In this issue:

Easter Faith
Pat Marrin 3

Formation:
Spanish/English
Words We Need
Catechesis
Psalms
Faith and Life
Art and Worship 5-17

Preparation:
Music, Prayers,
Planning & Graphics 18-27

Preaching:
Commentaries
Sample homilies
Sermon starters
Youth homily ideas for the four Sundays of April 2015

Daily Bread:
Homily starters and reflections on the readings of the day

Easter Faith
Jesus’ resurrection is incomplete without us 3
Preachers have 50 days to explore the mystery of the Resurrection with their assemblies. So much more than spring flowers and pastel fashions, the risen Christ is celebrated as the life of the church, the energy surging within the body of Christ nourished by the Eucharist and sent to transform the world.

To settle for a simple commemoration of a past event as proof that Jesus is God would be to miss the challenge of Jesus’ resurrection as the source of our lives here and now. Awakening full Easter faith is the purpose of our liturgical celebrations during this Paschal season.

This is not to say that proclaiming the Resurrection is easy in our world or even in our faith communities. Consider the resistance to belief in the earliest accounts of the risen Christ in the New Testament. They stand as a reminder to us that even the original witnesses had to come to faith by way of confusion, fear and doubt.

Easter faith is challenging because it is not just about what happened to Jesus. It also radically changed the lives of the disciples. The risen Christ not only appeared to them, but, at Pentecost, entered into them permanently through the Holy Spirit. They became the presence of Jesus in the world, his hands and feet, his voice and active compassion for the poor; his mission to speak truth to power and to bring new freedom to the oppressed and outcast of the world.

If the message of Easter is safely confined to our churches; if we make of it a spirituality that comforts without challenging us to take up the mission of Jesus — then we can hardly call ourselves believers.

Our hopes for personal immortality after death are inseparable from our commitment to live fully and courageously as disciples in this life.

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**Editor’s Corner**

Pat Marrin

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**Contents**

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**FORMATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proclaiming Easter Faith</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility for Jesus’ Death</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April Lectionary Themes</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See That Guy? He’s Crazy!</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We Gather on This Night</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This Is the Day</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Dignity of Muslims</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turn It Upside Down</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned to Preach</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walking with the Marginalized</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ships Passing in the Night?</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mystagogical Music</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PREPARATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April Music</td>
<td>18-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning and Prayers</td>
<td>22-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April Graphics</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PREACHING**

Five 4-page resource folders

**Commentaries**

Mary McGlone, Patricia Datchuck Sánchez

**Sample Homilies**

Paige Byrne Shortal, Pat Marrin, Ted Wolgamot

**Youth Preaching**

Jim Auer
Proclaiming Easter Faith

Jesus’ resurrection is incomplete without us

By PAT MARRIN

The four Gospel accounts of the resurrection of Jesus do not provide an easy or coherent straight-line proclamation of what is undeniably the cornerstone of Christian faith. What they do is challenge us to enter the Easter experience of our ancestors in order to make their mysterious encounters with the risen Christ our own, here and now, present and effective in our world today.

Preachers mounting pulpits around the world this month of April 2015 will proclaim not that Jesus was raised, but that “He is risen.” For Easter to have meaning and effect, believers in every church must be more than people congregating for random social gatherings, but instead faith assemblies conscious that they are the body of the risen Christ for the 21st century.

The implications of this awareness are the central challenge of the Christian life we assume at baptism. Easter people are those who take up the mission of Jesus by sharing his cross and resurrection, the heart of the Christian life embodied in every disciple.

The church ceases to be church if it does not share the ongoing mission of evangelization in both word and action, by becoming the hands and feet, mind and heart of Jesus in every Christian engaged in the world.

So where does Easter faith come from, and how can we make it more than a time capsule of past events or witness? The Word of God must come alive in our faith communities and in our commitment to lifelong Christian formation.

Where does Easter faith come from, and how can we make it more than a time capsule of past events or witness? The Word of God must come alive in our faith communities and in our commitment to lifelong Christian formation.

For the record

Good preaching is essential for building up the faith. A careful exegesis of the resurrection accounts, viewed together in parallel columns, and in their probable order of composition, reveals a multilayered and often contradictory narrative. Details vary, witnesses are different, some include appearances, some do not, and where encounters with Jesus occur, they both inspire and confuse witnesses, some of whom wonder whether they are seeing Jesus or some mysterious stranger.

Here are the sources:

❖ Mark draws on an existing 35-year-old oral memory of apostolic preaching and primitive Christian worship. But his original resurrection story stands incomplete and ends abruptly. Mark has only an empty tomb, a simple messenger who instructs three terrified women to tell the disciples that Jesus will join them in Galilee. The last words of his account actually report that the women flee in terror and say nothing to anyone. This is probably the earliest written account of the Resurrection, yet as a primary source the other Gospels will build on, it was deemed so inadequate that it had to be enhanced later with additional appearance stories and a final commissioning scene.

❖ Matthew and Luke take up Mark and other oral and written sources some two decades later to meet the needs of their respective Jewish and gentile communities. They combine detailed appearance stories with bodily encounters with Jesus, meals, miracles and some extra stories loaded with allusions to ancient scripture passages in order to show how Jesus’ shocking death actually fulfilled the Law and the Prophets. Luke’s second volume, the “Acts of the Apostles,” tells how the Holy Spirit of Jesus then guided the growth of the early church. Some of our most cherished stories of the risen Jesus come from Matthew and Luke, including the beautiful story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. It is sometimes called a gospel in miniature as a summary of the faith, yet it is also clearly a theological reflection on the depiction of the Eucharist in...
The tradition we celebrate today has evolved for two millennia. Our Easter tradition would have faded to nothing after the first few generations if it relied solely on past witnesses. Nor is faith only possible for saints and mystics. The Gospels make it clear that ordinary people like us were called to accompany Jesus and to be witnesses to his death and resurrection. They offer no proof but only carefully nuanced invitations to faith, challenges to trust what we cannot prove and to know what we cannot see with our eyes, but only with our hearts, with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Faith, for them and for us, comes gradually, like the dawn after a long night of anguish and despair, as it did for the women who grieved at the cross and waited at the tomb. Faith seeps through stony hearts and clouded minds, as it did for doubting Thomas. Even despair opens our eyes to the stranger on the road who breaks bread with us at every Eucharist. Tears of failure bring us face to face with Jesus, who forgave a brokenhearted Peter and entrusted him with the gospel of mercy.

Easter faith does not smooth over death. The subtle complexity of the Gospel accounts suggests that what Jesus’ disciples experienced was not defeat on Friday and victory by Sunday, but a long, stage-by-stage conversion to an entirely new way of understanding reality.

Believers today need more than denial and happy talk as they lay their loved ones in the grave and consider their own mortality. A young poet named Ted Rosenthal, who died at age 34 of acute leukemia, spent his last six months writing a short book titled How Could I Not Be Among You? His cry was the universal question, the unsettling intimation of just how fragile we are in our “wagers for transcendence,” in Pascal’s poignant phrase. Easter faith does not deny death, but embraces it as part of living, showing us how to join life and death the way Jesus did in his Paschal Mystery.

Four lessons of Easter

What can we learn about life and death from Easter?

First, we learn that Easter faith is harder alone than in community. The first step toward the promise of resurrection occurs when we enter webs of relationships that enrich our small stories with the stories of others. No one carries all the pieces of the puzzle, but even a small, diverse community will have most of them. Real churches pair ragamuffins and control freaks, exiles and homebodies, the strong and the weak, the confident and the anxious. Variety can make the beatitudes seem normal, the corporal works of mercy into everyday routines. Christ slips in wherever need is exposed and compassion responds.

Second, we learn that resurrection, like crucifixion, happens all the time, but in small, manageable patterns of life that teach us generosity and patience. When we fall asleep each night, we rehearse death, learning to let go, entrusting ourselves to something larger than our egos. When we rise to any occasion where love can make a difference, where forgiveness frees another, we move a stone from the mouth of some tomb; we practice resurrection. If this seems mundane, consider it the triumph of the Incarnation that God is among us in everything human, blessing even the smallest virtue as possessing eternal value.
Third, we learn that some realities are so shocking they are best handled indirectly, with rituals and symbols. Death is one of them. So we meet our beloved dead at the door of the church. We clothe them and sprinkle them with the waters of baptism, we light a tall candle and bear the body on our shoulders to the center of the circle, tell stories, sing songs, say prayers to renew our faith. We share a meal to seal our covenant with them against eternity, when we will all reappear together as one body, joyful beyond words.

A favorite hymn says it so well: “We come to share our story, we come to break the bread, we come to know our rising from the dead.” All the elements of Easter are here, showing us how to live out the implications of our union with Christ.

Finally, we learn that FDR was right: “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” The Resurrection is not about protecting us from death, but about freeing us from the fear of death. The greatest obstacle to an active Christian life is to limit ourselves because we are afraid. If death is the worst thing that can happen to us, there is no stopping someone who is no longer intimidated by death. We honor as saints people who lived fearlessly, large and deep. We should also imitate them.

Ched Myers, in his study of Mark’s Gospel Binding the Strong Man, says that the Gospel was left incomplete for a reason. Without us, there is no happy end to the story of Jesus. The burden passes to his disciples to live as he did, trusting totally in God’s ultimate victory over sin and death.

Blessed are Easter people — those who dare to live, who act courageously on behalf of truth and justice, and who risk everything to follow their dreams. Timid Christians have done more to postpone the coming of God’s reign in the world than any enemy of the church. Resurrection is less about reassuring us of heaven after death than about freeing us to live now without fear. This is the joyful, compelling message of Easter.

Who Was Responsible for Jesus’ Death?

By THOMAS F. O’MEARA, O.P.

In the last weeks of Lent, the Gospels for the daily Eucharist describe how some forces following Jesus turn against him, become more violent and eventually arrange his arrest. In Holy Week, we hear the Gospels tell of the trial and execution of Jesus. The four Gospels devote considerable effort to presenting those responsible for depicting Jesus as a criminal. There are a number of groups and individuals involved: Roman political and Jewish religious movements like the Sadducees or the Sanhedrin; powerful officials directing the legal proceedings, like Caiaphas, Pilate and Herod; individuals participating in various ways, like the Apostle Judas, assorted soldiers, Pilate’s wife and other arrested criminals. Clearly, the Gospels want to narrate a somewhat detailed history of how the one who is more than the Messiah came to be removed as someone worse than a major criminal.

Who was responsible for Jesus’ death? First, it was not God. God is infinite goodness, whose activities, as the beings of creation show, are good. The trial and execution of an innocent man is a serious evil, and God does not direct — cannot direct — evil enterprises. Great theologians like Thomas Aquinas point this out and show that God permits human beings to undertake the arrest of the special prophet and tolerates the cessation of his ministry. To our dismay, God permits human beings to exercise their freedom to do immoral activities: to massacre a village or embezzle the savings of the elderly. He has given an extensive and sovereign freedom to men and women, and he does not externally block its evil exercise.

We should not imagine that the Trinity established an early plan for Jesus’ execution to save the human race in a startling way. The plan of the Trinity is for the Word to become a human being, a prophetic figure in a particular time, political regime and religious tradition. Incarnation, not sacrificial execution, is the plan. Jesus’ preaching of the kingdom of God antagonizes some of his hearers and threatens the leaders of political and religious establishments. It questions their power. “People were not made for the Sabbath; the Sabbath was made for people.” They turn against Jesus, block his renewal of the Jewish covenant and then kill him. God permits this, and then turns it to serve as an instruction for the human race about each man and woman surviving the evils of their lives, and to serve as the entrance to the Resurrection — of Jesus and of all. But the divine plan is not for death but for preaching, not for depression but for life. The leaders of some religious and political organizations are indicated as the prominent agents of Jesus’ arrest and death. In a variety of ways, they truly conspire against him, and these incidents come together on Holy Thursday and Good Friday. They work to remove him so that their positions of wealth and power can be continued.

Christian tradition implies that in some way the sins of human beings are responsible for Calvary. This is so in a global and background way. The administrators of Calvary represent and are supported by a collective human history of violence. The cross is a symbol and source of forgiveness for each man and woman. Nonetheless, as St. Paul points out, the message of Jesus’ death and resurrection is not one of guilt and discouragement, but is a recognition that Jesus suffers in solidarity with the sufferings of each person. His death brings not depression but life, not embarrassment but liberation. “For me to live is Christ; to die is gain” (Phil 1:21).

Dominican Fr. Thomas F. O’Meara is the William K. Warren Professor of Theology Emeritus at the University of Notre Dame.
El Núcleo De Nuestra Fe: Jesús Resucitado

El culto y la vida para el mes de abril 2015

PATRICIA DATCHUCK SÁNCHEZ y RAFAEL SÁNCHEZ ALONSO

El mes pasado nos enfocamos en Jesús elevado en la cruz para salvar a los pecadores y por Él llevarlos a Dios. Este mes los textos sagrados invitan a enfocarnos en Jesús que, elevado a la gloria, atrae a todos los creyentes hacia la eternidad. Jesús ha resucitado. Jesús vive. Como ha dicho el Papa Francisco en su exhortación apostólica “La alegría del Evangelio” (2013), “Su resurrección no es algo del pasado; entraña una fuerza de vida que ha penetrado el mundo.” Y así ha sido desde aquel momento en que Jesús fue elevado en el sufrimiento y en la victoria.

Antes de que Jesús apareciera entre nosotros, los toscanos enterraban a sus muertos en tumbas orientadas al oeste; para ellos la muerte era el fin de la vida. Después del evento de Cristo, las tumbas de los cristianos miraron al este porque la resurrección de Jesús ha disipado para nosotros, los toscanos enterrando mártires cristianos que hay otra cámara en donde están enterrados mártires cristianos que se burlan de los dioses o expresan quejas amargas. Cerca de ese lugar se burlan de los dioses o expresan quejas amargas. Cerca de ese lugar se burlan de los dioses o expresan quejas amargas. Cerca de ese lugar se burlan de los dioses o expresan quejas amargas. Cerca de ese lugar se burlan de los dioses o expresan quejas amargas. Cerca de ese lugar se burlan de los dioses o expresan quejas amargas.

Hallamos un contraste similar en las catacumbas. En una cámara que remonta a la época de Julio César (100-44 a.C.), se encuentran tumbas con epitafiles de miedo y desesperanza. Muchas inscripciones son cinicas, se burlan de los dioses o expresan quejas amargas. Cerca de ese lugar hay otra cámara en donde están enterrados mártires cristianos que fueron quemados, crucificados o arrojados a las fieras. Pero aquí no hay muestras de tristeza ni de angustia. Lirios adornan las tumbas y las inscripciones expresan una alegría sincera; toda la cámara mortuoria parece revestida como para una boda en vez de una muerte. Todo, a causa de la resurrección de Cristo.

Al celebrar este misterio fundamental del Cristianismo, sin el cual nuestra fe sería en vano, los textos sagrados nos recuerdan cómo la verdad de la resurrección de Cristo afectó a nuestros antepasados en la fe. En una palabra, fueron transformados. Su cobardía se transformó en valor, sus dudas en fe, su miedo en audacia, su confusión en claridad. Por Jesús resucitado y su fe en Él, se transfiguraron en hombres nuevos, en mujeres nuevas en Cristo.

El domingo de Pascua, San Pedro (Hechos de los Apóstoles) da un testimonio valiente ante todos sus oyentes de lo que Jesús hizo y dijo; proclama con orgullo: “Él nos encargó predicar… ser testigos.” El tercer domingo de Pascua, Pedro (Hechos) ruego a quienes le escuchan: “Arrepientanse y conviértanse, para que Él borre sus pecados.” El cuarto domingo de Pascua, Pedro resume el misterio: “No hay salvación en ningún otro nombre porque, bajo el cielo, no hay persona otra por la cual podamos ser salvos.” La experiencia de Pedro y de los primeros creyentes incitan a cada uno de nosotros a preguntarnos: ¿Cómo me afecta a mí y a mi mundo la realidad de la resurrección de Jesús? ¿Me transforma?

Si tratamos de responder a estas preguntas, es posible desanimarnos: “muchas veces parece como que Dios no existiera: vemos injusticias, maldades, indiferencias y crueldades que no ceden. … También aparecen constantemente nuevas dificultades, la experiencia del fracaso, las pequeñas humanas que tanto duelen. Todos sabemos por experiencia que a veces una tarea no brinda las satisfacciones que deseáramos, los frutos son reducidos y los cambios son lentos, y uno tiene la tentación de cansarse” (Papa Francisco, obra citada). En tiempos como estos, debemos aferrarnos a la resurrección de Jesús y a su poder transformador. Puesto que vivimos bajo el poder de un Jesús que pasó de la muerte a la vida, debemos dar testimonio de ese poder con nuestras vidas, palabras y obras. Debemos cooperar voluntaria y libremente en la transformación del mundo, comenzando cada día arrepintiéndonos y convirtiéndonos a Cristo. En virtud de nuestro compromiso con Cristo Resucitado, cuando veamos el sufrimiento, debemos sentirnos obligados a aliviarlo. Cuando veamos la necesidad y la miseria, debemos compartir lo que tenemos y somos. Cuando veamos la injusticia, debemos ser la voz y también el voto que exige cambios y reformas. Cuando veamos la ignorancia, el perjuicio y cualquier clase de discriminación, debemos aportar la luz del evangelio para iluminar esas tinieblas mientras que damos testimonio del amor al que Jesús nos ha llamado a todos.

Una vez tuve una amiga a quien le gustaba decir: “Es posible que usted sea el único evangelio que otra persona lea en su vida.” Espero que no le importe a Maggie Keys que cambie sus palabras para resaltar esto: “Es posible que usted sea la única experiencia de la resurrección de Jesús que otra persona perciba.” Por tanto, cuando se presente la oportunidad de ofrecer esperanza a otros, de compartir la fe, o de asistirles en su camino y atenderles en sus necesidades, somos rápidos y diligentes en ayudarles. La resurrección de Jesús no es un secreto que debemos custodiar sino una revelación del amor de Dios que debemos compartir con todos.

“La resurrección del Señor ha penetrado ya la trama oculta de esta historia, porque Jesús no resucitó en vano. ¡No nos quedemos al margen de esa marcha de la esperanza viva!” (Papa Francisco, op. cit.). Al contrario, recordemos que hemos sido capacitados por el mismo Espíritu que Jesús sopló sobre los primeros discípulos. Así equipados, “somos el pueblo de la Pascua y ‘Aleluya’ es nuestra canción.”

Patricia Datchuck Sánchez y Rafael Sánchez Alonso han provisto de comentarios y homilías a Celebración desde 1979.
Heart of Our Faith: Jesus Risen
Lectionary themes for April 2015

PATRICIA DATCHUCK SÁNCHEZ
and RAFAEL SÁNCHEZ ALONSO

Last month, our focus was on Jesus being lifted up on the cross in order to heal all sinners and draw them to himself and to God. This month, the sacred texts call upon us to focus on Jesus being lifted up in glory, drawing all who believe unto eternity. Jesus is risen; Jesus lives. As Pope Francis pointed out in his apostolic exhortation “The Joy of the Gospel” (2013), “Jesus’ resurrection is not an event of the past; it is a vital power which continues to permeate the world.” And so it has been from the moment Jesus was lifted up in suffering and in victory.

Before Jesus’ appearance among us, the Tuscans laid their dead in tombs that faced the west. For them, death was the end of life. After the Christ-event, however, the tombs faced the east because Jesus’ resurrection dispelled the darkness of sin and death forever.

A similar contrast can be found in the catacombs. In a chamber that dates back to the time of Julius Caesar (100-44 B.C.E.), the tombs are marked with signs of dread and hopelessness. Many inscriptions are either cynical, at the expense of the gods; or embittered in their complaints. Nearby in another chamber are buried martyrs who were burned or crucified or thrown to the beasts. But here, there is no gloom or anger. Lilies adorn the tombs; the inscriptions express a sincere joy, and the whole chamber is decked as if for marriage rather than death. All this because of Jesus’ resurrection.

As we celebrate this vital mystery without which our faith is in vain, the sacred texts remind us how the truth of Jesus’ resurrection affected our ancestors in the faith. In a word, they were transformed. Cowardice was transformed into courage, doubt into faith, fear into boldness, confusion into clarity. Because of the risen Jesus and their faith in him, they were new men and new women in Christ.

On Easter Sunday, Peter (Acts) witnesses with boldness to all that Jesus did and said. He proudly declares, “He commissioned us to preach ... to testify” (April 5). On April 19, Easter’s Third Sunday, Peter (Acts) appeals to all who will hear: “Repent and be converted, that your sins may be wiped away.” On the last Sunday of April (Fourth Sunday of Easter; April 26), Peter (Acts) sums up the mystery: “There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven ... by which we are to be saved.” The experience of Peter and those very first believers prompts each of us to ask ourselves: How does the reality of Jesus’ resurrection affect me? How does it affect my world? Am I transformed?

In attempting to answer these questions, we might become discouraged. “All around us, we see persistent injustice, evil, indifference and cruelty ... we all know from experience that sometimes a task does not bring the satisfaction we seek; results are few and changes are small and we are tempted to grow weary or even give up” (Pope Francis, op. cit.). At times like these, we must cling to the reality of Jesus’ resurrection and its transformative power. We live in the power of Jesus’ rising from death to life, and so we witness to that power with our lives and with all our words and works. We are to participate willingly in the transformation of the cosmos, beginning with our own daily repentance and conversion to Christ. Where we see suffering, we are compelled, by virtue of our commitment to the risen Christ, to alleviate it. Where we see need and want, we are to share what we have and who we are. Where we see injustice, we are to be the voice as well as the vote that calls for change and transformation. Where we see ignorance, prejudice and any other sort of discrimination, we are to bring the good light of the Gospel to bear on the darkness while witnessing to the love Jesus has called us all to bear.

I once had a friend who was fond of saying, “You may be the only gospel another person will ever read.” Perhaps Maggie Keys wouldn’t mind if I altered her words to make a point: “You may be the only taste of Jesus’ resurrection that another person will ever experience.” Therefore, when an opportunity arises to offer hope to another person, to share faith or to ease their way and see to their needs, let us be quick and eager to do so. Jesus’ resurrection is not a secret to be kept, but a revelation of God’s love to be shared by all.

“Jesus’ resurrection is already woven into the fabric of human history, for Jesus did not rise in vain. May we never remain on the sidelines of this march of living hope” (Pope Francis, op. cit.). Let us remember, instead, that we are empowered by the same Spirit Jesus breathed forth on the first disciples. Thus equipped, as the saying goes, “we are Easter people and Alleluia’ is our song.”

Patricia Datchuck Sánchez and Rafael Sánchez Alonso have been collaborating to provide Lectionary commentaries and homilies for Celebration since 1979.
See That Guy? He’s Crazy!

We need to lament climate change, not deny it

By GABE HUCK

We reach and keep Triduum after each year’s Lenten disciplines. This can possibly, year by year, bring us each and all to put some names on that living enemy, death. We make Lent bright with discovery and so arrive at the Triduum humbled and exhausted. But humbled is good. Exhausted is good.

For better and worse, we come to Triduum wrung out by Lent and by life, not sure anymore what to renounce and what to affirm. Maybe our best Lent, individually and as church, leaves us like the speaker in Hopkins’ poem that begins: “Not, I’ll not, carrion comfort, Despair; not feast on thee” and ends: “That night, that year / Of now done darkness I wretch lay wrestling with (my God)! my God.” (Look it up at www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/173657.)

Who of us takes this challenge in these times when we either don’t see or pretend not to see what is at stake?

We pass through the Three Days grasping for what we are to renounce and what we are to embrace at the time of plunging into the font. And beyond that is the Fifty Days, that Paschal season that can no longer be reduced to “just the facts” of “was crucified, died and was buried, and rose again on the third day.” The Fifty Days are hard, and most of us never took to them. But does Easter mean we put aside that lamentation that is a human and Gospel response to our times? Not, I think, if our eyes have been opened in Lent to what we have promised, as church, to see; and if perhaps we have discovered where to look.

Last month we talked about lamentation in Lent, and specifically about two laments. One is a lament for Palestine that could break our American Catholic silence on Israel’s oppression of Palestinians and our own government’s seemingly limitless support for that oppression. A second needed lament involves us in pondering how we must react to the widening gap in our nation and in our world between the rich and the poor. In the hoarding of wealth and of power, the gap is becoming an abyss.

Lamentation is a language of standing-with. It is a language too honest for our comfort.

David Power, theologian and teacher who died last June, wrote in his 1992 book The Eucharistic Mystery:

Since we celebrate amid the ruins of culture and human community, it would seem that within the prayer it is time for Christians to include lament. Lament is a form of reversal. It points to that within a people’s lives and history which betrays the hope of the promises. … Lamentation before God and in the community of faith energizes. It dares to name the suffering, the oppression, the ideology, the wrestling with faith.

Power argues: “When the lament is admitted, thanksgiving for Christ has to be made precisely from the point of distress, however challenging this be to faith.” So in its eucharistic praying, the church must place the familiar words of thanksgiving and intercession “amid the ruins that lament dares to bring forward, even when it means searching anew for the divine name.”

Lament dares to bring forward the ruins. What does that mean? And how is it different from intercession? We do intercede in our assemblies for justice in Palestine, for legislative reforms and courts brave enough to challenge the 1 percent, for media honestly interested in the truth rather than the sensation or the profit. So how is that different from lamentation over the ruins? Why does lamentation possibly make our thanksgiving/Eucharist honest? And in the real world of parish life, how would lamentation not divide us? Isn’t one Christian’s lament likely to be another Christian’s political conviction? Can both voice — or even just moan to — the same lament?

That said, we plunge now briefly into a long-avoided topic that is necessary to any reflection on ourselves as obliged to lament. It has great relevance to the sounds and words and smells and gestures of the Fifty Days, providing we burst through their literal tether.

Decades ago, I loved the cartoons in The New Yorker, and occasionally one in particular surfaces in my memory: A busy street corner. Across the street we see a person with a sign that reads: “The end of the universe is coming!” The cartoonist intended, that an “End of the universe” sign is as wacky as an “End of the world is coming!” All three are dressed in the pre-1960s vision of society’s dropouts. One of the two “world ending” men is pointing at the man holding the “universe” sign across the street and saying, “See that guy? He’s crazy!”

None of us likes bad news, and here we are facing something beyond bad news. Do we continue to think, as the cartoonist intended, that an “End of the world is coming” sign is as wacky as an “End of the universe is coming” sign? If so, we’re still in the 1950s. In the London Review of Books (Oct. 23 2014), Paul Kingsnorth reviewed a book by George Marshall with this excellent title and subtitle: Don’t Even Think about It: Why Our Brains Are Wired to Ignore Climate Change. The book argues that the evidence has been stacking up for several decades, that the political and economic resistance to truth-telling is all-powerful, and that so many of us don’t become
involved because we just won’t take it seriously. “Don’t even think about it!”

The science of climate change may be ignored for some of the same reasons that the nuclear threat has been and is today ignored. Jonathan Schell’s 1982 book *The Fate of the Earth* was another story we didn’t want to believe. I wrote a bit about Schell and his book in the August 2014 *Celebration*, shortly after his death. This quote from that book fits both nuclear and climate situations: “A society that systematically shuts its eyes to an urgent peril to its physical survival and fails to take any steps to save itself cannot be called psychologically well.”

In the case of climate change, after decades of dawdling, some political players seem willing to accept that we must not let the average global temperature increase by more than 2 degrees above preindustrial levels. But after 30 years of failure on the part of the world’s major players, where is the will to pay the price of holding that line on temperature? At the end of 2014, the United States and China reached an agreement on fossil fuel reductions, but India’s new leaders are having none of it. The poor nations ask why they must help pay the price for the damage the wealthier nations have done. Wouldn’t we wonder too in their place? Rich nations made the problem, and they should solve it. You can only argue with that if you begin by saying that we’re sorry and now we need each other. Let’s work something out. But what must we of the rich world put on the table? More than we are willing now, even if absolutely everything is at stake.

Thus the concern that the line will not hold at 2 degrees. If it doesn’t, then what? In his review of *Don’t Even Think about It*, Kingsnorth writes:

“Four degrees of warming, Marshall tells us, is likely to bring heatwaves of magnitudes never experienced before, and temperatures not seen on Earth in the last five million years. Forty percent of plant and animal species would be at risk of extinction, a third of Asian rainforests would be under threat and most of the Amazon would be at high risk of burning down. Crop yields would collapse, possibly by a third in Africa. US production of corn, soy beans and cotton would fall by up to 82 percent. Four degrees guarantees the total melting of the Greenland ice sheet and probably the Western Antarctic ice sheet, which would raise sea levels by more than thirty feet. Two-thirds of the world’s major cities would end up underwater. *And we aren’t looking at a multigenerational time-scale: we may see a four degree rise over the next sixty years.* (My italics.)

Sixty years means I won’t be here and probably you won’t be here. But that is not the reason, according to Marshall, that we aren’t worried about this enough to make a tremendous fuss so that both the political and the corporate powers do something. It seems, rather, that

We have failed to act on climate change not because we don’t know enough about it, or because we don’t know how to prevent it: we have failed to act on it because at one level we don’t want to act on it. And we don’t want to act on it because we don’t want to believe it’s really happening.

But the review ends with a possible third factor: We just can’t bring ourselves to lower our standard of living. Especially, perhaps, those of us who won’t live to see the worst.

All of us have known persons who, facing death, were at peace. The individual’s mortality is part of that individual’s life very early. “And if I die before I wake,” we would pray each night. But this is different. In the lifetime of living generations now, we have become aware that we crossed some line and if we lack the sense to accept that and to change the dynamic, then something we find nearly or completely impossible to imagine will happen. We are individually either in denial of the science or unwilling to visualize how, collectively, we can turn it around. We are willing to do little stuff like recycle and pay more for fuel, but we aren’t going to carry any of those “End of the World” signs.

We want human life and art and joy to survive, but we just can’t quite believe that it depends on us and that we have so little time.

As with the nuclear war scenario that Schell described 30 years ago, the problem is taking it seriously, taking it politically, taking it economically, taking it in solidarity. That’s never been our style. Was it in the 1980s that some popular magazine had a cover with a young person looking at a headline and saying: “Nuclear war! That spoils all my plans!”

Our inclination is to turn away, but that’s not easy either. We sense that it isn’t enough to be at peace with our own mortality as individuals, or enough to have long grieved over the way we as a people have inflicted suffering in crude or sophisticated ways. But if, in all this, we have somehow grasped and come to cherish how love and wisdom have shaped our lives together in ways beyond counting, then perhaps we cannot turn away now.

And that may be how we come to lamentation. Not intercession. Not confession. Not yet action, perhaps. But giving some sound or shape or word to grief at what we collectively have done and have failed to do. Perhaps we have in the scriptures, songs and rites of the Fifty Days, a ready place for such lament over our failures, our narrow agendas, our arrogance of presumption. “Don’t even think about it”? No. That’s not right. We have to think about it. When the stakes are this high and we are this low, lament is some movement toward thought.

Where does that belong in our words and rites? We are not lamenting our own suffering, our own plight. We are not yet Rachel weeping and refusing to be comforted. We are not those who have been “buked and scorned.” But we may have something to learn from David when his child was dying, from Job and from Psalm 88. Maybe. Can all this happen amid Alleluias? Maybe that’s the only way it can happen.

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We Gather on This Night
*A cosmic celebration of our shared life in Christ*

By MELISSA MUSICK NUSSBAUM

My cousin sent me a print of a photograph she found. It’s a panoramic view of a Texas plain. The vast, cloudless sky; the flat ground; and, all around, cowboys, horses and cattle. The legend on the back reads: Last Roundup at the Spade Ranch — Fall 1924. My great-grandfather, David Nathan Arnett, managed the Spade Ranch for the Ellwood brothers of Chicago, the men who co-owned the patent on barbed wire. Except for the hired hands, all the men in the picture are Arnetts or Arnett kin: Tom and Dud and Homan and Carter and Bass and Albert and Stanford Arnett, and Jim Brown, Homan and Carter’s uncle and the camp cook.

The men are listed, but so are the horses, each one named, and many described. Homan is holding Tony. Carter is holding Popcorn. The “white horse, saddled,” is Traveler. The “horse with tail to Tom [is] either Baldy or Slut.” And, as if to explain the confusion, the legend adds, “They [the horses] were half-brothers.” Family resemblance, you see, and so an easy mistake for the writer to make.

I try to imagine a life in which I live so close to horses that I know them all by name and sight and bloodline, even among the hundreds on a 280,000-acre ranch, a ranch 10 miles wide by 54 miles long. Of course, that is not my life, and not the life of almost anyone today. Texas, where the rural population was in the majority when I was growing up there, now has an urban majority.

So I can’t understand the care with which the horses are included in the list of subjects, but I can understand, and do, how it is that we always name what we treasure, what we need, what matters. The care with which the men and horses in this picture were named makes me think of the care with which the Easter Vigil — what it is, who we are, why we gather, what we do — is named.

The Exsultet is the legend, the guide to the panoramic landscape of the Easter Vigil.

The Exsultet is the legend, the guide to the panoramic landscape of the Easter Vigil. Who is gathered to rejoice? Heavenly powers, choirs of angels, all creation. The earth and the Mother Church and all God’s people join them.

How do we thank the Lord our God? We give thanks united. We give thanks with our hearts uplifted. We give thanks with full hearts and minds and voices.

Where have we gathered to rejoice and give thanks? We gather at our Passover feast, on the night God led Israel dry-shod through the sea. We gather on the night when the pillar of fire destroyed the darkness of sin, when Christians everywhere are washed clean of sin and are freed from all defilement. We gather on the night when Jesus Christ broke the chains of death and rose triumphant from the grave.

What happens on this night? Evil is dispelled, guilt is washed away, lost innocence is restored, mourners receive joy, hatred is cast out, peace comes to us and earthly pride is brought low. Heaven is wedded to earth, and we are reconciled with God.

My great-grandfather and his kin and hands gathered 90 years ago for a solemn ceremony on the high western plains. They assembled for a photograph, a rare and cumbersome event, but worth the time and trouble, for this was the marker of a land and a people and an identity. My great-grandfather would not have sat alone, and he and the cowboys would not have sat without the horses and cattle. Together, they made up the story of a life, of their lives, these men remembered by us only as “Fuzzy, a farmer from around Wolfforth” and “AG (I.Z.) Dillard.”

We Christians have gathered at the Easter Vigil year after year for over 2,000 years now. We do not gather alone, but in a cosmic community transcending and embracing the living and the dead, the present and the past, all tribes and races and languages. We know the candles we each hold to be a portion of the pillar of fire, “a flame divided but undimmed.” We know that our little candles “mingle with the lights of heaven” and illuminate the night.

We name it all because it is our identity, our first breath and our last, our need, our hope, our treasure, our truth, our joy.

The world my great-grandfather oversaw is gone. Like the tornadoes that tear through the region north and west of Lubbock each spring and summer, time and new economies have swept his world away. But we continue to gather in honor and praise of the Morning Star which never sets.

May Christ, the Morning Star, who came back from the dead and shed his peaceful light on all humankind, who lives and reigns for ever and ever — may this Morning Star return and find our flames, divided but undimmed, still burning.

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Formation: Scripture

This Is the Day

The Psalms of April

By DENISE SIMEONE

Rarely do we sing one psalm as often as we will sing Psalm 118 this month. We sing it at the Easter Vigil and on Easter Sunday (April 5). We sing it three of the four April Sundays and hear 18 of the 29 verses. All three Sundays, we proclaim: “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, his mercy endures forever/his love is everlasting” (v. 1) and “The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. By the Lord has this been done; it is wonderful in our eyes” (vss 22-23).

If we were to read the psalm in its entirety, we would also see that “Lord” is heard in 24 of the verses: the Lord answered, the Lord is with me, came to my aid, set me free, the Lord is my helper, my refuge, the Lord’s name is my help, my strength and might, my savior. The Lord’s hand works valiantly, chastens me, opens the gate, accomplishes wonderful things, enlightens me. This day belongs to the Lord, who grants salvation, enduring mercy and everlasting love.

What is our response to this faithful love — this hesed? We acknowledge: “This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad” (v. 24; responsorial verse for Easter Sunday).

Our potential testimony is illustrated in the psalm. This is what we do when we recognize God’s powerful covenantal love. We give thanks. We proclaim. We call on the Lord. We have no fear. We trust. We declare the works of the Lord. We rejoice and are glad. We form processions and offer praise, singing: “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, his love is everlasting” (v. 1; responsorial verse for the Second Sunday of Easter, April 12).

The psalmist bore witness to what the people of God had come to know and believe. They proclaimed and gave praise to the God who had chosen them. In the Acts readings heard these April Sundays, we see the testimony of the first disciples. They proclaimed the word of God. They healed those in need. They shared everything in common so that no one was in need. They preached and called people to conversion. They bore witness to the power of Jesus Christ in their lives.

After Easter, all of the second readings in April are from 1 John and reinforce what the followers of Jesus Christ must do. Keep the commandments of God. Believe Jesus is the Son of God who claims victory through the waters of his blood. Believe in the one who saves all from sin, and know him in the keeping of his commandments. Trust that we are now the beloved children of God.

The only time we hear Psalm 4 in the Lectionary cycle is this Third Sunday of Easter (April 19). Its overall sentiment is one of confidence that God responds when we cry out and answers when we call. We remind God to show us the light of his face: “Lord, let your face shine on us” (v. 7). But perhaps one of the stronger messages in the psalm is one not heard in this liturgical selection but that seems appropriate for this season. Verse 5 says: “Tremble and sin no more.” The word tremble is also translated as “Be moved deeply.”

What if we really allowed ourselves to be moved deeply this Easter season? What if we allowed the Spirit of the risen Christ, the Spirit present over the waters of creation, to move us deeply so that we would indeed sin no more? What if we could put aside our fear, our prejudices and our judgments? What if we put aside our quarrels, grudges and conflicts? What if we put aside arms, violence, war? All is possible if we believe the message of the psalms and readings of this month.

In the stories proclaimed at the Easter Vigil, we hear of God’s power and intervention in the lives of the Israelites — the people of God. God saves. They are freed and invited to know the loving embrace of God’s arms. So are we. We are saved from our own sinfulness. Even though we often forget our promise to be faithful, God never forgets. Truly we are called to be moved deeply by our own sin and to go forth saved, to witness to this loving hesed of God.

On the Fourth Sunday of Easter (April 26), our responsorial verse is: “The stone rejected by the builders has become the cornerstone” (Psalm 118:22). This image is found also in the Acts reading when Peter proclaims that “Jesus Christ ... whom God raised from the dead ... is the stone rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone” (Acts 4:8-12). Peter emphasizes that God’s saving and healing power comes through the name of Jesus Christ, a name like no other name under heaven. Listening to the psalm, we hear its imagery echoing with the implication of the messianic power of Jesus Christ. In recognizing the saving power of God, we must give thanks and praise.

Gratitude and a continual attitude of worship are at the heart of Easter faith.

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APRIL 2015 | 11
The Dignity of Muslims

Vatican II and Islam

By BIAGIO MAZZA

Before Sept. 11, 2001, many of us in the United States knew little or nothing about Islam and saw no reason to be bothered to learn. The incidents of that day, as well as many global events in the years since, have alerted the United States and the world to the impact of Islam. In the wake of these horrendous events, the world has changed forever, forcing all of us to ask a variety of questions about Islam: what it is, what it stands for, and how Muslims and non-Muslims can grow in mutual respect and understanding.

Because of longstanding tensions and quarrels between the practitioners of Islam and Christianity, many distorted notions of both religions have arisen and continue to be disseminated. In the 1960s, the participants at the Second Vatican Council were very much aware of these tensions and distortions and addressed the relationship between Christians and Muslims in two separate documents: Lumen Gentium, the “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,” and Nostra Aetate, the “Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions.”

Lumen Gentium was promulgated on Nov. 21, 1964. Jumping off the theological principle that God desires all people to be saved, it states:

“The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, first among whom are the Muslims ...”

— Lumen Gentium #16

On Oct. 28, 1965, Nostra Aetate was promulgated. It contains a rather significant paragraph concerning Muslims and the church’s relationship to them. The document first addressed the church’s relation to non-Christian religions by stating:

“The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. It has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from its own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men and women. ... Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, together with their social life and culture” (Nostra Aetate #2).

Nostra Aetate then goes on to address various non-Christian faith traditions such as Hinduism and Buddhism, with a large section devoted to the church’s relationship with Jews and Judaism. Nostra Aetate #3 addresses the church’s relationship with Muslims in a very pastorally significant and truly insightful understanding of Islam and its beliefs and practices. It is worthwhile quoting it in full because it summarizes rather beautifully the way we should still approach relationship and conversation with Muslims:

“The church has also a high regard for Muslims. They worship God who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to humanity. They endeavor to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God, just as Abraham submitted himself to God’s plan, to whose faith Muslims eagerly link their own. Although not acknowledging him as God, they venerate Jesus as a prophet; his virgin mother they also honor; and even at times devoutly invoke. Further, they await the day of judgment and the reward of God following the resurrection of the dead. For this reason, they highly esteem an upright life and worship God, especially by way of prayer, almsgiving and fasting” (Nostra Aetate #3).

Having attuned themselves to Muslims by focusing on the main pillars of Islam, and their link to belief in the same God, the council participants were very much aware of the tensions and conflicts that existed in the past, and attempted to address those concerns:

“Over the centuries many quarrels and dissensions have arisen between Christians and Muslims. The sacred council now pleads with all to forget the past, and urges that a sincere effort be made to achieve mutual understanding; for the benefit of all let them together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values” (Nostra Aetate #3).

Essential to this paragraph is the acknowledgment that we have much in common with Islam, both in belief and in practice, regarding the promotion of peace, social justice and moral values. Despite extremists on both sides, most Muslims, like most Christians, desire to express their belief in and love of God by their inclusive love of all God’s people and all God’s creation. Vatican II’s challenge to us today is still as powerful and prophetic as it was 50 years ago.

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Turn It Upside Down

With Easter, God teaches us a new way to see

By ERIN RYAN

We have art classes for adults at the gallery where I work. Joni, my boss, teaches four oils classes a week, and they’re nearly always full.

Her classes are for people at any level of experience. Some students have been painting with Joni every week for more than three years. We also constantly welcome brand-new students, adults who have never before picked up a brush.

Joni gives demonstrations to the whole class, and then walks around helping them with their individual compositions, answering their requests for advice about what to do next. I hear things like: “Well, yellow and purple are complimentary colors, remember, so you want to add a little more purple to this sun, to make it darker.” “This part is a bit overworked, but oils are forgiving.”

Sometimes, students might stop, thinking: Hey, this looks good enough. If I do anymore, I might ruin it. They ask for the teacher’s critique, and she gently suggests, “Maybe the tree could use a couple more branches; you have too much space over here. The composition’s out of balance.”

And sometimes, paintings don’t turn out at all like the ideal that the students envisioned, and they despair: Should I throw it away? Should I just start over?

At times like these I hear Joni say, “Turn your painting upside down.”

Turning the painting upside down is an artist’s trick that helps you to focus on what your painting is, not what you meant it to be. It gets you beyond the idea stuck in your mind that you were bent on creating and leads you to see what’s actually there. Then, you can adjust your approach to the composition.

Speculative fiction author Ursula K. LeGuin (one of my favorite writers) has a story called “The Eye Altering,” in her 1982 collection The Compass Rose, that gets at this same idea. The story is about a group of settlers from Earth who live on a planet they call New Zion. The first generation is now in middle or old age, and their kids, the first children to be born on New Zion, are in their 20s.

Life on New Zion isn’t terrible, but the original settlers think it’s an ugly place. There’s a “warty-orange sun” and “repulsive blackish-purple native weeds.” After a long day’s work, the older folks relax in a communal living room that is lit with artificial Earthlike sunlight, with photos and pictures of the green landscapes they left behind.

One of the younger settlers, a sickly 24-year-old named Genya, paints scenes and landscapes of New Zion — his world. He is quite proud of one particular painting he has done in the hospital, a view of the fields outside his window. To make him feel better, an elder takes it and puts it up in the living room.

Soon the denizens of the living room are wondering where this new picture suddenly came from after 25 years. It has to be France, one says. No, Italy, says another. Either way, it is a scene of “pure, subtle, green and green-gold fields,” a “complex and happy painting, a celebration of spring, an act of praise.”

It’s Genya’s painting of New Zion. Under the Earthlike light, they can finally see what he sees, what the new settlers see: their real world; not a memory of a past ideal.

Before Lent began, we read the Creation story from Genesis. This month we encounter it again at the Easter Vigil. “In the beginning,” we hear; “the earth was a formless wasteland, and darkness covered the abyss.” “Then God said, ‘Let there be light,’” and there was light. God saw how good the light was.”

Imagine if God had stopped there, after the first day. “That light. I like it. I don’t think I’m going to do anymore; it’s fine the way it is.” Or God could have stopped after “brining forth vegetation” on the third day, or after the flying creatures or the creeping ones. But God kept on creating.

Once humans entered the picture, the composition changed. And God kept on creating and creating. And when that creation seemed to need a new approach, when people were stuck in their ways, God turned creation upside down.

It happened at Easter, when God died, when Jesus turned death on its head. It happened when Jesus appeared in a locked room, when he sent out his disciples to create a church, a new world, a new way of seeing. It continues to happen as we assemble to celebrate the feasts of Easter and beyond, to all the Sundays and feasts of the year.

Every time we gather for liturgy, we hear a different combination of stories and music and preaching. Every time we gather, we are different people. Each liturgy is a brushstroke of the kingdom.

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Commissioned to Preach

*In memory of Fr. Norman Rotert*

By PEG EKERDT

Frustrated with his diminishing parish census and the blight around him, Norman attended a seminar at Notre Dame that encouraged community action as a method to respond to urban problems. When he returned to Kansas City, he bought and then developed a burned-out neighborhood home.

Fr. Norman Rotert, friend, former pastor and former diocesan Vicar General for Kansas City-St. Joseph, Mo., died last December. As I read the Easter scriptures to prepare for writing this column, I knew that they were a gift to me. To be sure, I found consolation in their promise of new life. But more, I read a resounding affirmation of the work of God’s servant Norman in the Easter Sunday first reading from the Acts of the Apostles: “Jesus of Nazareth … went about doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil.” Peter says, “We are witnesses of all that he did. … He commissioned us to preach to the people” (Acts 10:38-39, 42).

If anyone showed us how to live faithfully and to preach to the people, it was Norman Rotert.

Norman was born in 1931 in Montrose, Mo., where, among that rural town’s 500 citizens, he always said that he learned the importance of belonging to community. He initially envisioned a career in politics. But in time, Norman embraced a different call and was ordained a priest in 1957 for the Kansas City-St. Joseph diocese.

Norman’s early urban parish assignments had a formative impact on his life as he watched neighborhoods endure white flight, blockbusting tactics and redlining practices. What he had learned in parish ministry was magnified when, in 1965, he traveled with other Kansas City religious leaders to march for civil rights in Selma, Ala. On the day the group arrived in Selma, Dr. King’s associate C.T. Vivian addressed them with these words: “This afternoon we are going out in the street and we are going to tell the people of Alabama as lovingly as we possibly can that what they’re doing is wrong … we are going to ask God to fill our hearts with love for our enemies and to give us strength to live that love … if you can’t allow them to beat or stomp on you … then don’t go out there.” Norman often said he was forced that day to make a decision as to what he was willing to die for: “Jesus of Nazareth went about doing good and healing all those oppressed.”

In 1968, Norman was assigned to St. Therese Little Flower Parish in an area he later called the nerve center of an urban revolution. By the 1970s, the parish was in the middle of an urban wasteland of 300 abandoned houses. Frustrated with his diminishing parish census and the blight around him, Norman attended a seminar at Notre Dame that encouraged community action as a method to respond to urban problems. When he returned to Kansas City, he bought and then developed a burned-out neighborhood home. When the appraisal of the new home proved unacceptable, he went to real estate school, earned his own broker’s license and then sold the home.

That was the start of a community development corporation that still develops affordable housing in Kansas City. And while most would think that accomplishment a sufficient lifetime legacy, Norman did not. He realized that housing had improved, but communities remained fractured. So he began the work of community organizing with a passion that energized others to use the methods of such organizing to talk and listen to individuals, to identify neighborhood concerns and to establish priorities collaboratively that would effect change.

Norman Rotert’s work had an impact on an entire city. That work was rooted in the Gospel, and no one should underestimate how his powerful preaching affected those who gathered weekly to be fed by his homilies that engaged the entire assembly and challenged hearts and minds.

We have heard many times that “they don’t make them like Norman anymore.” That may be true, but Norman’s priesthood was inspired by Vatican II’s emphasis on the priesthood of all the baptized and its proclamation that the “joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men [and women] of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ” (*Gaudium et Spes* #1).

Those baptized followers would be us: you and me. Whether or not they “make priests like Norman anymore,” we are charged to preach to the people, too, by the witness of our lives.

So we enter the Easter season with a preacher’s words sending us forth:

I’m sure the disciples felt like it was an overwhelming task to “Go into the whole world.” … The work was not completed in their lifetime, but it was begun. We may not accomplish the creation of a world filled with love, unity and peace in our lifetime, but we must attempt it” (Norman Rotert, 2004 homily).

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Walking with the Marginalized

Our salvation is tied to the realities of others

By COLLEEN DUNNE

When I served as a college campus minister, a significant part of my job was to plan and accompany students on service immersion trips during school breaks. These trips took us to places from Native American reservations in northwest and southeast Montana; to inner-city settings in East Los Angeles, Cincinnati and Kansas City; to the mountains of Guatemala. On these trips, we learned about poverty, homelessness, hunger, immigration and education, among many other issues of human dignity. Prior to participating in a trip, interested students went through an application process to be selected, worked as a group to raise money, and learned about Catholic Social Teaching and the circumstances of the marginalized populations they would be encountering.

Often, students who signed up for the trips imagined themselves building houses, cleaning, painting or preparing meals — work that would make lives visibly and instantly better for those they served. Their applications were full of ideas about what they, as college-educated middle-to-upper-class Americans, could do to make the world a better place. In spite of the aspirations of the students, to say these trips were service-oriented was always a stretch because in five days very little sustainable service could actually be done.

As the process of preparing for the trip proceeded, more emphasis was always placed on the “immersion” element of the trips and the ability to build relationships with those we visited. In reality, students were more likely to be asked to read a book or play at recess with a fourth grader than to paint a school; to sit and eat breakfast with a homeless man than to prepare the meal; or to attend Mass in the mountains of Guatemala with indigenous farmers rather than work in their fields. As awareness set in for the students that the trip was going to be more about “being with” than “doing for” others, real conversations began to happen about concerns and fears around encountering the marginalized and understanding their lives. Students became nervous that they might not be able to relate to the people they were about to meet or the struggles they faced.

Lila Watson, an Indigenous Australian activist, once said, “If you have come here to help me, you are wasting our time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”

―Lila Watson, Indigenous Australian activist

In the midst of long days and endless needs, their jobs are demanding. Their stories tell of entering into communities where suffering is real and needs are many. They have learned in these places that neither results nor solutions come easily and that there is no magic formula for making people’s lives better. Yet they have learned the value of being with others, and that the foundation of any endeavor of service begins with creating relationships to serve with others rather than for others. Their work is courageous, and as I listened to them reflect, I can see how it is beginning to shape the choices they will make to continue to walk with the marginalized as they move forward in their lives.

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Ships Passing in the Night?
It need not be so, if only we respond to the grace being offered

By JOHN DAVIS

This reflection came to Celebration from Alabama, where resistance to immigration had made national news.

I’ve heard it described as “ships passing in the night.” What do you imagine when you hear that expression? Do you imagine two giant liners that move silently past one another on a foggy night, going in opposite directions?

Think rather of one boat, yours. It is well-made. You have a fine, experienced captain, the latest GPS, and your craft is well-trimmed for speed, or leisure cruising. You’ve plenty of the finest foods on board. In fact, you’ve got extras, such as wine, spirits and exotic fruits.

Your boat is running parallel with another, but that craft is barely afloat. It is without a captain, much less equipment. You can’t imagine what caused those on board to have set sail to begin with. They seem doomed, and you can’t decide what to do. You’re going the same way, but you still aren’t sure how to act.

I’m describing the fate of many of our immigrant Catholic brothers and sisters here in America. A Catholic deacon observed, “We need them. We aren’t reaching out for Spanish-speaking deacons from among the Hispanics themselves.”

To begin with, there are growing numbers of immigrants among us. The challenge is that many of them are young and transient. They live in archipelagos of trailer courts, in apartment complexes or in random dwellings in the poorest areas. They aren’t where we can find them, because they aren’t always easy to find.

Yet they are Catholics without a priest or deacon. To be honest, they don’t have a church, either. The only church they have is yours, and you don’t know they are there.

I was called one night by a friend who asked me to help translate for a Latino baptism ceremony. “What?” I answered, incredulous. “I haven’t spoken Spanish for 25 years! How can I possibly help?” God, however, has a sense of humor. As it was, the ceremony went well. In fact, so well that I was invited to come to a wonderful family feast afterward.

So what can we do, we who are in the fortunate boat? Consider this historical precedent with startling implications for us now. In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, Europe was a devastated, starving shambles. Some 14 million Germans, almost half of them Catholic, lived in squalor, crammed into immense concrete blockhouses built to protect against falling bombs. The war had obliterated their homes, and they were left to survive in these fetid places of freezing concrete. Millions more were driven from their homes and left to wander friendless and abandoned.

A Belgian Catholic priest observed that these suffering, hopeless people were ripe for Communist propaganda offering them promises of a better life, since they had been “forgotten by their church.” Fr. Werenfried van Straaten wrote an essay titled “Peace on Earth? No Room at the Inn.” It appealed for humanitarian aid for these people displaced by the war. He spoke the words of Christ to challenge those who saw them only as former enemies, not as brothers and sisters. They desperately needed material help, but they also needed to know that God had not forgotten them.

Fr. van Straaten organized deliveries of food and essentials. He mobilized youth groups to offer practical help where they could. And, even more, he organized a convoy of abandoned military vehicles in which he placed mobile altars. These trucks and vans traveled throughout Europe to the displaced persons’ camps, to the former bomb shelters, to the concrete blockhouses packed with parents and children, so Mass could be offered to reassure them that God was still with them.

Can’t we do this today? We can attract, train and ordain Spanish-speaking deacons. We can make it important to learn Spanish in our seminaries and for all our clergy. and lay ministers. We can take the Mass and the sacraments to those in migrant camps, trailer courts, neighborhoods and rural homesteads.

The opportunity is there. We only have to use our imagination. We have to see that their boat is really ours, and that we have brothers and sisters who are suffering. If we ignore them and lose them for the church, everyone will be the poorer for that failure.

John Davis is a member of St. John’s Catholic Church in Athens, Ala. He has served in various volunteer ministries in several parishes.
Mystagogical Music

Singing the Easter mysteries

By J. MICHAEL McMAHON

After the long 40-day period of Lenten preparation and the powerful celebrations of Holy Week and the Easter Triduum, the liturgies of Easter Sunday can feel like the end of a long road. Yet Easter Sunday actually marks the launch of yet another intense period. During the 50-day Easter season, penance and preparation give way to a time of celebration and reflection, or mystagogy.

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) directs that the Easter season should be a time of mystagogy not only for the newly initiated but also for the entire community. As all the faithful were called during Lent to accompany the elect in their immediate preparation for baptism and to renew their own baptismal covenant, so during the Easter season they rejoice with the neophytes and join them in a time of mystagogy, of “deepening their grasp of the paschal mystery and making it part of their lives” (RCIA #244).

Mystagogy is not a classroom activity but is carried out primarily in liturgical celebration. It draws on a joyful experience of celebrating the Eucharist, reflecting on the scriptures, deepening the bonds that draw the neophytes and faithful together, and engaging in works of charity, showing forth the love of Christ into which all have been baptized (see RCIA #245-246).

The primary place for mystagogy is at Sunday celebrations of the Eucharist during the Easter season. “Since the distinctive spirit and power of the period of postbaptismal catechesis or mystagogy derive from the new, personal experience of the sacraments and of the community, its main setting is the so-called Masses for neophytes, that is, the Sunday Masses of the Easter season” (RCIA #247).

Given the importance of mystagogy at Easter time, music ministers have an important role to play in preparing, leading, singing and playing mystagogical music that celebrates the Easter mysteries with joy.

Given the importance of mystagogy at Easter time, music ministers have an important role to play in preparing, leading, singing and playing mystagogical music that celebrates the Easter mysteries with joy. The rejoicing of the community on Easter Sunday may have a triumphant sound, as in “Jesus Christ Is Risen Today,” while the joy of some later Sundays may sound more tender and reflective, as in “Unless a Grain of Wheat.”

It is also important to pay attention to the special ritual aspects of the Easter season when preparing music that is truly mystagogical. Because the entire season has a strongly baptismal character, take care to choose an appropriate song relating to baptism for the sprinkling of the faithful during the renewal of baptismal promises on Easter Sunday and during the optional rite of sprinkling during the entrance rite on the other Sundays.

Preparing mystagogical music requires attention to the movement of the season and an ear shaped by the word proclaimed on these Sundays. The Easter season celebrates the glory and abiding presence of the risen Christ not only from the perspective of the empty tomb (Easter Sunday), but in many other ways. To name just a few: appearances to the disciples (Second and Third Sundays); the breaking of bread (Third Sunday); the Good Shepherd (Fourth Sunday); the love of believers for one another (Sixth Sunday); the glorification of Christ (Ascension Day); the mission of the community to give witness (Ascension Day and the readings from Acts); the sending of the Spirit (Pentecost).

For the entire 50-day period, it may be helpful to evaluate each musical selection by asking how well it fosters deeper reflection on the celebration of Christ’s Paschal Mystery as we hear it proclaimed in the scriptures of the Sundays of Easter and as we celebrate it around the table of the Lord. May we carry those songs in our hearts as we go forth to love and serve.

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**April 2015**

**EASTER SUNDAY**

April 5, 2015

**Psalm of the Day:** Ps (117) 118
Alleluia/Alleluia (Reza) JS2 94
Surrexit Christus (Berthier) W4 525/GC2 455/G3 529/RS 577
This Is the Day PSL B-72/SS 442
This Is the Day (Fisher) JS2 444/J3 421
This Is the Day (Guimont) CBW 90/GC2 987/G3 1065
This Is the Day (Haugen) W4 92/GC2 65/G3 81/RS 158
This Is the Day (Homerding) PMB 169, 617/WC 469/R-WS 404
This Is the Day (Hunstiger) SS 597
This Is the Day (Kreutz) PCS 15, 20
This Is the Day (Proulx) SS 671
This Is the Day (Peloquin) SI 63
This Is the Day (Reza) JS2 94
This Is the Day (Rubalcava) JS2 444/G3 541
This Is the Day (Ryzewicz) PMB 268/J3 397/CBW 88
This Is the Day (Schiavone) JS2 922
This Is the Day (Soper) JS3 99/MI-BB 815
This Is the Day (Scherer) PMB 268/JS2 422/J3 397/CBW 385/WC 598/R-WS 514/BB 178/SS 836
This Is the Day (Soper) JS3 99/MI-BB 816
Christians Sing Your Praises (Paraphrase) GC2 817
Christ the Lord Is Risen Again JS2 442/JS3 418/WC 617/BB 175
Christ Is Risen LMGM2 316/CBW 375/PMB 271/WC 887/R-WS 662
Christ Is Risen! Shout Hosanna! W4 498/GC2 449/G3 521/PMB 263/WC 610/R-WS 523/SS 830
Christ Is Risen Again (E) PSL B-71/SS 238
Christ Is Risen Again (E) PSL B-71/SS 239
Christ Is Risen Again JS2 442/JS3 420/WC 617/BB 175
Come, Ye Faithful, Raise the Strain W4 437/JS3 415/WC 607/R-WS 533/BB 173
Alleluia, Alleluia! Let the Holy Anthem Rise (G) GC2 440/LMGM2 318/JS2 434/JS3 411/PMB 273/WC 613/R-WS 525/SS 842/BB 174
*Alleluia! Christ Is Risen (E) IH 22
Alleluia, Christ Is Risen (1, 2, G) GC2 439/G3 518
Alleluia, No. 1 GC2 462/G3 524/RS 581/CBW 383/PMB 353/JS2 439/JS3 413/WC 760/R-WS 628/MM 578
At the Lamb’s High Feast We Sing (2, C) W4 512/GC2 463/G3 536/RS 578/LMGM2 316/CBW 375/PMB 271/J3 424/J3 407/WC 593/R-WS 517/SS 845/BB 172
Baptized in Living Waters (1) PMB 386/WC 787/R-WS 662
Be Not Afraid – Taizé (G) W4 522
Bread of Life from Heaven/Pan de Vida Eterna (2, G) W4 948/GC2 803/G3 943/SS 1063
Bread of Life/Agua de Vida – Cortez JS2 543/JS3 256/MI-BB 939
Bread of Life from Heaven/Pan de Vida Eterna (2, G) W4 948/GC2 803/G3 943/SS 1063

**RESOURCES**

The Strife Is O'er (W4 511) GC2 459/G3 525/RS 587/LMGM2 308/CBW 395/PMB 257/J2 431/J3 408/WC 589/R-WS 528/MI-BB 571/SS 828
The Tomb Is Empty (G) GC2 464/SS 834
This Is the Day (Ref based on today's psalm refrain, but verses are not from Ps 118) J5 211, 588/CBW 592/PMB 269/LMGM2 305/WC 611/R-WS 657/SS 831
This Joyful Eastertide W4 502/RS 598/J3 305/J3 414/CBW 397/BB 185
Three Days J3 423/J3 406/BB 163
We Know That Christ Is Raised (2) RS 906/CBW 398/WC 615/SS 832

2ND SUNDAY OF EASTER

April 12, 2015
Psalm of the Day: Ps 118
Alleluia PSL B-75/SS 211
Give Thanks to the Lord, Alleluia PSL B-129/SS 263
Give Thanks to the Lord (Alstott) J3 96/J3 903/BB p. 153
Give Thanks to the Lord (Boschetti/Fowler) CBW 91
Give Thanks to the Lord (Guimont) GC2 988/G3 1066
Give Thanks to the Lord (Hopson) PMB 618
Give Thanks to the Lord (Schiavone) PMB 923/J3 100
Give Thanks to the Lord (Smith) MI-BB 816
Give Thanks to the Lord (Waddell) W4 94, 1081/RS 159
Suggested Common Psalm: Ps 118
See suggestions for Easter Sunday.
Songs for the Liturgy
See also suggestions for Easter Sunday, many of which are appropriate on any Sunday of the Easter season.
A Living Hope (2) CBW 613/PMB 284
*As Newborn Infants (E) IH 23
At the Lamb's High Feast (2) W4 512/GC2 463/G3 536/RS 578/LMGM2 316/CBW 375/J2 424/J3 407/WC 593/R-WS 517/BB 172/SS 845
Awake, O Sleeper, Rise from Death (G) W4 915/RS 792/WC 827/R-WS 693
Baptized in Living Waters (2, G) PMB 386/WC 787/R-WS 662
Bread of Life from Heaven/Pan de Vida Eterna (G) W4 948/GC2 803/G3 943/SS 1063
Christ Has Risen (G) W4 505/GC2 465/G3 530
Come and Eat This Bread (2) SS 1091
Come and Eat This Living Bread (2) GC2 820/G3 942
Do Not Be Afraid (G) J5 731*
*Draw Us in the Spirit's Tether (1) W4 937/RS 917/J5 797
Eye Has Not Seen (G) W4 713/GC2 616/G3 728/RS 758/CBW 482/WC 881/R-WS 736/MI-BB 463/SS 940
Father, We Thank Thee (1) W4 631/CBW 528/RS 705/GC2 547/G3 632/PMB 316/WC 656/R-WS 560/SS 915
Glory and Praise to Our God (G) J5 596/J3 574/RS 696/W4 597/GC2 537/G3 606/WC 936/R-WS 783/MI-BB 547
Healer of Our Every Ill (G) W4 965/RS 958/GC2 854/G3 960/WC 713/R-WS 616
If You Believe and I Believe (G) W4 803/RS 825/GC2 708/RS 818/J3 839
In the Breaking of the Bread/Cuando el Pan del Señor (1) J5 808/J3 779/PMB 303/RS 932/W4 944/GC2 843/GC3 918/WC 663/R-WS 566/MI-BB 336
Is Your All on the Altar (G) LMGM2 660
Jesus Christ, by Faith Revealed (G) PMB 369/WC 759/R-WS 640
Joyful, Joyful, We Adore You (G) W4 611/RS 669/GC2 520/G3 614/LMGM2 435/CBW 511/J3 617/J3 575/PMB 497/WC 945/R-WS 780/MI-BB 555/SS 901
May We Be One (1, 2) GC2 322/G3 394/RS 477
*O Love of God Incarnate, v 3 (G) J5 420
*O Sons and Daughters (G) W4 507/LMGM2 312/RS 579/GC2 446/G3 532/PMB 274/J3 420/J3 405/CBW 404/WC 608/R-WS 515/BB 176/SS 823
*Our God Reigns, v 5 (G) WC 942/R-WS 790
*Peace (G) PMB 462/J5 741/J3 700/WC 904/R-WS 751/MI-BB 535
Peace for Our Times (G) PMB 455/WC 902/R-WS 750
Peace with the Father (G) W4 820
*Praise the Lord, My Soul (2) RS 688
Praise the Spirit in Creation (1, G) W4 542/RS 609
Lord, Let Your Face (Haugen) RS 30
Lord, Let Your Face (Huntingst) SS 494
Lord, Let Your Face (Joncas) PMB 620
Lord, Let Your Face (Krisman) W4 1083
Lord, Let Your Face (LeBlanc/Gelineau) RS 29
Lord, Let Your Face (Schiafone) JS2 925
Shine Your Face on Us PSL B-78/SS 407
Suggested Common Psalm: Ps 118
This Is the Day the Lord Has Made Songs for the Liturgy
*All People of the Earth, Rejoice (E) IH 24
Alleluia! Jesus Is Risen! (G) W4 503
Alleluia! Sing to Jesus (G) W4 953/GC2 826/G3 949/RS 914/LMGM2 752/PMB 352/CBW 426/JS2 477/JS3 458/WC 746/R-WS 632/MI-BB 742/SS 1066
At the Lamb’s High Feast We Sing (1, G) W4 512/RS 578/GC2 463/G3 536/LMGM2 316/CBW 375/PMB 271/JS2 424/JS3 407/WC 593/R-WS 517/BB 172/SS 845
Baptized in Living Waters (1, G) PMB 386/WC 787/R-WS 662
Be Light for Our Eyes (G) GC2 511/CBW 305
Behold the Lamb -- Willett (G) JS2 809/JS3 785/GC2 824/G3 939/MI-BB 337
Bread of Life (G) JS2 819/JS3 788, 799, 805/MI-BB 324, 357, 368, 371
Bread of Life from Heaven/Pan de Vida Eterna (G) W4 948/GC2 803/G3 943/SS 1063
Bread That Was Sown (G) MI-BB 333
Christ Has Risen (G) W4 505/GC2 465/G3 530
Christ Is Risen (G) WC 593/CBW 803/JS2 791/JS3 791/PMB 300/CBW 603/WC 666/R-WS 581/MI-BB 328/SS 1086
Give Thanks and Remember (1, G) PMB 315/WC 682/R-WS 590
Go Make of All Disciples (G) W4 792/RS 798/GC2 666/G3 769/LMGM2 646/PMB 479/JS2 828/JS3 430/WC 927/R-WS 772/BB 189
Go to the World! (G) W4 532/RS 608/GC2 469/G3 546/LMGM2 321/CBW 508/WC 917/R-WS 768/SS 851
God, Our God of Distant Ages (G) PMB 346/WC 736/R-WS 626
God’s Blessing Sends Us Forth (G) PMB 473/WC 921/R-WS 773
Hail Thee, Festival Day (1, G) W4 524/RS 588/CBW 386/JS2 450/J3 428/WC 605
I Am the Vine (G) W4 823/PMB 436/JS2 355/WC 868/R-WS 694
I Come with Joy (G) W4 926/GC2 799/G3 919/RS 854/LMGM2 754/CBW 424/PMB 320/WC 913/R-WS 597/SS 1056
In the Breaking of the Bread/Cuando Partimos el Pan del Señor (G) JS2 808/JS3 779/PMB 303/W4 944/RS 932/GC2 843/G3 918/WC 663/R-WS 566/MI-BB 336
Jesus Christ, Bread of Life (G) PMB 294/WC 667/R-WS 587/SS 1072
Jesus Is Here Right Now (G) LMGM2 751/R-WS 930/G3 984
Journeysong (G) JS2 759/JS3 731
*Jubilate, Alleluia (E) W4 60
*Let All the Earth (E) PSL B-77/SS 336
Let Us Break Bread Together (G) GC2 832/RS 911/PMB 313/JS2 806/JS3 800/WC 653/R-WS 565/MI-BB 338
*Lift Up Your Hearts (E) JS2 620/JS3 593/GC2 543/G3 624/RS 691/MI-BB 541
Look Beyond (G) GC2 837/MI-BB 339
May We Be One (1, G) RS 477/GC2 322/G3 394
Now Let Us from This Table Rise (G) CBW 521/PMB 472/WC 963
Now We Remain (1) W4 764/RS 813/GC2 696/G3 785/WC 678/R-WS 582/MI-BB 514/SS 983
*On the Journey to Emmaus (G) RS 816/GC2 445/G3 538
Our God Reigns (1) WC 942/R-WS 790
Peace (G) PMB 462/JS2 741/JS3 700/WC 904/R-WS 751/MI-BB 535
Prepare a Room for Me (G) W4 827/GC2 428/G3 504/SS 1077
Priestly People (1, G) PMB 383/WC 786/R-WS 659

PREPARATION: MUSIC

Prayer of Peace (G) W4 821/GC2 720/SS 993
Pues Si Vivimos/If We Are Living (2) W4 754/GC2 650/G3 756/RS 727/PMB 408/WC 835/R-WS 701/SS 966
*Put Your Hand Here, Thomas (G, C) PSL B-76/SS 390
Sent Forth by God’s Blessing (G) PMB 474, 475/CBW 533/JS2 768/JS3 740/WC 925, 926/R-WS 767, 774/MI-BB 385
Shalom, My Friends (G) PMB 456/WC 899/R-WS 754
Shout for Joy, Loud and Long, v 4 (G) W4 605
*Show Me Your Hands, Your Feet, Your Side (G, C) W4 679
Singing a New Church (E, 1) W4 727/GC2 644/G3 743/JS3 830/MI-BB 416
Singing to the Mountains (Ps) JS2 601/JS3 580/GC2 452/G3 519/RS 590/MI-BB 553
*Take and Eat, vss 2, 6 (G) W4 940/RS 910/GC2 812/G3 950/LMGM2 765/CBW 611/WC 686/R-WS 584/MI-BB 366/SS 1087
*That Easter Day with Joy Was Bright (G) W4 514/RS 599/GC2 461/G3 542/CBW 392/SS 825
The Spirit of God (G) PMB 399/WC 832/R-WS 687
*They Disbelieved for Joy (G) W4 513
Thine Be the Glory, v 3 (G) WC 596/R-WS 518
This Is the Day (Ps) LMGM2 305/CBW 592/PMB 269/WC 611/R-WS 657/SS 831
We Have Been Told (2) W4 763/GC2 694/G3 784/RS 815/WC 851/R-WS 718/MI-BB 505/SS 987
We Know That Christ Is Raised (G) RS 906/CBW 398/WC 615/SS 832
We Remember (1, G) W4 938/GC2 578/G3 681/RS 724/WC 691/R-WS 561/MI-BB 502/SS 922
*We Walk by Faith (G, C) W4 674/RS 723/GC2 583/G3 680/LMGM2 550/CBW 495/JS2 700/JS3 669/PMB 416/WC 847/R-WS 705/MI-BB 494/SS 924
We’ve Come This Far by Faith (G) LMGM2 548
*Without Seeing You (G) GC2 842/G3 922
World Peace Prayer (G) GC2 718/G3 827

3RD SUNDAY OF EASTER

April 19, 2015
Psalm of the Day: Ps 4
Lord, Let Your Face (Guimont) GC2 879/G3 1068

20 | APRIL 2015
PREPARATION: MUSIC

*Ps 66: Let All the Earth (E)
Shepherd of Souls, Refresh and Bless (G)
W4 941/GC2 818/G3 910/JS2 825/JS3 808/PMB 296/WC 665/R-WS 562/MI-BB 373/SS 1070
Sing of One Who Walks Beside Us (G)
CBW 405
Song of the Body of Christ/Canción del Cuerpo de Cristo (G) GC2 807/G3 924/R-WS 924/WC 668/R-WS 761/MI-BB 325
That Easter Day with Joy Was Bright (1, G)
W4 514/RS 599/GC2 461/G3 542/CBW 392/SS 825
*Touch Me and See (G) PSL B-79/SS 449
*Two Were Bound for Emmaus (G) JS3 417/BB 174
When We Eat This Bread (G) JS2 823/MI-BB 342
*Who Are You Who Walk in Sorrow? (G)
W4 506/PMB 401/WC 821/R-WS 676/SS 981
You Are the Voice (1) RS 659/GC2 538/G3 609/CBW 576

4TH SUNDAY OF EASTER

April 26, 2015
Psalm of the Day: Ps 118
The Stone Rejected by the Builders (Alstott) JS3 908/BB p. 158
The Stone Rejected by the Builders (Hopson) PMB 623
The Stone Rejected by the Builders (Hunstiger) SS 596
The Stone Rejected by the Builders (Schia-aveno) JS2 928
The Stone Which the Builders Rejected PSL B-81/SS 301
The Stone Which the Builders Rejected (Farrell) JS2 95/JS3 101
The Stone Which the Builders Rejected (Smith/Somerville) CBW 98
Suggested Common Psalm: Ps 118
This Is the Day the Lord Has Made Songs for the Liturgy
A Living Hope (2) CBW 613/PMB 284
Abundant Life (G) RS 636/GC2 703/G3 811
All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name (1) W4 566/GC2 490/G3 570/RS 632/LMGM2 342, 343/JS2 482/JS3 462/PMB 368/WC 744/R-WS 629/MI-BB 737/SS 875
At That First Eucharist (G) W4 954/LMGM 134/RS 922/GC2 840/G3 914/PMB 292/WC 654/R-WS 589/SS 1079
At the Name of Jesus (1) W4 561, 563/G3 569/JS2 400, 424/JS3 369, 465/CBW 427/R-WS 643/MI-BB 739, 740
Baptized in Living Waters (2) PMB 386/WC 787/R-WS 662
Baptized in Water (2) W4 919/RS 903/GC2 797/G3 903/LMGM2 746/CBW 614/JS2 542/JS3 516/PMB 286/WC 635/R-WS 552/MI-BB 657/SS 1057
Because the Lord Is My Shepherd (G) JS2 725/JS3 697/MI-BB 464
Bread of Life, Cup of Blessing (G) W4 924/G3 947
Christ Is Made the Sure Foundation (1) W4 732/RS 778/GC2 642/G3 745/JS2 780/JS3 747/PMB 384/CBW 430/WC 783/SS 964
Come to Me – Norbet (G) JS2 728/JS3 695/PMB 444/R-WS 746/MI-BB 462
Come to Us (G) GC2 740/G3 842
Easter Alleluia, v 4 (G) GC2 447/G3 537/RS 592/SS 833
Eye Has Not Seen (2) W4 713/RS 758/GC2 616/G3 728/CBW 482/WC 881/R-WS 736/MI-BB 463/SS 940
Gentle Shepherd/Jesús, Pastor Tan Dulce
(JS2 737/CBW 598
God Is Love (2) RS 781/GC2 332/G3 402/CBW 490/MI-BB 657/SS 1057
I Am the Vine (G) W4 823/JS2 355/PMB 436/WC 614/RS 694
I Know That My Redeemer Lives – Hatton
(W4 581
I Will Rise Again (G) MI-BB 446
The Lord Fills the Earth (E) MI-BB 768
The Lord Jesus Christ, v 1 (G) CBW 436
The Lord, My Shepherd, Rules My Life (G)
CBW 489
The Lord's My Shepherd (G) CBW 488
The Living God My Shepherd Is (G) W4 709/CBW 690
The Mercy of the Lord (E) IH 25
This Is My Body, v 4 (G) PMB 318/CBW 580/WC 661/R-WS 575
This Is the Day – Deiss (Ps) PMB 269/WC 611
Our God Reigns (Ps, G) WC 942/R-WS 790
Priestly People, vss. 10-11 (G) PMB 383/WC 786/R-WS 659
Ps 23, The Lord Is My Shepherd (G)
*Ps 33: The Earth Is Full (E)
Pues Sí Vivimos/If We Are Living (1, 2)
W4 754/RS 727/CBW 650/G3 756/PMB 408/WC 835/R-WS 701/SS 966
Shepherd Me, O God (2) W4 36/RS 756/GC2 23/G3 35/W4 36/RC 756/MI-BB 470/SS 633
Shepherd of My Heart (G) GC2 624/G3 723/SS 944
Shepherd of Souls (G) W4 941/GC2 818/G3 910/JS2 825/JS3 808/PMB 296/WC 665, 681/R-WS 562/MI-BB 373/SS 1070
Sing Praise to Our Creator (2) PMB 376/RS 620/WC 776/R-WS 654
Take and eat, v 3 (G) W4 940/RS 910/GC2 812/G3 950/LMGM2 765/CBW 611/WC 786/R-WS 584/MI-BB 366/SS 1087
*The Earth Is Full (E) PSL B-80/SS 418
The Living God My Shepherd Is (G) W4 709/CBW 690
*The Lord Fills the Earth (E) MI-BB 768
The Lord Jesus Christ, v 1 (G) CBW 436
The Lord, My Shepherd, Rules My Life (G)
CBW 489
The Lord's My Shepherd (G) CBW 488
*The Mercy of the Lord (E) IH 25
This Is My Body, v 4 (G) PMB 318/CBW 580/WC 661/R-WS 575
This Is the Day – Deiss (Ps) PMB 269/WC 611
*We Are Known and Not Unnumbered (G)
W4 581
We Will Rise Again (G) MI-BB 446
With a Shepherd’s Care (G) W4 710/RS 738/GC2 628/G3 725
Without Seeing You, v 4 (G) GC2 842/G3 922
You Are Mine (G) W4 704/RS 762/GC2 627/G3 721/WC 893/R-WS 743/MI-BB 460/SS 943
You, Lord, Are Both Lamb and Shepherd (1, G) W4 626/RS 699/GC2 825/G3 628/LMGM2 359

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**The Core of the Easter Vigil**

*Fr. Lawrence Mick*

The restoration of the Easter Vigil by Pope Pius XII in 1951 began a recovery that is still underway. The 1951 revisions moved the time of the Vigil from Holy Saturday morning to the evening and also revised the texts and rituals of the Vigil. The changes were slow to affect the average parishioner; however. My 1959 St. Joseph Sunday Missal does not even mention the Vigil!

Though the 1951 revision was helpful, the Easter Vigil still lacked its traditional core. Only with the reforms of Vatican II — and, in particular, the issuance of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults in 1974 — was the celebration of baptism placed back at the center of the Vigil celebration.

The interaction between catechumens and the wider assembly throughout the catechumenate has led to some increase in the numbers who gather to celebrate the Vigil. It must be admitted, however, that this celebration is a long way from regaining its status as the primary liturgical celebration of the year: Many Catholics do not yet even recognize it as “counting” for Easter, and among those who do, relatively few have incorporated its celebration into their annual pattern. We still suffer from an aversion to any liturgy that exceeds an hour in length.

Parishes who have elect to be initiated each year have learned that attendance at the Vigil increases to the degree that the whole parish is involved in the formation of the catechumens. A different challenge faces some parishes, though, especially small communities who may not have elect each year: How do you celebrate the Vigil well without anyone to initiate into the Easter sacraments?

If this is happening often, parishes might need to examine their efforts at evangelization to see why they are not attracting new members to Christ. But even with the best of intentions, there may be some years without catechumens to be initiated at the Vigil.

There is no real guidance for this in the missal. It simply indicates what to skip if there are no baptisms. Creative efforts might be based on recognizing that no parish is an island. Planners could contact neighboring parishes to obtain names of those who will be initiated in those communities, and read off those names at the point of the Vigil when baptism is normally celebrated. If you start planning early in the year, that might allow time to post pictures of these people at the entrances during Lent; invite people to pray for them as they prepare for the sacraments. If your space allows, you might even project those pictures onto a screen or wall as their names are read at the Vigil. Parishioners might also be invited to write letters to the elect, welcoming them into the Catholic community of faith.

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**Easter Sunday**

*Joan DeMerchant*

*Note: These prayers may also be used at the Easter Vigil.*

**INTRODUCTION**

My dear friends, today we celebrate the heart of our Christian faith. The readings tell of the first witnesses of the resurrection. Here is the challenge for us: How will this story move us? It changed the lives of so many others. How does it change ours?

**PENITENTIAL ACT**

Lord Jesus, you fulfilled the promise made to your disciples: Lord, have mercy.

Christ Jesus, you show us what awaits those who are faithful to you: Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you call us to testify to your risen life: Lord, have mercy.

**SCRIPTURE READINGS**

*Act 10:34a, 37-43* Peter preaches Christ’s death and resurrection to the gentiles.

*Psalm 118* This is the day the Lord has made.

*Col 3:1-4* Paul teaches the consequences of following Christ.

*John 20:1-9* The empty tomb is discovered.

**PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL**

Presider My friends, on this Feast of Feasts, we pray to have the excitement of our ancestors in faith. And we remember all those whose lives can be immeasurably better because Jesus is risen!

Minister For renewed faith in the Resurrection and in life … we pray.

❖ For all Christians whose mission is to bear witness to the risen Christ … we pray.

❖ For openness to what God has yet to show us … we pray.

❖ For those who live in circumstances that deny life: those deep in violence, poverty or any kind of inhumanity … we pray.

❖ For the grace to trust others as reliable witnesses, especially those who do not look or sound like us … we pray.

❖ For those dedicated to preserving life … we pray.

❖ For the newly baptized and those newly received into the church … we pray.

❖ For those who are sick or in need of any kind; for those who have died … (names); and for all who need the good news of the Resurrection … we pray.

Presider Triumphant God, who brings victory over death, we come to you with our needs, confident of your care for us. Help us to live as the earliest witnesses to the Resurrection, proclaiming life in all that we say and do. We ask this in the name of the risen Christ. Amen.
This Sunday carries a multitude of names and nicknames. It is primarily the Second Sunday of Easter. It is also the Octave Day of Easter, concluding eight days of high celebration. In the past it has been called Whit Sunday, recalling the time when the newly baptized wore their white garments for the final time, concluding eight days of mystagogical. More recently it was given the title of Divine Mercy Sunday, reflecting a personal devotion of Pope John Paul II.

Pope Francis has often spoken about God’s mercy; he sees it as the core of the Gospel message. And our reconciliation with God has come through the death and resurrection of Christ, so there is very good reason to give thanks for God’s mercy this weekend. But it does not seem appropriate to turn this Sunday into a day for confessions. The sacrament of penance has presumably been given significant attention in the weeks leading up to the Triduum. Today is a day to continue our Easter rejoicing.

And that spirit of joy should mark all 50 days of Easter, from Easter Sunday through Pentecost. Planners should take this challenge seriously. For whatever reason, we seem to do better at maintaining Lenten repentance for 40 days than we do at living in joy for 50.

One of the clearest signs of continued rejoicing is the music used through the season. Musicians should plan these eight Sundays as a unit, figuring out which Easter songs to use each week to keep the focus on the Resurrection and its effects in our lives. As we approach the end of the season, the feasts of Ascension and Pentecost will call for additional themes, but even those feasts should be recognized as part of Easter.

Those who create the visual environment should also plan for the whole season, which may mean limiting the number of flowers on Easter Sunday, for example, so that the budget will allow replacing them with other blooms when necessary.

Those who write texts for the Masses on these Sundays should also remember the nature of the season, using verbal cues to gently remind the assembly that the Resurrection is our focus. Preachers, of course, should also do this by the mystagogical preaching that should mark the season.

Remember that the dismissal today uses the double Alleluia, just as on Easter Sunday and Pentecost. Some parishes use it on all the Sundays of Easter to help unify the season. Though the missal only prints two of the four dismissal formulas with the Alleluias appended, there seems to be no good reason why you could not use any of the four options provided in the Order of the Mass (see #144).

2nd Sunday of Easter

Joan DeMerchant

INTRODUCTION

In today’s readings we look into the life of the early church. Do we match their lively faith, their sense of urgency? We share their faith, which John calls “the victory that conquers the world.” Despite our doubts, we are in a long line of witnesses who attest to the new life offered by Jesus Christ.

PENITENTIAL ACT

Lord Jesus, you came among your disciples in their fear and doubt: Lord, have mercy.
Christ Jesus, you came to bring peace: Christ, have mercy.
Lord Jesus, you call us to believe, though we have not seen: Lord, have mercy.

PSALM 118

Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Psalm 118 Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good.
1 John 5:1-6 Faith in Christ and love are required of believers.
John 20:19-31 Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

Presider Our belief in the risen Christ compels us to love and care about those who are in need. And so, we pray for the world, for our community and for our families and friends.
Minister That all who doubt or fear may see in us witnesses of the living God ... we pray.

 That we may be open to new ways to be the church, to witness to the risen Christ ... we pray.
 For the peace that Christ bestowed: that every nation, city, community and family may experience deep and lasting peace ... we pray.
 For respect and compassion for all who seek, doubt or struggle to believe in Christ, especially those who have been hurt or scandalized by Christians ... we pray.
 For the the poor, the uneducated and unemployed; for all who live on the margins of society ... we pray.
 For the generosity to continue the ancient practice of sharing what we have with those in need ... we pray.
 That our newly baptized and our newest members may be strengthened by our steadfast belief in Christ ... we pray.

 For the sick and dying; for those who have died ... (names); for all who need our prayers ... we pray.
Presider Gracious God, though we, like Thomas, are sometimes unsure, wavering or weak, we rely on the witness of generations of believers who declare that your Son, the risen Lord, is here among us. In his name we voice our deepest needs and concerns. Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTENTION

For the new life offered by Jesus Christ.
For those who have not seen: Lord, have mercy.
For the silence and doubt: Lord, have mercy.
For the joy of the Easter season: Lord, have mercy.
For the peace that Christ bestowed: that every nation, city, community and family may experience deep and lasting peace: Lord, have mercy.
For the the poor, the uneducated and unemployed; for all who live on the margins of society: Lord, have mercy.
For the generosity to continue the ancient practice of sharing what we have with those in need: Lord, have mercy.
For the newly baptized and our newest members may be strengthened by our steadfast belief: Lord, have mercy.
For the sick and dying; for those who have died: Lord, have mercy.
For all who need our prayers: Lord, have mercy.
Sin after Baptism

Fr. Lawrence Mick

If one were to seek a day to focus on the need to repent of sin, it would be hard to find a better set of readings than the ones we have this Sunday. Our first reading from Acts ends with a clarion call: “Repent, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be wiped away.” The second reading from 1 John begins: “My children, I am writing this to you so that you may not commit sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an Advocate with the Father; Jesus Christ the righteous one.”

The Gospel story of the journey to Emmaus ends by noting that “repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.”

This may seem odd so soon after the Triduum. Remember, though, that the Sundays of Easter are days for mystagogical preaching to the newly baptized. And one of the sad realities of life after baptism is that sin can easily find a place in our lives again. The church insists that those who were baptized have died to sin and should not turn back to sinful ways. But human limitations, the church learned early on, require us to face the reality of sin after baptism.

Those who have just been initiated into the church community surely began their new lives intending to live the Gospel fully. But in the days and weeks ahead—or perhaps as soon as this Sunday—they will learn the power of sin to frustrate those good intentions.

This is a good day, then, for preaching about the need for continuing conversion and about the wondrous mercy of God, who forgives us whenever we turn back to God. Those who entered the church at the Easter Vigil through the waters of the font had all their sins forgiven, but they still need to be introduced to the sacrament of reconciliation as a means to foster the ongoing conversion to which we all are called.

Of course, it is not just the newly baptized who may need this instruction. Many of their brothers and sisters who were baptized years ago may need to relearn the importance of reconciliation for the ongoing journey of growth in faith. It is no secret that many Catholics make no use of this sacrament at all. Inviting the neophytes to embrace this tool of conversion might also prompt others in the assembly to reconsider its value in their own lives.

Planners might spend some time together discussing how the parish can renew appreciation for this sacrament throughout the year—by catechesis, communal celebrations, times for individual reconciliation, etc.

4th Sunday of Easter

Joan DeMerchant

INTRODUCTION

We reflect on the early church’s conviction that Jesus is risen and is the fulfillment of the law and the prophets. Their faith, like ours, emerged slowly. Jesus addressed their fears and questions with love and patience, giving them peace. As we struggle and grow in faith, Jesus offers us that same peace.

PENITENTIAL ACT

Lord Jesus, you are the fulfillment of God’s promises to Israel: Lord, have mercy. Christ Jesus, you are an advocate on behalf of sinners: Christ, have mercy. Lord Jesus, you are the source of peace for us: Lord, have mercy.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Psalm 4 Lord, let your face shine on us.
1 John 2:1-5a Those who believe keep Jesus’ commandments.
Luke 24:35-48 Jesus’ final appearance to his disciples

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

Presider My friends, knowing that Jesus still stands among us, we lay before him our prayers for ourselves, for others and for the world.

Minister For the church: may its faith be ever fresh and open to new understanding … we pray,
❖ For the courage to press forward in our own lifelong faith journeys … we pray,
❖ For all who help others to grow in faith: for parents and teachers, preachers and counselors, catechists and theologians, prophets and artists … we pray,
❖ For those who fear new expressions of faith understanding … we pray,
❖ For peace where there is no peace, especially where violence is propelled by religion … we pray,
❖ For those whose lives are devoted to protecting others and keeping the peace: for the military and all first responders, for war correspondents and negotiators, for diplomats and policymakers … we pray,
❖ For the commitment to protect our fragile environment, as we celebrate Earth Day this week … we pray,
❖ For all who are in need, especially the poor; for those who have died … (names) … we pray,

Presider God of our ancestors, you have given us Jesus as your great final gift, to lead us, guide us and bring us peace. We ask you to strengthen our faith and give us the courage to keep his commandments. Keep us aware of his presence among us. We pray in his name. Amen.
The Good Shepherd

Fr. Lawrence Mick

The Fourth Sunday of Easter each year brings us a Gospel passage about Jesus as the Good Shepherd. In all three years, we hear from the 10th chapter of John’s Gospel. This year’s selection stresses the shepherd’s willingness to lay down his life for the sheep.

While that surely brings to mind Christ’s sacrificial death for our salvation, the call to give one’s life is issued to everyone who serves as shepherds, which includes those who shepherd parish communities. And that means more than just the ordained pastors. All those in leadership in a parish are called to serve as good shepherds of the flock.

Planners might engage in some reflection this week on how well they shepherd the flock entrusted to their care. It is all too easy to get consumed by a love of the liturgy itself and by all the details that must be managed, so that we lose track of the very people for whom we do this. The liturgy is not an end in itself. It exists for the sake of the people who are called together by God.

Yes, those people can be difficult at times, unwilling to cooperate, resistant to change, insistent on their own desires. That’s when we find out if we are willing to lay down our lives or not. Are we willing to embrace suffering for the sake of our brothers and sisters? Are we patient with them when they do not respond as we hope? Can we accept less-than-perfect responses to our efforts?

The good shepherd also reaches out to other sheep who do not yet belong to the fold. Are we attentive to the presence and needs of people in our assemblies who do not yet belong or feel like they belong? Does the parish extend a warm welcome to visitors? Do we make it easy for visitors to participate fully in the liturgy, by making sure that everyone knows where to find the music for all the parts of the Mass?

Do we strive to make those from other cultures and languages feel a part of the liturgy? Do we make extra efforts to include children and teens in our worship, listening to their needs and interests and planning with them in mind? Are we as attentive to the homeless person who comes in from the street as we are to our friends and regular parishioners?

The first reading and the psalm today remind us that it is Christ who is the cornerstone. We shepherd the flock in his name, carrying on his mission. How well does the title of “good shepherd” fit us?

5th Sunday of Easter

Joan DeMerchant

INTRODUCTION

The early Christians had to face many challenges to their faith in Jesus from skeptics and nonbelievers. Who was this Jesus to his followers? Today we ponder two titles applied to Jesus: the stone the builders rejected, who became the cornerstone; and Jesus, the good shepherd. Who is Jesus for us? What beliefs are we willing to defend with our lives?

PENITENTIAL ACT

Lord Jesus, you are the cornerstone: Lord, have mercy.

Christ Jesus, you are the good shepherd: Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you lay down your life for us: Lord, have mercy.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Acts 4:8-12 Peter proclaims Jesus as Savior to the Sanhedrin.
Psalm 118 The stone rejected by the builders has become the cornerstone.
1 John 3:1-2 We are God’s children now.
John 10:11-18 Jesus is the Good Shepherd.

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

Presider Brothers and sisters, let us pray now for the many needs in our own lives, in our families and in the world.

Minister For the church: may it know how to shepherd others by hearing the voice of the Good Shepherd ... we pray,

♦ For those still persecuted for their faith, especially in war-torn countries across the earth ... we pray,
♦ For those who disrespect, reject or persecute members of other faith traditions ... we pray,
♦ For those willing to lay down their lives for others, especially in small, unseen ways ... we pray,
♦ For those whose lives have no foundation: the homeless; refugees; immigrants, especially the undocumented; the marginalized ... we pray,
♦ For children who lack guidance; for parents who struggle to raise their children; for all who yearn for the help of a loving shepherd ... we pray,
♦ For the newest members of the church and for all of us who are called to shepherd them ... we pray,
♦ For the sick, the dying and the grieving among us; and for those who have died ... (names) ... we pray

Presider Merciful God, we bring our deepest cares and concerns to you. We are confident in you, who have given us your Son, Jesus, as our foundation and our shepherd. Hear our prayers and give us the strength to walk each day in his footsteps. We pray in his holy name. Amen.
April Sermon Starters

It was Palm Sunday, but because of a sore throat, a little boy had to stay home from church with a sitter. When the family returned home, they were carrying palm branches. The boy asked them what they were for:
“People held them over Jesus’ head as he walked by,” his father told him.
“Just my luck,” the boy said. “The one Sunday I don’t go and he shows up.”

One Easter a priest and a taxi driver both died and went to heaven. St. Peter was at the Pearly Gates to greet them.
“Come with me,” St. Peter said to the taxi driver.
The taxi driver followed St. Peter to a mansion. It had everything you could imagine from a bowling alley to an Olympic-size pool.
“Oh my word, thank you,” said the taxi driver.
Next, St. Peter led the priest to a rough shack with a bunk bed and a little old television set.
“I think you’re a little mixed up,” said the priest.
“Shouldn’t I be the one who gets the mansion? After all I was a priest, went to church every day, and preached God’s word.”
“Yes, that’s true,” St. Peter answered. “But during your Easter sermons people slept. When the taxi driver drove, everyone prayed.”

One Easter Sunday the celebrant told his congregation, “My good people, I have here in my hands three sermons: a $100 sermon that lasts five minutes, a $50 sermon that lasts 15 minutes, and a $20 sermon that lasts a full hour: We’ll take up the collection to see which one you want.”

A little boy and his family were having Easter Sunday dinner at his grandmother’s house. When the boy received his plate, he started eating straight away. His father told him to wait until they had said grace.
“I don’t need to,” the child replied. “This is Grandma’s house, and she knows how to cook.”

A Sunday school teacher asked the children just before she dismissed them to go into church, “And why is it necessary to be quiet in church?”
A little girl replied, “Because people are sleeping.”

The pastor was preaching the children’s Easter sermon. He reached into his pocket and pulled out an egg. He asked the children, “What’s inside here?”
“I know, I know!” a little boy exclaimed. “Pantyhose!”

“The secret of a good sermon is to have a good beginning and a good ending; and to have the two as close together as possible.”
— George Burns
PREPARATION: GRAPHICS

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.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

April 5
Easter Sunday
“They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don’t know where they put him.”
— John 20:2

April 12
2nd Sunday of Easter
“Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.”
— John 20:29

April 19
3rd Sunday of Easter
“You are witnesses of these things.”
— Luke 24:48

April 26
4th Sunday of Easter
“I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own.”
— John 10:17-18
A New Creation

Christ’s resurrection rises like yeast within the whole universe

Brothers and sisters:
Do you not know that a little yeast leavens all the dough?

Clear out the old yeast, so that you may become a fresh batch of dough, inasmuch as you are unleavened.

For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us celebrate the feast, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

—1 Corinthians 5:6b-8

Alternate Second Reading for Easter Sunday, April 5, 2015

— Amelia Kunhardt, Photojournalist
Visit kunhardtphoto.com for her biography and a gallery of her work.
When asked to describe the mystery of Easter, author Carl Knudsen responded with the following story. Years ago an old municipal lamplighter, engaged in putting out the street lamps one by one, was met by a reporter who asked him if he ever grew weary of his work. After all, it was a lonely job and the night was cold and damp. “Never am I cheerless,” said the old man, “for there is always a light ahead of me to lead me on.” “But, what do you have to cheer you when you have put out the last light?” asked the news writer. “Then comes the dawn,” said the lamplighter (cited in *A Treasury of Quips, Quotes and Anecdotes*, Anthony Castle, ed., Twenty-Third Publications, Mystic, Conn.: 1998).

What if the same question were put to Jesus? One light after another did he put out: the lamp of popular acclaim, the lamp of patriotic approval, the lamp of ecclesiastical conformity—all for the sake of God’s love, which burned in his heart and showed him the way. At last even the light of his life was to flicker out on the hill called Calvary. What then? We hear his voice: “Into your hands, I commend my spirit.” And then came the dawn.

Because all did not end at Calvary, because the cross was but a passage to everlasting life, we celebrate today the Christ who lives and by whose arising a new day has dawned for all of humankind. In today’s first reading, the formerly fearful Peter proclaims the good news of Jesus’ death and resurrection, hoping to draw unto Jesus those who had not yet been willing to hear, to believe or to be transformed by faith. Peter’s words reach across the centuries and invite our renewed commitment to Jesus, the light of the world. Our belonging to Jesus precludes any hopelessness or pessimism; any hiding or wandering aimlessly in the dark. This kind of darkness has no place in the Christian heart.

Paul, in today’s second reading from his Corinthian correspondence, challenges us to clean house. Get rid of malice and wickedness so as to make room for sincerity and truth. Christ, our light, will aid us in discerning what should go and what should stay. Christ will also strengthen our resolve and inspire in us an even greater passion to believe in the Gospel and live in accord with it.

In today’s Gospel, we read the original ending of Mark, where two Marys and Salome arrive at the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. Theirs was a sad and difficult task, but their love for Jesus urged them on. Notice that they did not expect to find anything except the deceased Jesus. They had no idea there could be an alternative.

Scholars agree that the empty tomb probably prompted the conclusion that Jesus’ body had been stolen. In fact, John says as much in his narrative. Only when the young man in white interprets the empty tomb for them does the notion of a risen Jesus arise. But the experience terrified the women, and they ran off without a word to anyone.

A longer ending to Mark’s Gospel, added later by an editor/redactor, tells the rest of the story. Included in Mark 16:9-20 are a resurrection appearance, the commissioning of the disciples and an ascension scene. This longer ending, as Hugh Anderson has explained, shows how the church thought of Easter as central and decisive, as the hinge of its history and belief and, above all, of its missionary proclamation and service (*Gospel of Mark*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Mich.: 1984). The longer ending also represents one of the church’s earliest attempts to construct a harmony of Easter events out of the varied data of the Gospels and Acts, which converge over time to express the Easter tradition.

Patricia Sánchez has been contributing to *Celebration* for over 35 years. She holds a master’s degree in literature and religion of the Bible from a joint degree program at Columbia University and Union Theological Seminary in New York.
We know the rest of the story, and Jesus also charges us with proclaiming the good news to all creation. We cannot be fearful and remain silent, for the reality of Jesus-risen compels us to witness with our lips and our lives. “Moved by Jesus’ example, we are to enter fully into the fabric of society, sharing the lives of all, listening to their concerns, helping them materially and spiritually in their needs, rejoicing with those who rejoice, weeping with those who weep; arm in arm with others, we are committed to building a new world. But, we do so not from a sense of obligation, not as a burdensome duty, but as the result of a personal decision which brings joy and gives meaning to our lives” (Pope Francis, “The Joy of the Gospel,” 2013).

And so, on this feast of light and life, let us resolve to be the light that dispels another person’s darkness and to share the life that Jesus has secured for each of us.

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

Closely connected with the belief in the risen Jesus was the conviction that such faith should issue forth in a universal mission. To that end, Luke presented the mission to the gentiles as an integral aspect of God’s foreordained plan of salvation. This conviction is reflected in his Gospel as well as in Acts.

Peter’s discourse at the home of Cornelius, and the other discourses in Acts, are not just sermons; rather, the discourses are highly stylized theological vehicles through which Luke responded to the pastoral needs of the growing community of believers. An extremely effective teaching tool, the speeches in Acts were intended to reach beyond their historical and literary context to inform any Luke/Acts reader of the significance of a particular issue or event.

With the baptism of Cornelius and his household, the early community, according to Luke, took its first official step toward realizing the universal embrace of Jesus’ mission. Of course, the gentile mission had begun before the Cornelius event, thanks largely to the efforts of Hellenist Christians — Philip, Stephen, etc. But Luke’s theological concerns led him to relate all significant expansion and development to the Jerusalem church. Therefore, Luke has featured Peter, the leader of the Twelve, as welcoming Cornelius to the faith.

Unlike the speeches in Acts that were addressed to a Jewish audience, Peter’s discourse at Cornelius’ home does not include an indictment for Jesus’ death. Nor does it reference the prophets or the fulfillment of prophecy. Rather, in this speech, Peter made mention of Jesus’ life, ministry and good works.

Peter also affirmed that his testimony about Jesus was true because he and the other apostles were eyewitnesses who had seen, heard and eaten with the risen Jesus. In ancient times, the testimony of two witnesses who agreed on what they had seen and heard was accepted as the truth. Peter and the other Eleven must have been powerful and convincing witnesses, for through them, the followers of Jesus began to grow in number.

However, Luke was quite clear in affirming that this open-hearted and open-minded policy of accepting “everyone who believes” (v.34) was not to be wholly credited to human efforts. On the contrary, Luke repeatedly insisted that just as the Holy Spirit was with Jesus, enlightening his mind and empowering his ministry, so was that same Holy Spirit with the church. Through the centuries, through good times and bad, that very Spirit has continued to inspire the church, grace its ministries and awaken it to opportunities to be light and life for the world.

**1 COR 5:6b-8**

Today’s second reading is part of a longer section of Paul’s letter to believers in Corinth in which he issued a call for community discipline (1 Cor 5:1–6:20). With that general call, Paul cited an individual case of “lewd conduct ... a kind not even found among the pagans — a man living with his father’s wife” (1 Cor 5:1). Scholars agree that the wife in question was a stepmother and not a member of the community or Paul would also have addressed her part in the relationship. Such behavior was forbidden by law (Deut 27:20; Lev 18:8; 20:11); therefore, the incestuous relationship was in direct violation of the terms of the covenant with God. Paul not only condemned the behavior of the man but also the fact that the community appeared to tolerate such a sin.

After demanding that the Corinthians expel the man from the community so that he might realize his sin and repent, Paul then returned his focus to the community. Instead of concentrating solely on the sins of others, or boasting about themselves (4:7), members should recognize their own need for spiritual purity and transformation. “Because they were liberated from captivity through the death of Jesus, they should act like Israel on the night of Passover: clean out the old leaven and gather together for the feast that celebrates their deliverance” (Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Ky: 1997).

In ancient times, leaven was regularly used in bread-making. When

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2 | APRIL 2015
foods were being offered in sacrifice, leaven was prohibited. Its mysterious effect on dough seemed magical and even sinister; for that reason, leaven became a symbol for sin and corruption. Unleavened bread, on the other hand, became a figurative sign of purity and holiness. Jesus reflected this idea in his teachings. Mark (8:15 and parallels) and Paul used this symbolism to call believers to live the life demanded of them because of their belonging to Christ.

By virtue of Jesus’ passing over from death to life, Christians are called to a new wholeness and holiness in him. When Paul exhorted his readers to “clear out the old yeast” (v. 7), he was referring to the custom of sweeping the house clean of every impurity in order to celebrate Passover. Jesus had done this in a cosmic way on the cross; now his followers are to maintain not only their homes but themselves, as well, in a state of holiness. This would include helping a known and flagrant sinner (like the incestuous man) to see the light of truth, to repent and sweep himself clean of sin. Then he and the rest of the community could properly celebrate their new life in Christ with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

**MARK 16:1-7**

In his book *On Being a Christian*, theologian Hans Küng explains, “Jesus’ resurrection cannot be described as an historical event in the ordinary sense of the word. There were no human witnesses. No press passes were distributed, no cameras recorded the scene for all posterity. Rather, and as the Christian Scriptures consistently attest, the resurrection of Jesus was an eschatological act of God and an integral aspect of the transformation of the world” (Doubleday, New York: 1984).

Küng goes on to say that this perspective affirms that the resurrection is more than the divine vindication of a particular person, Jesus of Nazareth. God’s saving plan is involved in Jesus in such a way that after Easter, Jesus became the norm for the relationship between humanity and God. When the evangelists spoke and then wrote of Jesus’ resurrection, they did so in the light and grace of Easter faith. That grace and faith enabled them to look back on Jesus’ life and ministry and, with new understanding, to appreciate his journey and make it their own.

In this account of Jesus’ resurrection, Mark tells of the women coming to offer a last service to Jesus: the anointing of his body for a proper burial. Understandably, since they had no inkling that Jesus was risen, they were concerned about the stone. When they arrived, they found “the stone was rolled back.” As Lamar Williamson Jr. has explained, the passive voice is used here to avoid directly speaking of God (*Mark*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Ky: 1983). Readers are to understand that the entire event is God’s doing.

To clarify and interpret their experience, the young man dressed in a white robe told the women that Jesus was risen. Some speculate that this was the same young man in white from Mark 14:51. Still others are of the mind that the young man was Mark himself, and that he was offering a signature of sorts to his efforts. Speculation notwithstanding, the young man serves as an “angel/messenger” who delivered the good news of Easter. The tomb is empty because Jesus lives. “In that emptiness is expressed the futility of every effort to possess the Nazarene, the frustration of every quest of the historical Jesus. To see Jesus, the women and the disciples must look ahead ... to Galilee” (Williamson, *op. cit.*).

Galilee was not only where the disciples had made their home and their livelihood; it was also the place where their apostolic mission would begin. From Isaiah 9:1, we learn that Galilee was a land of foreigners. Therefore it was a place ripe for evangelization. However, and much to a reader’s dismay, the women fled in fear and said nothing to anyone. Because of the abrupt ending of Mark’s Gospel, some have suggested that the original ending was lost. To remedy what may appear to be an incomplete Gospel, verses 9 through 20 were later added. Included in this pericope are three resurrection appearances and the commissioning of the disciples for their universal mission.

But if Mark did choose to end his Gospel with verse 8, what is his message to us and to all believers? Perhaps he was assuring us that Jesus has indeed gone ahead of us and, despite our fears and weakness, we will see him. For now, we have to summon our courage and, by God’s grace, proclaim the good news of Jesus-risen to all—with our lips and with our lives.

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**Sermon Starters**

*Deacon Dick Folger*

The last lines from today’s Easter Gospel (Mark) tell us that the disciples “saw and believed. For they did not yet understand the Scripture that he had to rise from the dead.”

We can imagine what took place before their discovery: Jesus rose from death alone in the darkness of the tomb. He removed his own burial clothes and folded them. Jesus then took off his head covering, rolled it up and put it in a separate place. From inside the tomb, he moved the heavy stone aside and stepped out into the early-morning darkness.

Like the disciples, we are challenged to believe that he rose from the dead. We have had over 2,000 years to understand that the Easter Gospel invites us to step into the tomb and rediscover that Jesus’ resurrection is a promise to us. We come to know that like him, we, too, shall rise from the dead.
**Preaching to Youth**

*Jim Auer*

**KEY VERSE(S) / MAIN IDEA** The Resurrection.

**HOW YOUTH MIGHT APPROACH THE MAIN IDEA** Generally receptive, but note last Leading Question.

**STARTER** You surely know those Geico TV ads that say, “Fifteen minutes could save you 15 percent or more on car insurance.” Another voice says, “Everybody knows that.” What’s the unspoken implication? That everybody accepts the statement as true, but it’s not really exciting. Perhaps it was at one time, but now it’s so ordinary that it’s not especially important. Now imagine this scenario. One person says, “Jesus Christ is risen from the dead,” and the second person (in a bored, “So what?” tone of voice) says, “Everybody knows that.”

**LEADING QUESTIONS** * Would the second voice represent a common view today’s world — yes, it happened, but I don’t see why it’s important? * Is the Resurrection more than just a nice thing that happened to Jesus? * If we answer “yes,” what’s the “more”? * If people who don’t believe in Jesus, or who think he was simply a great prophet and teacher, but are good people and sincere in their own faith — if they can make it to heaven, why is it so important that we believe Jesus rose from the dead?

**DIRECTIONS TO EXPLORE** * The meaning of our phrase “The Paschal Mystery.” * The culture makes a bigger deal of Christmas, but Easter fulfills and celebrates what only began at Christmas. * The Resurrection makes every day another chance. * When Christ rose from the grave, he brought each of us with him.

**QUOTATION** “And if Christ weren’t raised, then all you’re doing is wandering about in the dark, as lost as ever. If all we get out of Christ is a little inspiration for a few short years, we’re pretty sorry lot. But the truth is that Christ has been raised, the first in a long legacy of those who are going to leave the cemeteries” (1 Cor 15:16-20, Eugene Peterson translation).

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**HOMILY**

*Deacon Ross Beaudoin*

**Death Brings Life**

Jesus Christ is risen! Alleluia!

We are here today because our faith calls us to celebrate Jesus’ triumph over death. We rejoice. We live in the hope that Jesus’ victory will be ours, too. We long for that life everlasting which Jesus proclaimed and which we celebrate at Easter.

But it is not only life after death that is our Easter celebration. It is life through death. For Jesus Christ, death is the doorway to life. “Unless the seed falls into the ground and dies…” (John 12:24). The seed falls into the ground at the time of physical death. It also happens countless times throughout life. “If the seed dies, it yields a rich harvest” (John 12:24). Death bringing new life is a law of the universe.

The baptism ritual of Easter demonstrates this. The catechumen descends into the waters of baptism, the waters of death, and emerges to new life in Christ. “Unless you are born again of water and the Spirit, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven” (John 3:5).

Ongoing death-to-life is not an easy consideration for us human beings. You and I are comfortably in church this Easter to celebrate joyful Easter “Alleluias.” But it is only because of Jesus’ victory over death that we celebrate Easter joy. Our Easter “Alleluias” are meant to echo every day of our lives. Christ died once for all (Heb 7:27). We rejoice and are glad.

We know that it was not just Jesus’ death on Calvary, but Jesus’ whole life that was a dying, a giving over of himself for the life of the world: “Though he was in the form of God... [Jesus] emptied himself, taking the form of a slave in every way like a human being, and became obedient to the point of death... on a cross. And for this, God raised him on high” (Phil 2:6-9).

We are challenged to live our lives with Jesus for the life of the world. Our Easter “Alleluias” will resound every day if we live the life of Christ that we received at baptism. With Jesus, it is not just our final passing in death that brings new life; it is the whole of our lives. It is the frequent little deaths that we face over and over. We are parents, spouses, family members, friends, employees, employers, teachers, ministers. There are times we are called to set aside our own comfort, interests, desires or needs in order to provide attention, love or life-giving service to another person. We die to self so that we can give life to them. Through that, we bring Easter joy anew to a portion of the world.

Today, we are 20 centuries after the time of Christ, and violence and death have not yet been overcome with life-giving sacrificial love. It is disturbing to reflect on what seems to be an ever-increasing level of violence in our homes, on our streets, within governments, between nations and based in groups that promote lawlessness and terror.

Any solution starts with us. Any change begins in individual hearts. Each one of us can give attention to one area of our life that needs to be resurrected from death. That may be someone or some situation near to us, calling out for our attention. We ask ourselves: Who or what needs the life-giving touch of the resurrected Jesus-in-us?

Jesus says (John 10:10), “I have come that you may have life, and have it more abundantly,” now and after death.

As Pope Francis tells us: “Let the risen Jesus into your life. Welcome him as a friend, with trust: He is life!”
An Evolving Church

In the sacred texts for today, we are reacquainted with the earliest believers in Jesus. We are invited to see and appreciate the impact of the risen Jesus on their lives. Because of Jesus, as Luke tells us in Acts, the believers were of one heart and mind. They shared all they had; there was no need to which they did not tend. Graced by God, they bore powerful witness to their risen Lord. Three times in Acts, Luke offers us a glimpse into the life of the nascent church. Three times, we are challenged to ponder our own enthusiasm for the risen Christ. Three times, we are invited to look within and consider the depth of our own transformation by Easter grace.

In today’s second reading, the Johannine author reminds us of our heritage. By faith we are begotten by God. We are the blessed sisters and brothers of Jesus who are called to love as he did and obey God as he did. That love and obedience must issue forth in love for another. Begotten and loved by God, believers are thereby empowered, as John says, “to conquer the world” — that is, to overcome those forces that are hostile to God, to justice, to life and to truth.

Today’s Gospel is so very familiar to us, yet perhaps we might look at it with fresh eyes. In addition to following Thomas’ journey from doubt and disbelief to faith in Jesus — “My Lord and my God!” — we might also consider what William Bausch has called the Thomas Syndrome: “Thomas, called Didimus, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came” (Once Upon a Gospel, Twenty-Third Pub., New London, Conn.: 2008). Where was he? Why was he absent? But he was, and as a result of his absence, he didn’t see Jesus or hear him speak or receive his peace. He wasn’t there when Jesus breathed forth his Spirit on his own. Therefore, he didn’t understand; his faith was shaken. He had nothing to hold onto but his doubt.

Bausch goes on to suggest that we too, at times, are absent Thomases. “We are absent from sufficient knowledge about our faith” (op. cit.). Because we are not as steeped in our tradition as we could be, we don’t know how to interpret popular fictions like The DaVinci Code or how to evaluate the efforts of the Jesus Seminar. While we may be up-to-date on current events, and while we try to remain current in our job skills, we may not always be so conscientious in enriching our faith and appreciating the rich traditions of our church. How can we follow the lead of those earliest believers in the great work of evangelization if our religious education and formation ended in grade school or high school? Our religious formation must be continuous. It is a cradle-to-the-grave process.

Had they been left to their own devices, the disciples may have remained silent and fearful behind closed doors. But Jesus came to them, wished them peace and breathed the new life of the Spirit into them. This same Jesus comes to us, breathing the power of the Spirit into us, enabling us to overcome our doubts and fears so as to witness to the Gospel. We, for our part, are to receive that Spirit and cultivate its presence in our lives. Like Mary, sister of Martha and Lazarus, we are to be wise and sit at the feet of Jesus, listening to him and taking his words to heart. We are privileged to avail ourselves of the rich resources offered in the scriptures, as well as other worthy publications; and prayer and study groups that are sponsored by our parishes. This will preclude our being absent Thomases without clear knowledge of our faith.

Thomas has another valuable lesson to impart to all who struggle to
believe. A week later, when he was with the disciples, Jesus invited him to touch his wounds and to believe. Thomas recognized the risen Jesus and made a profound declaration of faith — “My Lord and my God.” He had experienced the resurrection.

We who also know and believe Jesus-risen are to offer that same experience to others. As Ralph Kuehner and Joseph Juknialis have pointed out (Living the Word, Paluch, Franklin Park, Ill.: 2005), resurrection happens whenever love transforms life; when someone offers forgiveness despite a burning desire for vengeance; when a nation begins to value and protect the rights of all, not just a few; when the poor, hungry, homeless and disenfranchised are attended as brothers and sisters; when immigrants and refugees are not left to drown or incarcerated but are welcomed as the children of God. Resurrection happens when enemies sit down together to talk instead of planning the other’s demise. Resurrection is happening all around us; let us venture out of our locked doors and celebrate. Jesus, our Lord and our God, lives!

ACTS 4:32-35

In the second volume of his contribution to the Christian scriptures, Luke has shared the process whereby the proclaimer of the kingdom (Jesus) became the proclaimed. After Jesus’ death and resurrection, his followers continued his mission and eventually evolved into a community, a church. More than any other of the New Testament texts, Acts provides insight into that evolution.

Today’s first reading is one of three similar texts (see also 2:42-47; 5:12-16) through which Luke reminds his readers of their roots and encourages them to strive for similar ideals. These summaries feature the early Christian community as a closely knit group who shared resources in common and looked to the Twelve for catechetical and liturgical nourishment as their numbers grew.

In its earliest stages of development, the church relied solely on the knowledge, faith and experience of the apostles, whose kerygmatic preaching drew converts to Christ, and whose eyewitness testimony to Jesus fed the faith of those already initiated. Gradually, a fixed method of preaching emerged based on the memory of Jesus’ sayings, parables and works of healing and especially his passion, death and resurrection. Communal living centered on and flowed from each believer’s relationship to Jesus and, with him, to the Father. The sharing of goods was a natural consequence of their unity in faith, heart and purpose.

There was an ancient saying in the Hellenistic world: “Friends are of our heart and one soul. The possessions of friends are common property.” Did Luke have this saying in mind when he described the life of the earliest believers? William H. Willimon cites the harmony of the early Christian church as “evidence for the truthfulness of the resurrection” (Acts, John Knox Press, Atlanta: 1988). A group of people whose lives are so radically different, so completely changed from the way the world builds a community — surely this testifies even more than the empty tomb that something decisive occurred. Indeed, that “something” was the resurrection of Jesus, the Christ.

The ideal community was admired and emulated by others, a fact expressed by Justin Martyr’s description of his own community: “We, who once coveted most greedily the wealth and fortune of others, now place in common the goods we possess, dividing them with all the needy” (I Apology 14:2-3).

From Paul’s letters, we learn that the early community’s sense of mutual responsibility extended beyond the local church. Collections were taken up and sent to needier groups. This ideal was not always fully realized, as seen in the next chapter of Acts (5:1-41). There we will learn of the greed and duplicity of Ananias and Sapphira. This “reality check” lets us know that the growing church was still an imperfect and struggling community — much like our own.

1 JOHN 5:1-6

In his brilliant commentary The Epistles of John, Raymond E. Brown explained that these letters offer modern readers a sense of the “life and death struggle” experienced by the Johannine community in the late first century (Doubleday, New York: 1982). At the heart of the struggle were two conflicting interpretations of the fourth Gospel. The two groups disagreed about the unique role of Jesus, the ethical demands of Christian life, the Holy Spirit and eschatology. While one group adhered to the deposit of faith as it had been handed down to them, the other refused to acknowledge or accept the incarnation of Jesus; and while they claimed to enjoy a close relationship with God, they did not reflect this union in their interactions with one another (2:9-11; 3:10-24; 4:7-21). John referred to this group as the “Anti-Christ” and he frequently offered his contemporaries criteria for recognizing and refuting their errors. In the end, this group seceded from the church.

In this pericope, John called his readers to exercise their faith in Jesus as Christ and God by keeping his commandments to love one another.
Previously in this letter (2:22; 4:20), John insisted that anyone who claims to love God but hates their brother or sister is a “liar.” Here, he makes the same point. Those who believe in Jesus are begotten by God and are to love all others so begotten. To refuse to do so is to live a lie.

As Brown (op. cit.) has also pointed out, “it has become fashionable to affirm that what is demanded is not belief in an intellectual truth about Jesus but belief in a person with whom one enters into a relationship.” Without denying this, Brown also insisted that there is an intellectual aspect in the Johannine challenge to believe. One must know and understand Jesus correctly in order to have a salvific relationship with him.

Because the secessionists did not acknowledge or accept Jesus for who he was — the incarnate Word of God and the Christ — John believed their faith to be a sham and their unethical behavior further proof of their heretical ideas. The true believer, on the other hand, knows Christ and has been begotten by God; therefore, certain Christian behaviors must follow.

In a tone quite similar to that of John the Seer, author of Revelation, the author of 1 John described those who are begotten by God as conquerors of the world (v. 5). Those begotten by God can overcome any adversity by faith in Jesus as the Son of God who came through water and blood, i.e., as a true man who suffered and died for our sins. As William Barclay has put it, we have a defense against worldly standards and motives, the fascination with the wrong things and the temptations that are part of the human situation in a world not interested in and sometimes hostile to God (“John and Jude,” The Daily Study Bible, The Saint Andrew Press, Edinburgh, U.K.: 1976). Once we are aware of Jesus’ presence ever with us, we become strong so we may remain faithful and true to him.

JOHN 20:19-31

All the promises Jesus made to his disciples concerning his abiding presence, the gift of the Spirit, for-
Divine Inclusion

Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be with you.” … He showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. (John 20:19-20)

Today we still sing: “Alleluia, Christ is risen!”

This Second Sunday of Easter, the readings celebrate an Alleluia of divine inclusion. We hear echoes of divine inclusion in the words of Pope Francis, who, in the name of Christ, welcomes all and invites all into dialogue and acceptance of the love and mercy of God.

The Gospel shows us an intimate example of divine inclusion. The evening of the Resurrection, the disciples were gathered in a locked room. They were afraid for their lives, and they were also feeling guilty for having abandoned Jesus in his hour of need. In the upper room, Jesus greeted them with peace. Jesus’ peace set them free and assured them again of their inclusion in his life and mission. Except for John, all the disciples had abandoned him. Peter, their leader, had outright denied knowing Jesus. Yet, the risen Jesus reached out and brought them again into his company and mission.

Among the Twelve, there was one missing at Jesus’ appearance in the upper room. That one has gotten the name “Doubting Thomas.” When Jesus later returned, he took the initiative to include Thomas in the faith of the other disciples. Jesus invited Thomas to see the marks of the wounds that were visible in his glorified body. Jesus did not condemn Thomas for his doubting. Instead, Jesus offered him inclusion with the rest and the opportunity to join in their joy with the risen Lord.

In the first reading, we hear the story of an early community of believers who included all in their lives, in their love and even in their property. What radical inclusion! No one was left out. All members of the early community of believers shared equally in the life and goods of the community.

The second reading, from the First Letter of John, gives us a mature reflection on the life of Christian believers. We read: “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been begotten by God. Now, everyone who loves the father loves the child he has begotten” (1 John 5:1). What greater inclusion could there be? Every child of God is loved by God and is to be loved by those who believe in God’s Son, Jesus the Christ.

Who, then, would possibly be outside of God’s love, and therefore outside of our love and care? None.

As members of the risen Christ, how can we practice such divine inclusion in our time? Who are the ones who are vulnerable and excluded today? Some are excluded because of their race, land of origin or culture. Some because of their gender, lifestyle or politics, or because they are homeless, disabled, unemployed or otherwise marginalized.

Do we ignore the call of the suffering and risen Christ by excluding people or standing by while others exclude any of God’s children? For us, the baptized, that cannot be!

Resurrection faith means that Jesus Christ died and rose for all, for everyone. In today’s Gospel, Jesus proclaims, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you…. Receive the Holy Spirit.” We continue the mission of Christ. We bring Christ’s message to the world. We strive to ensure that all are included in the love of Christ.

God’s love is unconditional. That is the divine inclusion in which we rejoice, and that we extend to every person as we are sent forth in the power of the Holy Spirit.
Jesus the Advocate

“We have an advocate with the Father” (1 John 2:1-5). What is John telling us? That the reign of God is like a courtroom where we are lucky enough to have Jesus as the lawyer who’ll get the divine judge to let us off easy? That’s a rough description of one widely held understanding of this reading and a general theory of salvation. But is it the only interpretation?

The Greek word translated here as “advocate” is directly related to the New Testament word “Paraclete,” which can also be translated as comforter, consoler, intercessor, teacher and so on. Wikipedia, the go-to source for knowledge if not wisdom, tells us that advocacy is “a process by which an individual or group aims to influence decisions within the political, economic and social systems and institutions.” So as we contemplate the risen Christ today, we’re invited to consider Jesus as the Advocate. The obvious question is: For whom, and before whom, does he advocate? Now we’re entering an area in which our readings may surprise us.

Just to get us in shape for that, let’s go back to Peter’s homily in the first reading from Acts 3. Addressing his fellow Jews, Peter calls them to repent and be converted. Before he said that, he admitted his solidarity with the crowd; he was one among the many who acted in ignorance by somehow betraying Jesus. So in this scene we see Peter admitting that he’s been in a terrible mess together with his coreligionists, but he’s convinced that he’s found the way out and he’s trying to get them to join him in going there.

Peter’s way out is not something he invented or created. The resurrection narratives tell us that at first, he and the disciples found it hard to believe. In today’s Gospel Jesus shows up in the midst of his disciples though nobody saw him approach; it’s a lot like his entrance through locked doors without so much as knocking (John 20:19). But the crux of the story is not Jesus’ new ability to show up and disappear at will. In fact, his ability to arrive in their midst led to fear more than anything else. The most important point of this reading, as in the whole Gospel, is the message Jesus brought.

While the disciples were trying to sift through the strange experiences narrated by their trusted companions, while they were discounting women’s tales and wondering about ghosts, Jesus became present among them offering “Shalom, Peace.” Then, facing head-on everything that terrified them — from suffering to punishment and vengeful spirits — he said, “Look at my hands and feet ... touch me.” In effect, he was saying, “Look! I am the one you denied and left to suffer alone, and all I want now is to be with you and give you my peace.”

This was the living message that brought them to metanoia, the conversion that’s a turn-your-theology-and-life-upside-down new way of understanding what the Creator God is up to in relationship with humanity.

When the disciples stood before the risen Christ who was offering them peace, the meaning of his message finally came through to them. Every concept of God the harsh judge disappeared as he pronounced that one word: “Peace.” Now the disciples could truly recognize Jesus as the Advocate, the comforter. But their perspective had taken a 180-degree turn. Jesus wasn’t the one who would plead for them before God, but the one God sent to plead with them.

As we celebrate Easter, these readings invite us to try to suspend our presuppositions and contemplate Jesus as the one sent by the Father to...
give us peace. They invite us to stand with Peter and the guilty crowd facing the risen Christ whose only word to us is “Peace.” We need to let that word penetrate those parts of us blinded by ignorance and hardened by fear. We need to let him pour out that word over our own terrible and too-often secret messes. That is how we allow Christ to be the Father’s advocate in our life.

After we have spent time under his gaze, after that gaze has had its radical effect on our perspective, we may inquire what he asks of us, or in advocacy language, how he would like to influence us. The answer will be as unique as each of us and as universal as what he asked of his disciples: Preach forgiveness to the whole world, beginning with your own world. As we do that, we will find that John’s promise begins to take flesh in us and the love of God will come to its completion in us.

**ACTS 3:13-15, 17-19**

Peter offers us a number of ideas in this homily from the Acts of the Apostles (3:13-15, 17-19). We could focus on the theology of his description of Jesus as the ultimate sign of God’s glory and the way he situates Jesus in the history of salvation. We could underline the continuity of salvation history as he explains that the God who raised Jesus from the dead is the same God they have known, and that if they want to know the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, they should look to Jesus. But Peter goes on from the tradition to indict every one who collaborated in Jesus’ death. He’s unceasing in reminding his listeners that if not for them, Pilate would have released Jesus. He then recaps the tragedy of Jesus’ death with two stark antitheses: Jesus was rejected in favor of a murderer; the Author of Life was put to death. Finally, and most importantly, Peter reminds his people that God’s judgment on all that happened is revealed in Christ’s resurrection — which he and others have witnessed.

Peter makes it clear that he counts himself among those guilty of collaboration in Jesus’ death. If others “handed him over,” Peter is the most notorious among those who “denied the Holy and Righteous One.” Peter makes no bones about it: He is a sinner calling his peers to conversion. But for all of that seeming concentration on sin, Peter cares less about their past than about the potential of their future. Admitting that all of them were acting in ignorance, Peter seems to have figured out that he and his companions spent most of their time with Jesus in ignorance. They couldn’t comprehend who Jesus was. Worse yet, they didn’t realize that they didn’t understand.

Now, having been with the risen Christ, Peter has come round. Describing it in spiritual terms, we would say that he has undergone repentance and conversion. Not so long ago, Peter opposed Jesus, attempting to sway him from accepting the cross. Now he preaches that suffering was part of God’s good plan of salvation. Whether or not he’s got his theology lined up and systematized — which is pretty doubtful — Peter knows what repentance and conversion mean. They are such a powerful force in his life that he’s impelled to share them with anyone who will listen.

The process of Peter’s conversion was a mental, emotional, spiritual about-face that happened when the risen Christ reached out to him in forgiveness. That is why we can say that Peter “underwent” repentance and conversion. Christ started the process. Jesus’ love was the source of Peter’s new inside-out theology and self-concept. That, along with understanding how loved he was, compelled him to share the message that God’s first and last word to humanity is love. In Luke’s story, Peter’s response involved two steps: repentance as the mental-spiritual turnaround, and conversion as the evangelizing activity that flowed from it.

As we celebrate Easter, one thing Peter is surely showing us is that what we preach must come from our own experience of God’s transforming love. We may know wonderful theology, but our witness is powerful and true only to the extent that it springs from God’s grace working within us.

**1 JOHN 2:1-5a**

Here, as in the first reading, our Easter scripture contemplates the reality of sin. While John might hope that Christians can avoid sinning, he’s realistic enough to admit that sin happens. So he explains that when we sin, Christ himself is our advocate and expiation for our sins.

What we have here is a vision of God reaching out to us, especially in our weakness. John does not encourage sin but sees it as having an inevitable part in the rhythm of our relationship with God. When we sin, he says, God is the expiator; the result of our sin is that God reaches out to us. This indicates that if we want to know where God is moving in our world, we should look at the worst situations we know. The path into what we see as the most God-forsaken situations is really the way along which we will find God. John is saying that as soon as there is sin, Christ is advocating, acting as the conduit of grace. Not only that, but John doesn’t confine this vision to the Christian community. He reminds us that Christ’s outreach
extends to the whole world.

Theories of salvation have often presented Christ’s expiation as a movement from humanity toward God showing how Jesus atoned for the wrong done so that humanity could stand right with God again. That is the opposite of the message of today’s scriptures. John presents expiation not as humanity’s peace offering to God but as God’s outreach to humanity. The more we understand and accept the way God seeks us out, the more God’s touch can influence us.

Today’s reading closes with the promise that keeping God’s word leads to the perfection of the love of God. As we internalize God’s love, we cannot help but spread it. John teaches us that keeping the word of God is not a question of mandates but of cherishing God’s word, keeping it alive in our hearts. When we do that, the word continues to grow in us and the love of God slowly and surely fulfills its purpose, which is what it means that it comes to perfection in us.

**LUKE 24:35-48**

Luke’s final resurrection account caps the message of Easter and the whole of Jesus’ ministry. Chapter 24 of Luke began with stories of the disciples’ astonishment at the empty tomb followed by Jesus’ encounter with two disciples along the road and how their hearts were burning. Now, with Jesus’ final appearance, Luke brings his Gospel to a conclusion.

Luke uses this last appearance to emphasize two particular facets of the Resurrection. On one hand, this account underlines the bodily presence of Christ. The people of that day knew stories of ghosts and divinization — in fact, after someone reported having seen the spirit of an emperor ascending to the heavens, the Roman Senate would vote to proclaim that it was so, thus declaring that the deceased ruler now belonged to the ranks of the gods. Taking pains to distinguish the risen Christ from those cultural myths as well as from spiritualizing tendencies,

Luke relates a three-part encounter between Christ and his disciples. First, Christ “appears,” unfettered by the constraints of material space, thus inciting their terror. Then the risen Jesus identifies himself as the one who suffered: “See, touch me. The marks of shameful suffering are very real, not something you would ever want to dream up.” Finally, Luke says that Christ ate in front of the disciples. This was no ghost, nor a dream/vision that made everything OK; this was the mortally wounded one raised up, real and yet different.

The evangelists have no interest in explaining the physics or biology of resurrection. Their concern is to point out that Jesus was as real in resurrection as he had been from birth to death. He was himself, now unbound, unconstrained by physical limits, and still the man born of Mary, crucified under Pontius Pilate and raised by God. That means that God affirmed Jesus, putting the infallible stamp of approval on his life, death and message. That leads us right back to contemplate his message — again and again.

We begin this reading seeing some 120 disciples being told about the experience of the Emmaus travelers. Before they can get their story out, Jesus is standing in their midst, offering them peace. We should remember that this crowd was not morally distinct from the group Peter addressed in our first reading. With the exception of some women and a couple of men, the crucifixion had overwhelmed the disciples’ faith and crippled their faithfulness. It is for that reason that Jesus’ greeting of “Peace” is so meaningful. While they were worrying and wondering what reports of the Resurrection might mean, Jesus came to them seeking reconciliation. We need to underline that easily missed detail: It was Jesus who sought reconciliation, not his fragile disciples.

Jesus’ approach, his coming into their midst, summarizes the utterly astounding meaning of his life, death and resurrection. This is the ultimate revelation about the Father who sent Christ into the world. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of Adam and Eve who hid in shame, is the instigator of reconciliation, the eternal seeker of communion with humanity. That is the astounding good news that Jesus preached by the living parable of his life.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus had taught his disciples; he had reprimanded them for their status-seeking and vengeance; he had proclaimed the privilege of the poor and the necessity of his suffering, but they couldn’t comprehend it. Now, when they were at their absolute worst, he came offering peace, and that opened their minds to understand the scriptures in a new way. Having met the risen Lord and accepted his offer of peace, they were finally prepared to be witnesses to all the nations.

**Sermon Starters**

*Deacon Dick Folger*

If you watch enough crime shows, you learn that there are several kinds of evidence. Eyewitness testimony is from someone who sees the event in person. Circumstantial evidence is secondhand information. Hard evidence is something that is proof beyond the shadow of a doubt.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus used his own body to give the disciples real evidence of his resurrection. He didn’t want the story to be clouded by the possibility that the disciples were imagining things and that he was just a ghostly apparition. Jesus meant for them to know that it was truly him in the flesh. He showed them his wounds and went so far as to ask them for food, which he ate in their presence. He was the same Jesus who had been taken down dead from the cross. Real evidence.
Preaching to Youth

Jim Auer

KEY VERSE(S) / MAIN IDEA (Acts)
“The God of our fathers has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and denied in Pilate’s presence when he had decided to release him. You denied the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. The author of life you put to death. Now I know, brothers, that you acted out of ignorance, just as your leaders did. Repent, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be wiped away.” Accepting hard truths, especially about ourselves.

SPECIAL NOTE To avoid giving the impression that the main idea is directed specifically toward “young people these days,” explain that it applies (as did Peter’s words) to adults just as well.

STARTER In 1949, a song came out called “I Didn’t Know the Gun Was Loaded.” The refrain, an empty alibi for shooting someone dead, was “I didn’t know the gun was loaded. / And I’m so sorry my friend / I didn’t know the gun was loaded. / And I’ll never, never do it again.” Such an excuse didn’t change what was already done.

LEADING QUESTIONS * Do you remember a scenario from our first reading where people were said to have acted “out of ignorance”? * Do you buy that? Or do you think Peter was sugarcoating the grisly execution of Jesus in order to bring his listeners to accept the truth? * John 8:32b says, “The truth will set you free.” What does that mean to you? * How are you free (or freer) if you know an unpleasant truth? * Is there such a thing as doing something wrong out of ignorance? Do you think we sometimes use that as an easy excuse?

DIRECTIONS TO EXPLORE * We cannot appreciate or accept forgiveness unless we admit we have sinned. (Not just “didn’t use the best judgment.” Sinned.) * At Jesus’ execution, the gun was indeed loaded and all sins, including ours, pulled the trigger. Providentially for us, God raised Jesus from the dead.

HOMILY

Ted Wolgamot

God Is on Our Side

A chief counselor to the Anglo-Saxon King Edwin in 627 said this:

“Someone once wrote that the resurrection of Christ is “telling us that in the great storyline of history … the final judgment has already happened, and it’s nothing to be feared. God’s final judgment is that God will have the last word.”

What’s more is that the last word that God speaks will be “victory,” a word that contains the whole meaning of Easter; a word that will designate the ultimate triumph over all suffering and even death itself; a word that will culminate in every tear being wiped away.

Hope, then, is the major plotline in the story of Easter: To be a follower of Jesus, the Risen One, means that we are to be people who spread the message of hope wherever we can.

But how do we keep that hope alive?

Jesus tells us how by asking his disciples a seemingly odd question: “Have you anything here to eat?”

And then we remember: Meals are where Jesus did most of his teaching. Meals are where he formed relationships with his followers. Meals are where he healed, where he showed mercy, where he washed and kissed the feet of sinners.

Sharing meals is what will keep the disciples’ hopes alive — and ours, too.

We also remember that Jesus’ last moments with his disciples before he died were spent sharing a meal — a meal he told them to continue “in memory of me.” We call it the Last Supper. His last moments shared with them before returning to the Father were also spent sharing a meal and pushing them on to share with others. We call it the Eucharist.

Why a meal? Because that’s where we get the food that will nourish us, the energy that will renew our sense of purpose and the drive that will empower us to return to our little lives enriched with the conviction that love is stronger than death.

Easter convinces us that God is on our side.

That’s the “new teaching” that Jesus brought to the world.

Alleluia!
In His Name

It happens to everybody at some point. You do someone a good turn and you get in big trouble for it. Today we hear Peter defending himself before the guardians of orthodoxy. Poor Peter is accused of healing a crippled beggar in the name of Jesus. (See the whole account in Acts 3-4:30.) As the story goes, Peter’s responses culminate with the question of choosing whether to obey God or men, even — or especially — when the men claim the sanction of religious authority. As in the case of Jesus himself, we have here people who represent a belief system and its bureaucracy in conflict with others who have acted on behalf of the suffering without conforming to standard doctrinal correctness. But that’s actually not the centerpiece of today’s readings.

As we listen to Peter defending his good deed, he says that he carried it out in the power of the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean. That’s really quite an assertion. When we push it to the logical conclusion, we realize that Peter is claiming that Christ is living and acting in him. That’s trouble for him because the authorities believe Jesus deserved to die. Peter is a problem to them because of the obvious good he’s accomplishing in that name. Underlying all the conflict here is the question of who is in communion with God, who is truly acting in God’s name.

When Peter told the beggar, “In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean, rise and walk” (Acts 3:6), he was saying something more profound than we might first notice. To use the name of God or Jesus in that way was almost a sacramental action. By speaking in Jesus’ name, Peter put himself totally at Christ’s disposal, allowing Christ to accomplish his mission through him. At that moment Peter was not only healing a needy person, but he also entered into communion with the risen Lord. That helps us to make sense of his statement that salvation comes through the name of Christ: For him, communion with God is what salvation is all about.

Our other two readings reflect on additional dimensions of salvation-communion. The First Letter of John invites us to walk down memory lane with God and “see what love the Father has bestowed on us.” John wants us to take time to cherish the signs we have seen of God’s love in our lives. Doing that will lead us to the marvelous realization that we are God’s own beloved ones. Believing that is one of the greatest and most important acts of faith we can make.

In the Gospel today, Jesus uses the treasured metaphor of the shepherd to describe his relationship with us. When we explore his use of the image, we realize this goes much further than the consoling idea we know from Psalm 23. In the psalm, we speak of ourselves as the ones God leads and feeds, the ones to whom God gives rest and longed-for refreshment. All of that is good, but it doesn’t hold a candle to what Jesus says about us as his own sheep.

When Jesus talks about himself and the sheep, he describes an intimacy that goes beyond even what John talked about in the second reading. We are not just “God’s own children,” but we are invited into the same relationship of identity that Christ shares with the Father. He promises that we can know him as he knows us, as he and the Father know one another. That means that as we choose the relationship Christ offers, we are choosing the grace of union of heart, mind and will with Christ himself. We are choosing identification with him — a unity more profound than that of any human relationship.

Whew!
Today’s readings invite us to communion as the deepest and most pervasive experience of our life. Happily they begin with Peter, our patron saint of “keep trying.” The message we hear today reflects on both the active and the contemplative dimensions of our Christian life, helping us to remember that the two always go together. The more we “see what love the Father has bestowed on us,” the more we will be able to believe in Jesus as the Shepherd who ushers us into sharing the life of God. The more we share mind and heart with Christ, the more we will want to act in his name, allowing our communion to make Christ and the reign of God more present in our world. There’s more, but as John says, we aren’t ready to understand it.

Finally, realizing that the communion we are seeking and being offered is communion with the Christ who was crucified, we’ll be as prepared as humanly possible for the rejection and even persecution that will surely come our way.

Peter, patron of “keep trying,” pray for us!

**ACTS 4:8-12**

When was the last time you had to defend yourself for doing something good? That’s the setting in which we found Peter last week, and he’s still there. The Sunday Lectionary skips over the precipitating incident in favor of quoting Peter’s homily/defense, but the setting for it all was that when a crippled beggar asked Peter for money, Peter responded by saying that he was too poor to give him anything material. He then added, “What I do have, I give you.” So he took the man by the hand and in the name of Jesus he told him to walk. The guy not only walked, but he leapt around, making a scene that gave the Jewish mindset of those days. A person’s name was so powerful that speaking it could actually make the person present in some way. When Peter said, “In the name of Jesus Christ … stand,” that was not just a healing command; it was also an act of communion on Peter’s part. By calling on the name of Christ, he was opening himself, inviting Christ to work in and through him. As promised to Mary at the beginning of the Gospel and all the disciples after Easter, the Holy Spirit overshadowed Peter, empowering him to further the mission that Jesus handed over to the disciples. When Peter healed the man in the name of Jesus, Christ himself became present to and in him, exercising his healing power through Peter.

When we let that thought sink in, we can begin to understand why the religious authorities were so upset. There was a power afoot that was utterly independent of them. It had not stopped with Jesus’ execution, and now they were doing what they could to oppose it, but to little avail. Allowing Peter and his companions to continue what they were doing in that name was tantamount to surrendering their power and authority and admitting their mistake in rejecting Jesus.

What followed in the trial was one of Peter’s real high moments. The authorities conferred and ordered him and the disciples to cease and desist, warning them to “never again speak to anyone in this name.” Peter responded by asking them to judge: Should the disciples obey them or God?

Although the story extends beyond today’s selection from Acts, Peter summarized the crux of the conflict by citing Psalm 118: “The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone” (see Acts 4:11). What Peter didn’t quote, but they all knew as well as we know the words of the “Hail Mary,” was the next line: “By the Lord has this been done; it is wonderful in our eyes.” Peter would not desist from preaching about Jesus, nor would he cease to act in his name. He was filled with the Holy Spirit, and to stop acting in communion with Christ would have been to give up what made him alive and unafraid of any human consequences.

**1 JOHN 3:1-2**

Today’s message from the First Letter of John begins and ends by talking about seeing. The first line calls us to see what love the Father has bestowed on us. That should lead us to think over the effect that being loved has had on us at differ-
ent points of our life. The love we do or don’t receive as little people makes a profound difference in how we navigate the rest of our life. As they grow a little older, many young people are blessed with experiences of love so intense and new that they throw all of life into a tizzy — until that falling-in-love either fades away or matures and deepens to the point that their love colors and vivifies every dimension of a couple’s life. There are also the loves of friendship, of marriage and parenthood, of children who care for their aged parents. The blessings of love are all around, and each love affects us differently.

Without denigrating any of those experiences of love, John would tell us that he’s talking about something more profound, longer-lasting and far more consequential. John says that God’s love gives us our most basic identity, coming before all other loves and grounding them.

John’s message challenges us to expand the limits of our memory and imagination. “See what love the Father has bestowed on us!” God’s love, until the day we become what we see.

**JOHN 10:11-18**

In our reading from Acts, Peter showed us how discipleship is a vital part of our communion with the risen Lord. He demonstrated how to be people who act in Jesus’ name. The First Letter of John urged us to meditate on God’s great love so that love could become ever more clearly the source and orientation of our life. Today’s selection from the Gospel of John furthers the theme of communion, presenting Christ’s offer to be the Shepherd who gives us life and makes us one with each other and with God.

The first characteristic of the Good Shepherd Jesus describes is consecration to his vocation. With no resemblance to a hired hand, he willingly lays down his own life on behalf of those who are his. But Jesus’ description goes far beyond the image of even the most dedicated caretaker of a flock of animals. He says he knows them, and they know him. Lest we miss the seriousness and intensity of what he is revealing here, Jesus goes on to explain that he and his sheep know one another as intimately as he and the Father know each other. That kind of interior knowing comes from sharing the same life, the same understanding, even the same desire. The intimate mutual knowledge Jesus shares with his sheep is comparable only to the relationship he has with the Father.

The people of Jesus’ day knew plenty about shepherds. They were ordinary and lowly and yet were favored images of God. The figure of the Good Shepherd invited them to understand the shepherd’s field as the mystic’s cell, the place of ongoing encounter with God. Today we are invited to perceive our everyday life as the setting in which we come to intimate knowledge of Christ our Shepherd. To help us do that, John urges us to remember all the signs of God’s great love for us. And in the midst of it all, Peter shows us that doing Christ’s work, acting consciously in Jesus’ name, brings us into living communion with that Good Shepherd who knows us and wants to be known by and through us. Peter would tell us that it won’t be easy, but it’s more than worth the trouble.

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**Sermon Starters**

*Deacon Dick Folger*

Recently an old couple went to the city animal shelter to adopt a dog. They picked Regan, a pointer mix, from the kennels. The couple was told to wait in the “get-acquainted room” while staff went to fetch the dog. When Regan was brought into the room by the handler, he showed no interest in the old couple. Regan’s entire focus was on his handler. She was his shepherd, his only hope in the despair of the dog pound. When Regan’s handler left the room to leave him alone with the old couple, Regan pointed toward the door through which she would return. The old couple decided that Regan should go home with the handler he loved so much.

That’s the way it should be for us. We are the sheep of Jesus’ flock. Jesus is our only hope in the despair of the world. We know that in the end, our shepherd will come and lead us safely home.
By the Fourth Sunday of Easter, most of the best Resurrection stories have been told, and it sometimes seems odd to shift gears from Easter themes to the Good Shepherd. But Pope Francis’ strong emphasis on the link between mercy and evangelization has cast new light on the risen Christ as the Good Shepherd.

In today’s Gospel, the risen Jesus gathers his disciples, who were scattered like sheep when he was arrested and executed. His first words to them are of peace — total forgiveness for their cowardice in his hour of need.

The image of lost sheep certainly describes many people today, including Catholics who have wandered away or feel abandoned by the church. The thought that someone is out searching for them, eager to rescue them from the brambles of human temptation and entanglement, to bind up their wounds, lift them up on strong shoulders and carry them home — is a comforting message. It certainly beats being scolded by those who who expect the casualties to crawl in off the battlefields if they want care.

Mercy is first aid, no questions asked. Pope Francis’ vision of a merciful church does not dismiss the need for justice or accountability; he simply puts mercy first. The prodigal son, the ultimate lost sheep, might never have come home if he thought his father would only scold, belittle and punish him. In his desolate state, the son must have sensed that his father was grieving for him and wanted him to turn homeward. In fact, the story suggests that it was the father’s longing, his daily walks to the gate to see if his son was on his way, that prompted the son to consider coming home.

The Good Shepherd will not give up on a single sheep. He knows each one by name, loves them so much he is willing to lay down his life to save each one. There is no talk of “cutting his losses” or the kind of “tough love” that lets a rebellious child suffer the consequences of his own actions before there can be any intervention or negotiated return home. God’s unconditional love leaps into action at the first sign of regret or repentance. As Pope Francis has said, “We tire of asking for God’s forgiveness, but God never tires of offering it.” God’s name is Mercy. God cannot do otherwise, for it is God’s very nature to love and forgive.

Today’s Gospel is for anyone responsible for others. This includes parents, teachers, priests and bishops. Anyone entrusted with others who are vulnerable and need guidance has a model in the Good Shepherd. Their office cannot be just control or direction from a distance. A true shepherd goes among the sheep with humility and gentleness until he or she, in Pope Francis’ words, “smells like the sheep.”

When trouble comes, the shepherd does not flee or look to his own interests like the hireling. The Good Shepherd is responsible for protecting the flock from harm. How powerfully this addresses the scandal of child sexual abuse by priests or the enabling by bishops who looked the other way. How much this challenges all Christians to care for society’s neglected poor and outcast members.

We celebrate Easter by praying to be part of the community of the risen Christ. But it is less a comfort zone than a staging area for God’s mission of mercy to the world. Are we ready and willing to be good shepherds ourselves?
Homiletic starters and scriptural reflection points for each day of the month

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

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April 2015

Holy Week (continued)

Wed., April 1: Isa 50:4-9a; Matt 26:14-25
What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you? Why did Judas agree to betray Jesus? Unfortunately, his motives are lost to us. Perhaps he was simply greedy and dishonest, someone who could not resist an opportunity for personal gain. Perhaps Judas thought Jesus was a divinely sent leader, one who would spearhead the overthrow of the Roman government. When that didn’t happen, Judas’ loyalty changed. It’s also possible that Judas never meant for Jesus to die; he may have thought that Jesus was proceeding too slowly and wanted to compel him to act. On this side of the betrayal, we can only speculate about Judas’ reasons for doing what he did. We can also acknowledge that human beings are complex creatures, and given the right circumstances, we too might betray someone we love. Is it I, Lord? Do my actions betray you? JL

Holy Thursday, April 2: 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 Chrism Mass readings)
He took a towel and tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet. In my tradition, today is known as Maundy Thursday. “Maundy” comes from the Latin mandatum, which means “commandment.” On this day we remember Jesus: his compassionate, loving spirit; his words and actions; his tireless efforts to reach people and convince them of God’s steadfast, everlasting love. And we remember the new commandment Jesus gave his disciples: “Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.” We remember the example you set for us, Lord Jesus; help us to follow your way of love and service. JL

Good Friday of the Lord’s Passion, April 3: Isa 52:13–53:12; Heb 4:14-16; 5:7-9; John 18:1–19:42
Bowing his head, he handed over the spirit. The Gospel accounts of this day have led to a multitude of interpretations: sermons, dissertations, novels, hymns, oratorios (Bach’s “St. Matthew Passion”), musicals (“Godspell,” “Jesus Christ Superstar”) and movies (“The Robe,” “The Greatest Story Ever Told”). From the four Gospels have also come 20 centuries of religious art in which painters and sculptors have looked at the cross and seen Jesus not only as a first-century Jewish man but also as a white European, a black African, an Asian sage or a Native American chief. Those writers, composers and artists did what we are doing today: standing in front of the cross, trying to comprehend what happened so many years ago — and trusting that even though we cannot understand, even this is in God’s hands. Be with us in this dark hour, O God. JL

Holy Saturday, April 4: Vigil Readings (see Lectionary); Rom 6:3-11; Mark 16:1-7
When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome brought spices so that they might go and anoint him. Of all the Gospels, Mark’s ending is the most unsatisfying: The women go to the tomb, encounter the angel who tells them Jesus has been raised, and run away in fear and say nothing to anyone. That’s it. End of story. No explanations. No scenes in the garden. No encounters with the risen Jesus. No words of reassurance to frightened disciples. Just fear and silence and a nagging feeling that something is missing. Mark’s ending that isn’t an ending reminds us that the message of resurrection is always unfinished. The end of the story cannot be told because it is still happening, Help us to add our own ending to the neverending story of Christ’s life and love. JL

Octave of Easter

Mon., April 6: Acts 2:14, 22-33; Matt 28:8-15
Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went away quickly from the tomb, fearful yet
Tuesday, April 7: Acts 2:36-41; John 20:11-18
I have seen the Lord. As Mary Magdalene wept outside the empty tomb, two angels in white appeared. Her eyes were opened to recognize Jesus. It seems strange that she didn’t know her beloved teacher by sight. Yet many of us have dark moments when fear and pain completely cloud our vision. We wouldn’t know the Lord if he were standing in front of us. We need a spark, something or someone to help us see what’s right there. While we ourselves might be far from angels, our presence and comfort might be just what another person needs who has lost sight of the Lord. We can open their eyes to the One who is never far off. Help us, Lord, to support one another in our darkness and lead each other to the light of your presence in our lives.

Jesus himself drew near and walked with them. As the disciples walked from Jerusalem to Emmaus, Jesus quietly joined their company, casually listening, questioning, and even challenging their assumptions about what transpired over the previous three days. It wasn’t until they invited him to stay with them and sat down at table together that they recognized him, yet they’d felt something profound throughout their entire encounter. The Lord wants to be near us. He walks beside us and participates in the mundane aspects of our living. We feel his influence even when we aren’t entirely aware of his presence. Imagine how much more joy we can experience when we welcome him as our honored guest and put him at the center of our daily routine. Jesus, our brother and companion, draw near and stay with us.

Why are you troubled? We’ve celebrated the Resurrection, yet perhaps we still take pause. If so, we’re not alone. Even in the presence of the risen Lord, the disciples need further assurance. Why do we still lack trust in God’s promises? Why can’t we open our minds to scripture? Jesus won’t offer his hands and feet for us to touch and see. He already pointed out that he has fulfilled everything written in the law of Moses, the prophets and the psalms. The disciples’ witness and our own study should make this clear. Once, in an Easter homily, the celebrant challenged us with this: “Either you believe or you don’t.” Once you realize that you believe, the rest seems pretty clear. For faith and conviction, we pray.

Friday, April 10: Acts 4:1-12; John 21:1-14
Jesus revealed himself again. Even at Jesus’ third revelation, the disciples have a hard time recognizing him. Only after Jesus guides their successful fishing endeavor does Peter see him and eagerly jump into the sea. It’s easy to see the Lord in our good times, to embrace him and thank him. It’s also easy to drift away, to get so caught up in our daily routine that we don’t acknowledge him until something profound happens. Now we feel the intense joy of Easter, but what about next week, or next month? We need to look for the Lord every day in our travels, in our homes and gatherings and in our work. Lord, help us at all times to realize who you are and what you do for us, we pray.

Saturday, April 11: Acts 4:13-21; Mark 16:9-15
Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature. Evangelization is vital to the church’s mission. We must be bold in spreading the good news. We may feel awkward or unqualified or not know what to say. But the simple truth is that we’re called to be a witness to the world. Even if we aren’t eloquent, we can model virtue and charity. Our work and our personal lives can be examples of God’s unfailing love. If everything we do is performed with honesty, joy, care and affection, we’ll influence those who haven’t welcomed the Lord into their lives, as well as those who need their commitment buoyed or reignited. They’ll all want what we have. Lord, may our words and our deeds draw all closer to you, we pray.

Second Week of Easter

Unless one is born of water and Spirit he cannot enter the Kingdom of God. How many of us celebrate the date of our baptism? Perhaps those baptized as adults may remember, but for those of us who were baptized as infants, the significance of the day is sometimes lost. For most of my life, I took my adoption as a “child of Christ” for granted. Only when I began journeying with adults who consciously chose to be baptized into the faith did I fully understand the gift and responsibility it gave me. I was baptized by water as a child. I am baptized by spirit each time I die to my own agenda and allow the Spirit of Christ to work in me to make his kingdom more tangible for others. O Lord, make me an instrument of your will.

Tuesday, April 14: Acts 4:32-37; John 3:7b-15
The community of believers was of one heart and mind … they had everything in common. Does this sound like any community to which you’ve belonged? (Certainly hasn’t been my experience.) After attending conferences for my RCIA ministry, I had come away from some with a sense of frustration, as presenters spoke of ideals that seemed out of touch with the messy realities of parish life. I later realized that without an understanding of the ideal, we never work to improve our present reality. No matter how low we may set the bar, human nature dictates that few will reach it. Just as Jesus calls us to “enter by the narrow gate,” so, too, does Luke in Acts call us to strive for the ideal, knowing that our human nature will look for compromises. Lord, may our communities never compromise on generosity and compassion.

God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world. My brother relates how he once went to extreme lengths to hide his smoking addiction from his young children. Only after his daughter told him to “stop being so silly,” as she had known for years, did he spend more energy on quitting than hiding his bad habit. Hiding our weaknesses usually drains our energy and dignity. We may fear that exposing our secrets will leave us vulnerable to criticism, but Jesus assures us that we are not loved less than completely because of them. Being ourselves gives us a freedom of spirit that allows us to be more compassionate toward others who are also struggling to become themselves. **Into your hands, O Lord, I offer both my good and broken self. MJ**

**Thurs., April 16: Acts 5:27-33; John 3:31-36**

We gave you strict orders ... to stop teaching in [Jesus’] name. Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching. Where would our Christian faith be today without the courage and tenacity of the early apostles and of the many saints and martyrs who followed? Whenever humanity has exploited its power against the poor and vulnerable, there have arisen people of deep faith who risked their lives and reputation to become the voice of Christ. After all their sacrifices to promote justice and peace, I cringe to see how our faith community’s resources are spent on matters that have no bearing on our basic call to discipleship. Do we have the passion needed to pass on our faith to future generations? **Come, Holy Spirit, and renew our conviction of faith. MJ**

**Fri., April 17: Acts 5:34-42; John 6:1-15**

If it comes from God, you will not be able to destroy them; you may even find yourselves fighting against God. I can’t blame the Pharisees for trying to silence the disciples’ efforts to spread Jesus’ message. They undermined much of what the Pharisees lived and believed to be true concerning the laws of God. Jesus saw how the Pharisees’ loyalty to the letter of the law didn’t imply that they followed the spirit of the law. When holding onto traditions because “we’ve always done it this way” overrides their meaning, calls for reform inevitably arise. I pray that there are still modern-day Gamaliels who have the courage to allow the Spirit of God to direct our search for truth. **Help us, Lord, to trust in your Spirit when discerning our future direction. MJ**

**Sat., April 18: Acts 6:1-7; John 6:16-21**

It had already grown dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. As a mother, I can often put myself into stormy mental circles, worrying about the future of my children, convinced of dire outcomes. Even though logic tells me worrying will not alter their circumstances, like the disciples, I find myself rowing against a wind that prevents me from heading in any useful direction. When I take time to acknowledge Jesus’ presence, however, and place my dilemma in his hands, I can usually feel his presence calm me down — and in those snippets of calm I often discover we’ve already “arrived” at a possible solution. **Calm my mind, O Lord, long enough that my heart may hear you call: “Do not be afraid, it is I.” MJ**

**Third Week of Easter**

**Mon., April 20: Acts 6:8-15; John 6:22-29**

Stephen, filled with grace and power ... From Easter to Pentecost, we get two Gospels a day, as the Acts of the Apostles is considered the “gospel of the Holy Spirit.” Stephen’s trial and martyrdom match Jesus’ persecution at every point except one. Whereas Jesus said only enough to ensure his condemnation, Stephen tells the whole history of Israel’s infidelity, producing the same result: a death sentence. Can I see myself among the accused? How faithful have I been to the Gospel? When Jesus read Isaiah, Luke reports, “The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him” (4:20). Likewise with Stephen: “All those who sat in the Sanhedrin looked intently at him and saw that his face was like that of an angel.” Let us keep looking! **Jesus, show me your face in everyone I see. MD**

**Tues., April 21: Acts 7:51–8:1a; John 6:30-35**

He gave them bread from heaven to eat. How hard does one’s heart have to be to witness the stoning of Stephen and “consent” to it, as Saul did? When Stephen sees “the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God,” his murderers scream and “cover their ears.” How have I dealt with my own taste for violence? Do I look with indifference at the death of the innocent, getting plenty of practice from every “cutting-edge” TV series or movie? I live in Honduras, with 20 murders a day because the United States gobbles up the drugs that flow through here. No wonder John devotes his longest chapter to “the Bread of Life,” Jesus, our only hope for true and eternal nourishment. **Jesus, fill me with your life! MD**

**Wed., April 22: Acts 8:1b-8; John 6:35-40**

This is the will of the One who sent me, that I should not lose anything of what he gave me. Stephen’s death ignites a persecution, with Saul carrying the torch, “entering house after house and dragging out men and women.” Meanwhile, Philip, a deacon like Stephen, converts Samaria, which was formerly so hostile to Jesus that he forbade his missionaries to go there during his lifetime. Eventually, “the will of God” rescues even Saul, who, as Paul, knows that “love is patient; love is kind; it does not insist on its own way” (1 Cor 13). There’s only one way, the Bread of Life, multiplied in every believer, weak as we may be: “Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and I will not reject anyone.” **Come and see the works of God! MD**

**Thurs., April 23: Acts 8:26-40; John 6:44-51**

The bread that I will give is my Flesh for the life of the world. You can hardly blame the folks in Capernaum for not getting exactly how they’re supposed to “feed” on Jesus’ flesh. Until the Last Supper, no one could know how literally Jesus meant the manna/bread-of-life connection: bread that is his very body. There’s always something new to learn. When the Synod on the Family initially welcomed the gifts of homosexuals, participants might have been thinking of the Ethiopian eunuch — an outsider to many, perhaps, but the precise target of God’s grace, focused through the deacon Philip. All this lovely
soul wants is to know the scriptures, which means, as Philip explains, to know Jesus. Do I welcome those God sends to me? Jesus, let everyone teach me of your love. MD

I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Paul’s conversion is the turning point in Acts. The perfect Jew becomes the Apostle to the Gentiles, throwing the law under the bus, lifting every believer up on “one faith.” Jesus raises the stakes, too, in today’s Gospel. The manna/bread template is grounded in Moses and the desert, but where does “drink my Blood” find any Old Testament indicator? The law forbade even touching blood! Paul must have had his newfound faith severely tested when Ananias found him in Straight Street and prepared him for baptism and first Communion. I’m not so sure even today I appreciate what I learned from the catechism about the Eucharist: “Body and Blood, soul and divinity.” We can always use another Damascus moment. Jesus, give me this Bread of Life forever. MD

Sat., April 25: 1 Peter 5:5b-14; Mark 16:15-20
Mark, evangelist
The chosen one … sends you greeting, as does Mark, my son. Tradition says Mark wrote his Gospel as he heard it from Peter. The account is as unvarnished as it is urgent, jumping from “immediately” to “immediately,” like a stone skipping across a river. He is impatient with the apostles’ obtuseness; he has no time for long discourses; he refuses to tone down Jesus’ hand-to-hand combat with the devil. The Gospel reading today is not by Mark at all, but a sort of copy-and-paste from a later editor to round off Mark’s account. Some scholars speculate that the Gospel breaks off so abruptly because Mark was snapped up by that “roaring lion” Peter warns about. What moves me to write “my” Gospel? Make me run to you, O Lord, never to count the cost. MD

Fourth Week of Easter

What God has made clean, you are not to call profane. A thorny dilemma facing the early Christian movement was what to do with the gentiles. Did Jesus come to them, too? Should they be required to follow Jewish law and customs before being accepted into this new community? Peter’s dream of the unclean animals comes from the Jewish purity regulations, which declared certain animals (and certain people) to be unclean, outcast, not accepted into the community. Gentiles, Samaritans, anyone with a disease or disability — all were considered unclean. We may not use the same words, but we still make distinctions between who is “in” and who is “out.” Lord, forgive us when we decide whom you love. JL

My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me. Even though I live in the country, the only sheep I see are at the county fair and on Christmas cards. But sheep and shepherds turn up regularly in scripture, from Psalm 23 to the parable of the lost sheep. In this 10th chapter of John’s Gospel, we learn that Jesus is the Good Shepherd. And what is the main characteristic of this Good Shepherd? He cares. He cares for all the sheep in his flock. No matter how far we may stray, this shepherd will search for us, call us by name and welcome us home. Help us to recognize your voice, Lord. JL

Catherine of Siena, virgin and doctor of the church
Whoever … does not accept my words [will be judged by that] word. For some, there is a word within that must be proclaimed, no matter the cost. Consider St. Catherine — a woman born of a humble family who dared to speak truth to power. Imagine her courage, her passion as she wrote Gregory XI, urging him to re-establish the papacy in Rome: “Since [Christ] has given you authority and you have accepted it, you ought to be using the power and strength that is yours.” Those entrusted with a privileged education, Gospel insights and influence are chosen by God to make a difference, and woes to those who don’t. Catherine continues: “Cursed be you, for time and power were entrusted to you and you did not use them!” What might give us hope is not only that there are great ones who tell the truth, but that these great ones are recognized, even honored, by the very ones they were sent to reform. If that’s not the work of the Holy Spirit, what is? Come, Holy Spirit! PBS

No slave is greater than his master. Jesus washed feet, served at table, healed the sick, favored the poor, taught all who would listen. Jesus told the truth, knowing that the truth would lead to his death. This is who Jesus was. Jesus didn’t choose grand or comfortable or safe. I wish he did because then I could, and I like grand, comfortable and safe. But such a life without Jesus is an empty vessel, a whitened sepulcher, a darned boring existence. There is a lot of good company among those who choose Jesus. There’s joy and purpose and excitement every day. It’s not all serious business. But there is the cross for each disciple. Let us pray for the courage to pray, “Jesus, help us be like you.” PBS

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