them as such. We don’t want to miss the prophetic voice, wherever it comes from. For a heart and mind opened by a desire to learn and a love for each other, we pray. PBS
Fifth Week of Lent

Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger. Oh to have been a fly on the temple wall when the Pharisees brought a woman before Jesus “caught in the very act of committing adultery.” (What were they, peeping Toms?!) What did the accusers see written in the dirt that diffused their accusations so quickly? Our world hasn’t changed that much. We live in a culture where salacious rumors “go viral” in minutes. Would we be so eager to pass on gossip if the subject of the rumor was our child or loved one? Notice how Jesus never accuses either party, nor does he speak of their offenses aloud. He simply reminds them of their potential for integrity. “Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips.” (Ps 141) MJ

Tues., April 8: Num 21:4-9; John 8:21-30
With their patience worn out by the journey, the people complained against God and Moses. Poor Moses! Despite his best efforts, the rag-tag bunch of Israelites he was trying to guide to freedom constantly found fault with him and their situation. You can almost hear their collective whine, “Aren’t we there yet?” How quickly they had forgotten their life of desperate slavery. It can be difficult to keep my life in perspective when I’m exhausted or stressed. Every little annoyance becomes the fault of “others.” How quickly I forget that a lot of what I find to complain about would be considered a gift by much of the impoverished world. Widen my vision, O Lord, that I may see how generous you have been to me, and how much more generous I need to become. MJ

Wed., April 9: Dan 3:14-20, 91-92, 95; John 8:31-42
You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. My mother taught us as children that the truth doesn’t require a great memory, implying that it took more work and energy to maintain a lie. The older I get, the more I find this adage holds true. Trying to be someone other than my true self is exhausting and usually leads to disappointment. It is freeing to know that my identity begins and ends simply in being God’s beloved child. I am not required to be anyone other than myself to be deemed worthy in God’s eyes. When I feel pressured to be someone else, O Lord, help me to remember I am yours, and that is the only identity that matters. MJ

Thurs., April 10: Gen 17:3-9; John 8:51-59
Jesus hid and went out of the temple area. For some reason, I don’t remember ever hearing this line before. I can easily envision the story of Jesus confronting the moneychangers at the temple, or even slipping miraculously through the crowd to avoid being tossed over a cliff. Yet to think that Jesus hid to avoid confrontation or even that he chose his battles, is oddly comforting. I, on the other hand, sometimes find myself digging in my heels in an argument only to discover later that I was in the wrong. Other times I have shied away from confrontation when perhaps I should have voiced an opinion.

Fri., April 11: Jer 20:10-13; John 10:31-42
Even if you do not believe me, believe the works. Although my children have good memories of church as children, as young adults they have drifted away, telling me their experience of church no longer feels relevant or authentic. Jesus’ message did not fit in with that of the Jewish authorities or the Roman establishment. The “ordinary” people, however, easily connected his message to their own lives and found truth in his words and actions. If we, as church, are to play a role in our communities and our children’s lives, we may need to examine whether we “walk the talk” of our faith. The words of Pope Francis to us all to tap into the source of our faith, and to live as authentic and relevant examples of the body of Christ. Open my mind and heart to your teachings, O Lord, so that my life may be a reflection of you. MJ

Sat., April 12: Ezek 37:21-28; John 11:45-56
It is better for you that one man should die ... so that the whole nation may not perish. Scripture often gives us a negative image of the scribes and Pharisees. They oppose Jesus at every turn and do their best to eliminate his influence. Yet in their defense, they saw Jesus as a threat to the teachings of their faith and the well-being of the larger community. Our own history also reveals some pretty horrible decisions made on behalf of the “greater good.” Jesus teaches, however, that the integrity of a person or community lies in the honesty and integrity of its smallest action, and in how the most vulnerable are treated. “Little white lies” or feigned ignorance undermines the credibility of any larger action, no matter how honorable we think it may be. Keep me honest in all my daily responsibilities, O Lord, no matter how small. MJ

Holy Week

Mon., April 14: Isa 42:1-7; John 12:1-11
You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me. Holy Week offers a unique opportunity to pay attention to what’s most important. We’re asked to focus on Jesus in our midst, to be in the moment, and to reflect on what it means to attend to him. If we don’t make the time this Holy Week to be in the presence of the Lord, we miss a precious gift. The routine and concerns of our daily lives can wait. The distractions of the world can wait. They’ll be there tomorrow, and next week, and beyond. Jesus is calling us to be with him, to make him our first priority. For the grace to make this week truly holy, we pray. PR

Will you lay down your life for me? While Judas slinks into the night, Peter promises to follow Jesus even to the point of sacrificing his own life. While Peter appears sincere, he doesn’t fully recognize what he offers. Jesus acknowledges the challenge Peter will face, knowing that Peter will deny him. As we reflect on Jesus’ passion and death, it’s easy to focus on Judas’ horrific betrayal. The greater danger for most of us,
Easter

To do as Christ has done for us, we pray. and follow. of faith, we need simply to experience the Lord, to watch, learn from watching and imitating others, often not knowing why example of how we should treat others. Just like children learn chance to serve us and show us the way, we reject the perfect allow Jesus to love us and sacrifice for us. In denying him the reaches the end of his hard and painful work. He glorifies God,ing, there’s incredible joy in this story, too. Jesus successfully it’s hard not to grieve over our complicity in Jesus’ suffer-

Wed., April 16: Isa 50:4-9a; Matt 26:14-25
What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you? Our betrayal starts subtly. We stop volunteering, cut back on charit-
table giving or skip Mass to catch up on work, chores or rest. We fill our lives with other activities and might not even know what we’re missing. If we let it go on too long, we find that we’ve traded faith, devotion, service and worship for a life-

Triduum

Holy Thursday, April 17: Exod 12:1-8, 11-14; 1 Cor 11:23-26; John 13:1-15
Evening Mass of the Lord’s Supper (See Lectionary for Chrim Mass readings)
You will never wash my feet. Whatever it is — pride, fear, guilt — that keeps us from fully accepting Christ and following his example in our lives has got to go. Even if we don’t understand, especially if we don’t understand, the time has come to allow Jesus to love us and sacrifice for us. In denying him the chance to serve us and show us the way, we reject the perfect example of how we should treat others. Just like children learn from watching and imitating others, often not knowing why they’re doing what they do — as disciples in the infant stage of faith, we need simply to experience the Lord, to watch, learn and follow. To do as Christ has done for us, we pray.

Good Friday, April 18: Isa 52:13–53:12; Heb 4:14-16; 5:7-9; John 18:1–19:42
Friday of the Passion of the Lord
It is finished. Jesus’ earthly mission is fulfilled. Jesus’ last act, like all others before it, shows his inmeasurable love. Even at the end, Jesus takes care of everyone else. He asks forgive-
ness for those who conspire against him, he offers comfort and hope to the criminal at his side, and he seeks solace and companionship for his mother. He does everything the Fa-
ter asks, and only then humbly hands over his spirit. Though it’s hard not to grieve over our complicity in Jesus’ suffer-

Holy Saturday, April 19: Vigil Readings (see Lectionary); Rom 6:3-11; Matt 28:1-10
Go tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.

Our journey toward Easter encourages us to seek the Lord, but now that we’re here, we must not consider it our final destination. Jesus lives, and calls us to meet him. There’s no point in standing before an empty tomb. He isn’t there. We must follow Jesus down the road to learn the next stop on our journey with him. If we truly want to see Christ with a new understanding, we have to keep moving toward him. For the grace to follow the Lord wherever he leads us, we pray.

Octave of Easter

Mon., April 21: Acts 2:14, 22-33; Matt 28:8-15
Do not be afraid. These words were spoken to the shep-
hers at the beginning of Jesus’ life, and they are spoken to the women at the tomb, first by the angel and then by Jesus himself. Do not be afraid. Do not be afraid of life in all its beauty and all its messiness; do not be afraid of death in all its many disguises — perhaps the death of a beloved friend or family member, the death of a dream or the overwhelming deaths that come as a result of dis-
aster or war. We live in a Good Friday world, and yet we proclaim that God’s love is bigger than any grim, bleak, terrible thing the Good Friday world can throw at us. The diagnosis, the heartbreak, the tornado, even the funeral, is not the last word. Fill us with the hope, courage and faith of Easter.

Tues., April 22: Acts 2:36-41; John 20:11-18
She turned around and saw Jesus there, but did not know it was Jesus. On that first Easter morning, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb, expecting to prepare Jesus’ body for burial. But the tomb was empty. She ran and found Pe-
ter and John, who came back to the tomb with her. They didn’t understand what had happened any more than she did and went home. But Mary couldn’t leave. She was overwhelmed by grief, numb with sorrow, and now perplexed by the empty tomb. She asked the angels and then the gardener guy if they knew where the body was so she could “take it away.” When “the gardener” called her by name, she finally realized who he was. Jesus told her to go and tell the other disciples what she had seen and heard.

You come to us in ways we do not expect, O God.

Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him. How could they not recognize Jesus? They had spent the last few years with him. It had only been a few days since they celebrated Passover with him. It’s not until they sat down to eat that it happened. They didn’t recognize him when he walked with them. They didn’t recognize him when he asked what was going on in their lives. They didn’t recognize him when he opened the scriptures to them. But at the table, his pres-
ence and his words triggered memories of another table, another meal. At last these two disciples saw Jesus, recog-
nized him, and knew he was alive. Open our eyes to recog-
nize your presence with us in our ordinary lives, Lord Jesus.

*They had come to recognize him in the breaking of the bread.*

This Easter story is not about an empty tomb. It is about food, especially food shared in community. The risen Christ spends Easter day eating — he breaks bread in Emmaus with two disciples and then eats fish in Jerusalem with all of the disciples. Instead of going to the garden alone, maybe we are to experience resurrection by eating and being with others. But if we do that, we must remember that Jesus could show up, that resurrection could happen, at any table, at every table. We cannot predict where, when or how the risen Christ will bring new life among us. *Lord Jesus, stand in our midst; fill us with your resurrection power and send us forth to continue your work in the world.* JL


*Jesus said to them, “Come, have breakfast.”* It is some time after Easter morning, long enough for the disciples to have left Jerusalem and made the journey back to Galilee. They have gone back to their fishing, back to their lives “before Jesus,” almost as if the crucifixion and resurrection had not occurred. But their efforts are unsuccessful. They receive some instructions from someone on shore, and then they make a huge catch. One of the disciples realizes that it is Jesus on the beach; Peter jumps in to swim ashore. The others haul the nets in. Gradually they all recognize the stranger on the beach as the risen Christ. “Come,” he says to his wet, confused disciples, “have breakfast.” He is not serving supper this time. That was the last meal of their old life together. This is the first meal of their new life together — a resurrection breakfast. *Holy God, raise us to new life each day.* JL

Sat., April 26: Acts 4:13-21; Mark 16:9-15

*[Jesus] said to them, “Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature.”* The resurrection of Jesus was the foundation of the early Christian communities; it was central to their life together. The risen Christ shaped and influenced not only their worship and prayers, but their whole lifestyle, as well, how they related to one another and how they lived in the world. In short, Easter isn’t the end; it’s just the beginning. Easter keeps happening — today, tomorrow, next week, next month. And the risen Christ continues to commission, call and challenge his disciples. Resurrection demands a response. *Fill us with your resurrection power and send us forth to continue your work in all the world.* JL

**Second Week of Easter**


*Why do the nations so furiously rage together?* As I read Peter and John quoting the second psalm in today’s first reading, I hear that fabulous baritone solo from Handel’s “Messiah.” The music conveys the ferocity of raging nations. It’s easy to imagine this music playing as background to a movie battle scene. The world has known war for hundreds of years, nay thousands. Sometimes it seems like only the technology has changed. But maybe there is a little bit more outrage, a little bit more concern about the victims, a little more challenge to the idea that violence is a righteous response. *Lord, make me a means of your peace.* PBS


*Catherine of Siena, virgin, doctor of the church*

No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but *they had everything in common.* Last summer, our beloved little home parish was closed due to structural damages. It has since been demolished. Perhaps because of its small size in a city of larger churches, it was a uniquely friendly and active parish. It was rarely at a loss for volunteers. I was proud to witness how readily our members offered their gifts of hospitality and hard work to the communities they subsequently joined. It was a stark reminder that we as “church” are not about buildings, but about people who work together to be the body of Christ for each other and the world. *As we face an uncertain future, O Lord, help us to remember the basics of who we are called to be.* MJ


*Whoever lives the truth comes to the light.* Rarely does a day go by without some news story of a person or institution that has abused its authority or public trust. Details of elaborate cover-ups only serve to deepen the pain and anger of their victims. Today we hear Jesus tell Nicodemus that only by shedding light on such “evils” can God’s healing begin. The brokenness created by an abuse of trust in families, marriages, churches or institutions can only be restored when it is approached with a sincere commitment to transparency and the openness to healing forgiveness. Christ’s gift of his own life was meant to reconcile us to God and to each other, not condemn us into further despair. *For a world that is open to God’s gift of healing reconciliation through open and honest dialogue, we pray.* MJ

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