



Pondering the Word...

THE ANAWIM WAY

Daily Liturgical Meditations

Holy Thursday to Pentecost

April 17 to June 7, 2025

Cycle C - Year 1

Scripture Texts: Excerpts from the *Lectionary for Mass for Use in the Dioceses of the United States of America, second typical edition* © 2001, 1998, 1997, 1986, 1970
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What is the Anawim Spirituality?

Our spirituality has three essential characteristics:

Liturgical

The Liturgy is the source of our formation. Daily, we draw inspiration from the readings and prayers of the Liturgy, which we understand to be the ponderings of Mary's heart. For this reason, we honor Mary under the title of Our Lady of the Liturgical Life.

Eucharistic

Jesus in the Eucharist is the center of our spirituality. By faithful participation in Holy Mass and frequent Eucharistic Adoration, we are empowered by the Presence of Jesus to go forth to serve the people of God in all the circumstances of life.

Marian

We entrust ourselves to Mary, the mother and model of every Christian. She continually forms us in her spirit of humility, compassion and reconciling love, transforming us into the likeness of Jesus. She shares with us her spiritual motherhood as we are called to bring forth the life of Jesus in others.

If you would like to explore the Anawim Community further, we invite you to contact us.

The Easter Triduum

***“I give you a new commandment:
love one another as I have loved you.”***

John 13:34

Theme for the Week

Our forty-day journey has brought us to the holiest days of the year, the Sacred Easter Triduum. To enter eternal glory, we must follow Jesus in his Death and Resurrection. By dying Jesus reveals his love for us. We express our love for him by dying to ourselves and loving one another.

The Easter Triduum

Pastoral Note: The document of Pope St. Paul VI, “General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar,” gives a good summary of the meaning of the *Easter Triduum* (also known as the *Paschal Triduum*):

Christ redeemed us all and gave perfect glory to God principally through his paschal mystery: dying he destroyed our death and rising he restored our life. Therefore the Easter Triduum of the passion and resurrection of Christ is the culmination of the entire liturgical year. Thus the solemnity of Easter has the same kind of preeminence in the liturgical year that Sunday has in the week.

The Easter Triduum begins with the evening Mass of the Lord’s Supper [Holy Thursday], reaches its high point in the Easter Vigil [Saturday evening], and closes with evening prayer on Easter Sunday (#18-19).

The word “triduum” means three days. According to our usual way of counting, from Thursday to Sunday is *four* days. However, the days of the Easter Triduum are counted according to the Jewish tradition, where the new day begins, not at midnight, but at sunset. From sunset Thursday evening to sunset Sunday evening is *three* days. Thus, the first day extends from the Last Supper of the Lord to his burial in the tomb, and includes two major liturgies. The second day is all spent “in the tomb”; it is a day of rest. The third day celebrates the Resurrection, especially in the Easter Vigil, the “mother of all vigils,” but also including all the Masses of Easter Sunday.

April 17, Holy Thursday
Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper



First Reading: Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, “This month shall stand at the head of your calendar; you shall reckon it the first month of the year. Tell the whole community of Israel: On the tenth of this month every one of your families must procure for itself a lamb, one apiece for each household. If a family is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join the nearest household in procuring one and shall share in the lamb in proportion to the number of persons who partake of it. The lamb must be a year-old male and without blemish. You may take it from either the sheep or the goats. You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, and then, with the whole assembly of Israel present, it shall be slaughtered during the evening twilight. They shall take some of its blood and apply it to the two doorposts and the lintel of every house in which they partake of the lamb. That same night they shall eat its roasted flesh with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.

“This is how you are to eat it: with your loins girt, sandals on your feet and your staff in hand, you shall eat like those who are in flight. It is the Passover of the LORD. For on this same night I will go through Egypt, striking down every firstborn of the land, both man and beast, and executing judgment on all the gods of Egypt—I, the LORD! But the blood will mark the houses where you are. Seeing the blood, I will pass over you; thus, when I strike the land of Egypt, no destructive blow will come upon you.

“This day shall be a memorial feast for you, which all your generations shall celebrate with pilgrimage to the LORD, as a perpetual institution.”



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 116:12-13, 15-16bc, 17-18

Our blessing-cup is a communion with the Blood of Christ.

How shall I make a return to the LORD
for all the good he has done for me?

The cup of salvation I will take up,
and I will call upon the name of the LORD.

R. Our blessing-cup is a communion with the Blood of Christ.

Precious in the eyes of the LORD
is the death of his faithful ones.

I am your servant, the son of your handmaid;
you have loosed my bonds.

R. Our blessing-cup is a communion with the Blood of Christ.

To you will I offer sacrifice of thanksgiving,
and I will call upon the name of the LORD.
My vows to the LORD I will pay
in the presence of all his people.

R. Our blessing-cup is a communion with the Blood of Christ.



Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Brothers and sisters: I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes.

Gospel Acclamation: John 13:34

I give you a new commandment, says the Lord: love one another as I have loved you.



Gospel: John 13:1-15

Before the feast of Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father. He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end. The devil had already induced Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot, to hand him over. So, during supper, fully aware that the Father had put everything into his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God, he rose from supper and took off his outer garments. He took a towel and tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and dry them with the towel around his waist. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Master, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing, you do not understand now, but you will understand later." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "Unless I wash you, you will have no inheritance with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Master, then not only my feet, but my hands and head as well." Jesus said to him, "Whoever has bathed has no need except to have his feet washed, for he is clean all over; so you are clean, but not all." For he knew who would betray him; for this reason, he said, "Not all of you are clean."

So when he had washed their feet and put his garments back on and reclined at table again, he said to them, "Do you realize what I have done for you? You call me 'teacher' and 'master,' and rightly so, for

indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do."



Meditation:

The word that most meaningfully describes the very essence of God is *LOVE*. The beloved Apostle St. John tells us that "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8). In his Gospel account, we read that "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). The Son of God, Jesus Christ, shows us what the love of God, which constitutes his very being, is like. It is therefore the mystery of God's supreme act of love for us that we celebrate and relive with a greater spiritual intensity during the Easter Triduum.

The unveiling of the most perfect act of love by the One who is Love starts with the Evening Mass of the Last Supper. Today we commemorate the institution of the Sacrament of God's perfect love, the most Holy Eucharist, which is the sacramental expression of the *Paschal Mystery* – the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of our Lord. The Gospel account places us on the eve of Jesus' Passion. His "hour" has now come, the time for him to accomplish the great work of salvation. He will give new life to the world through his complete sacrifice, thus revealing his supreme love.

St. John tells us that Jesus "loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end." We can understand the "end" (*telos* in Greek) to mean the end of his mortal life. His love goes to the greatest extent possible when he gives his life to the point of death. "End" can also mean "goal." Jesus reaches the goal of his whole life: to bring the Father's work of salvation to completion by offering perfect love on the Cross.

On the night before he died, our Lord Jesus Christ instituted the Holy Eucharist as the memorial of his Passion and Death. Unlike the other Gospels, the Gospel according to John does not give us an account of the institution of the Holy Eucharist at the Last Supper. There is, however, another "institution narrative" of the Holy Eucharist found in St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. In today's second reading, Paul presents us with this vitally important event of our salvation history: "I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord

Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread. . . .” St. Paul adds a very significant insight which is at the core of our Eucharistic faith: “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes.” As Catholics, we recognize the Eucharistic celebration as essentially a sacramental re-presentation of the life-giving Death of our Lord on the Cross, the supreme expression of his love for us.

The reality of the Eucharist as a sacramental expression of our Lord’s saving Death was strongly prefigured in the event of the Passover meal, described in today’s first reading. The center of the observance of Passover is the sacrifice and the eating of an unblemished lamb. God instructed the Israelites to mark their houses with the blood of the Passover lamb. “Seeing the blood, I will pass over you.” This can rightly be read as well: *seeing the blood, I will save you!* When we refer to Jesus as the “Lamb of God,” we are recalling this ancient event, and giving thanks that God has given us the true Lamb by whose Blood we are saved.

What did the angel see that was so precious that it made him “pass over” the houses of the Jews? When the Fathers of the Church pondered this question, they answered that he saw the Blood of Christ; he saw the Eucharist! St. Melito of Sardis, a second-century bishop, wrote in his Easter homily: “O new and inexpressible mystery! The slaying of the lamb became the salvation of Israel; the death of the lamb became the life of the people, and its blood frightened the angel. Angel, answer me: what was it that filled you with fear: the slaying of the lamb or the life of the Lord? The lamb’s death or the Lord’s life? The lamb’s blood or the Lord’s Spirit? What you feared is clear: you saw the mystery of the Lord fulfilled in the lamb, the life of the Lord in the slaying of the lamb, the figure of the Lord in the death of the lamb, and for this you did not destroy Israel.”

If the prefiguration of Christ’s sacrifice had such power to bring salvation, what must be the power of the reality? The true paschal Lamb is Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Cor 5:7). On the night before his Death, at the Jewish feast of Passover, he instituted the new Christian Passover. The Holy Eucharist is the memorial of the saving Death which would take place the following day. The Eucharist is truly the Sacrament of Christ’s

Real Presence. “For in the Blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch” (CCC 1324).

St. John, in lieu of a description of the institution of the Eucharist, presents to us Jesus’ washing of the feet of his Apostles. This moving and highly symbolic action is also deeply Eucharistic, for in it Christ displays his Passion in anticipation. In the washing of the feet, he humbles himself, taking the form of a slave and becoming obedient to death (cf. Phil 2:7-8). Whenever we participate in the Eucharist, when we “eat this bread and drink this chalice,” we are proclaiming the Death of the Lord until he comes. We are proclaiming our commitment to joining him in self-emptying love and humble service of our brothers and sisters.

How can I give thanks to God for the gift of his life in the Eucharist? In what ways do I express self-emptying love and humble service to my brothers and sisters? How do I manifest my love to those who make my life uncomfortable?

Mary, help me to bear witness before others to the love Christ has for me.

Notes

April 18, Friday of the Passion of the Lord (Good Friday)



First Reading: Isaiah 52:13–53:12

See, my servant shall prosper,
he shall be raised high and greatly exalted.

Even as many were amazed at him—
so marred was his look beyond human semblance
and his appearance beyond that of the sons of man—
so shall he startle many nations,
because of him kings shall stand speechless;
for those who have not been told shall see,
those who have not heard shall ponder it.

Who would believe what we have heard?
To whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?
He grew up like a sapling before him,
like a shoot from the parched earth;
there was in him no stately bearing to make us look at him,
nor appearance that would attract us to him.
He was spurned and avoided by people,
a man of suffering, accustomed to infirmity,
one of those from whom people hide their faces,
spurned, and we held him in no esteem.

Yet it was our infirmities that he bore,
our sufferings that he endured,
while we thought of him as stricken,
as one smitten by God and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our offenses,
crushed for our sins;
upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole,
by his stripes we were healed.
We had all gone astray like sheep,
each following his own way;
but the LORD laid upon him
the guilt of us all.

Though he was harshly treated, he submitted
and opened not his mouth;
like a lamb led to the slaughter
or a sheep before the shearers,
he was silent and opened not his mouth.

Oppressed and condemned, he was taken away,
and who would have thought any more of his destiny?
When he was cut off from the land of the living,
and smitten for the sin of his people,
a grave was assigned him among the wicked
and a burial place with evildoers,
though he had done no wrong
nor spoken any falsehood.
But the LORD was pleased
to crush him in infirmity.

If he gives his life as an offering for sin,
he shall see his descendants in a long life,
and the will of the LORD shall be accomplished through him.

Because of his affliction
he shall see the light in fullness of days;
through his suffering, my servant shall justify many,
and their guilt he shall bear.
Therefore I will give him his portion among the great,
and he shall divide the spoils with the mighty,
because he surrendered himself to death
and was counted among the wicked;
and he shall take away the sins of many,
and win pardon for their offenses.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 31:2, 6, 12-13, 15-16, 17, 25
Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.

In you, O LORD, I take refuge;
let me never be put to shame.

In your justice rescue me.

In your hands I commend my spirit;
you will redeem me, O LORD, O faithful God.

R. Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.

For all my foes I am an object of reproach,
a laughingstock to my neighbors, and a dread to my friends;
they who see me abroad flee from me.

I am forgotten like the unremembered dead;
I am like a dish that is broken.

R. Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.

But my trust is in you, O LORD;

I say, "You are my God.

In your hands is my destiny; rescue me

from the clutches of my enemies and my persecutors."

R. Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.

Let your face shine upon your servant;

save me in your kindness.

Take courage and be stouthearted,

all you who hope in the LORD.

R. Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.



Second Reading: Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9

Brothers and sisters: Since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin. So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help.

In the days when Christ was in the flesh, he offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered; and when he was made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.

Gospel Acclamation: Philippians 2:8-9

Christ became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every other name.



Gospel: John 18:1–19:42

The Passion narratives are proclaimed in full so that all see vividly the love of Christ for each person. In light of this, the crimes during the Passion of Christ cannot be attributed, in either preaching or catechesis, indiscriminately to all Jews of that time, nor to Jews today. The Jewish people should not be referred to as though rejected or cursed, as if this view followed from Scripture. The Church ever keeps in mind that Jesus, his mother Mary, and the Apostles all were Jewish. As the Church has always held, Christ freely suffered his Passion and Death because of the sins of all, that all might be saved. (USCCB)

Jesus went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to where there was a garden, into which he and his disciples entered. Judas his betrayer also knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his

disciples. So Judas got a band of soldiers and guards from the chief priests and the Pharisees and went there with lanterns, torches, and weapons. Jesus, knowing everything that was going to happen to him, went out and said to them, "Whom are you looking for?" They answered him, "Jesus the Nazorean." He said to them, "I AM." Judas his betrayer was also with them. When he said to them, "I AM," they turned away and fell to the ground. So he again asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" They said, "Jesus the Nazorean." Jesus answered, "I told you that I AM. So if you are looking for me, let these men go." This was to fulfill what he had said, "I have not lost any of those you gave me." Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into its scabbard. Shall I not drink the cup that the Father gave me?"

So the band of soldiers, the tribune, and the Jewish guards seized Jesus, bound him, and brought him to Annas first. He was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. It was Caiaphas who had counseled the Jews that it was better that one man should die rather than the people.

Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Now the other disciple was known to the high priest, and he entered the courtyard of the high priest with Jesus. But Peter stood at the gate outside. So the other disciple, the acquaintance of the high priest, went out and spoke to the gatekeeper and brought Peter in. Then the maid who was the gatekeeper said to Peter, "You are not one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." Now the slaves and the guards were standing around a charcoal fire that they had made, because it was cold, and were warming themselves. Peter was also standing there keeping warm.

The high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his doctrine. Jesus answered him, "I have spoken publicly to the world. I have always taught in a synagogue or in the temple area where all the Jews gather, and in secret I have said nothing. Why ask me? Ask those who heard me what I said to them. They know what I said." When he had said this, one of the temple guards standing there struck Jesus and said, "Is this the way you answer the high priest?" Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong; but if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?" Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

Now Simon Peter was standing there keeping warm. And they said to him, "You are not one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not." One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the one whose ear Peter had cut off, said, "Didn't I see you in the garden with him?" Again Peter denied it. And immediately the cock crowed.

Then they brought Jesus from Caiaphas to the praetorium. It was morning. And they themselves did not enter the praetorium, in order not to be defiled so that they could eat the Passover. So Pilate came out to them and said, "What charge do you bring against this man?" They answered and said to him, "If he were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you." At this, Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves, and judge him according to your law." The Jews answered him, "We do not have the right to execute anyone," in order that the word of Jesus might be fulfilled that he said indicating the kind of death he would die. So Pilate went back into the praetorium and summoned Jesus and said to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you say this on your own or have others told you about me?" Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests handed you over to me. What have you done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom did belong to this world, my attendants would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not here." So Pilate said to him, "Then you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say I am a king. For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." Pilate said to him, "What is truth?"

When he had said this, he again went out to the Jews and said to them, "I find no guilt in him. But you have a custom that I release one prisoner to you at Passover. Do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?" They cried out again, "Not this one but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a revolutionary.

Then Pilate took Jesus and had him scourged. And the soldiers wove a crown out of thorns and placed it on his head, and clothed him in a purple cloak, and they came to him and said, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they struck him repeatedly. Once more Pilate went out and said to them, "Look, I am bringing him out to you, so that you may know that I find no guilt in him." So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple cloak. And he said to them, "Behold, the man!" When the chief priests and the guards saw him they cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and

crucify him. I find no guilt in him.” The Jews answered, “We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God.” Now when Pilate heard this statement, he became even more afraid, and went back into the praetorium and said to Jesus, “Where are you from?” Jesus did not answer him. So Pilate said to him, “Do you not speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you and I have power to crucify you?” Jesus answered him, “You would have no power over me if it had not been given to you from above. For this reason the one who handed me over to you has the greater sin.” Consequently, Pilate tried to release him; but the Jews cried out, “If you release him, you are not a Friend of Caesar. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar.”

When Pilate heard these words he brought Jesus out and seated him on the judge’s bench in the place called Stone Pavement, in Hebrew, Gabbatha. It was preparation day for Passover, and it was about noon. And he said to the Jews, “Behold, your king!” They cried out, “Take him away, take him away! Crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Shall I crucify your king?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but Caesar.” Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.

So they took Jesus, and, carrying the cross himself, he went out to what is called the Place of the Skull, in Hebrew, Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus in the middle. Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, “Jesus the Nazorean, the King of the Jews.” Now many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, “Do not write ‘The King of the Jews,’ but that he said, ‘I am the King of the Jews.’” Pilate answered, “What I have written, I have written.”

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four shares, a share for each soldier. They also took his tunic, but the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top down. So they said to one another, “Let’s not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it will be,” in order that the passage of Scripture might be fulfilled that says:

*They divided my garments among them,
and for my vesture they cast lots.*

This is what the soldiers did. Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he

loved he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son.” Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.

After this, aware that everything was now finished, in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I thirst.” There was a vessel filled with common wine. So they put a sponge soaked in wine on a sprig of hyssop and put it up to his mouth. When Jesus had taken the wine, he said, “It is finished.” And bowing his head, he handed over the spirit.

Here all kneel and pause for a short time.

Now since it was preparation day, in order that the bodies might not remain on the cross on the sabbath, for the sabbath day of that week was a solemn one, the Jews asked Pilate that their legs be broken and that they be taken down. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and then of the other one who was crucified with Jesus. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs, but one soldier thrust his lance into his side, and immediately blood and water flowed out. An eyewitness has testified, and his testimony is true; he knows that he is speaking the truth, so that you also may come to believe. For this happened so that the Scripture passage might be fulfilled:

Not a bone of it will be broken.

And again another passage says:

They will look upon him whom they have pierced.

After this, Joseph of Arimathea, secretly a disciple of Jesus for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate if he could remove the body of Jesus. And Pilate permitted it. So he came and took his body. Nicodemus, the one who had first come to him at night, also came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes weighing about one hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and bound it with burial cloths along with the spices, according to the Jewish burial custom. Now in the place where he had been crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had yet been buried. So they laid Jesus there because of the Jewish preparation day; for the tomb was close by.



Meditation:

“Yet it was our infirmities that he bore, / our sufferings that he endured.... the LORD laid upon him / the guilt of us all.” Here is the great mystery that we are pondering today, the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ and his Death for our sake. What was instituted sacramentally yesterday is fully revealed today as our Lord offers his

Body and sheds his Blood on the Cross. The symbolic gesture of foot washing is fulfilled as he humbles himself to death in order to bear our sufferings and carry the guilt of our sins.

On Good Friday we read St. John's account of the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is not folklore; it is a historical event that really took place. This is why St. John writes: "An eyewitness has testified, and his testimony is true; he knows that he is speaking the truth, so that you also may come to believe. For this happened so that the Scripture passage might be fulfilled...."

We see an example of Scriptural fulfillment when we read today's first reading, a prophecy of Isaiah, in light of the Passion of Jesus Christ. Isaiah foretells the terrible experience of a man whom the Lord calls "my servant." This suffering servant is "smitten by God and afflicted," "pierced for our offenses, / crushed for our sins." He is so disfigured, his body is so bruised, bleeding profusely from so many wounds, that the sight of him is appalling. Yet he does not open his mouth, like a lamb led to the slaughter. This vivid description of the "servant" is fulfilled in the Passion and Death of Jesus Christ, "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world."

The eyewitness testimony of St. John confirms the following: that in Jesus Christ God deals with the terrible reality of sin and its effects. Sin blocks the way to eternal life in Heaven with God; it can lead one to eternal punishment. But God does not want us to suffer eternal death. He so loves us that he takes upon himself the whole burden of sin and death. The most powerful demonstration of God's love is that Jesus Christ died for us that we may have life. His Death on the Cross clears the way to Heaven and makes it possible for us to live in union with God. The Cross that we venerate today is hence a symbol of love, life, and hope. In today's Liturgy we kiss the Cross to honor, acknowledge, and show gratitude for what Christ has done for us.

In today's selection from the Letter to the Hebrews, we read that although Jesus was the Son of God, "he learned obedience from what he suffered; and when he was made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him." From the Cross, new life comes forth. On the Cross, Jesus becomes the Source of life for us. We are therefore convinced that the Passion and Death of Jesus – though he

suffered extremely and excruciatingly – is nevertheless not a negative thing but rather a glorious victory. We honor his saving Death as the perfect expression of divine love. It is the source of life, strength, and hope. It is also the path that we ourselves are called to take.

Hence, what we ponder today with the greatest spiritual intensity, recollection, and interior silence is: *What a great act of love, that God in Christ suffered and died for me that I may have life!* As he stretches his arms on the Cross, Christ calls to us: “Come to me, all you who labor and are overburdened, and I will give you rest” (Mt 11:28). This is what his cry, “I thirst,” means. He thirsts for us to come to him. He wants to give us rest.

Jesus invites us to turn to him every time we are burdened: when we suffer from fears and anxieties – he carried these for us during his agony in the garden of Gethsemane; when we experience loneliness – he carried this for us when he was abandoned and cried on our behalf; when we face annoying injustice, gossip, unfair judgment, humiliation, psychological and physical pains – he encountered all these challenges and carried them all for us.

We may be encountering unspeakable interior and exterior sufferings, but his Passion is our life and our strength. “It was our infirmities that he bore, / our sufferings that he endured...” Out of his great love, he suffered and died for us. It is only right that today we express our love and deep gratitude to him.

What does my sin have to do with the Passion of Jesus? In what ways do I honor, acknowledge, and show gratitude that Christ died so that I may live? Why do I find it difficult to come before the Lord with all my faults and weaknesses and accept his love and forgiveness?

Mary, be with me as I kneel before Jesus on the Cross today.

Pastoral Note: The Divine Mercy Novena

On Good Friday, we “look upon him whom we have pierced” (cf. Jn 19:37). We venerate the wound in Jesus’ Sacred Heart from which Blood and Water gushed forth as a fountain of life and mercy for the whole world. This sacred fountain is symbolized in the image of the Divine Mercy by rays of red and white light streaming from Jesus’ Heart.

Therefore, in these holy days during which the Liturgy celebrates the overflowing gift of new life in Christ, a particularly fitting devotion is the *Novena to the Divine Mercy*, taught by the Lord to St. Faustina. The Novena begins today, Good Friday, and extends up to the Saturday before the Second Sunday of Easter, which is also Divine Mercy Sunday.



Meditation:

Today we go in spirit to the tomb of the dead Jesus Christ. We are accompanied by his sorrowful Mother. It is a day for silent prayer and interior recollection, a day to ponder the mystery of our Lord's Death and his descent to the realm of the dead.

Jesus' earthly mission is clearly finished. But what has he accomplished? It looks to almost everyone like he has died in failure. Instead of ushering in the glorious Kingdom of God, he has been painfully crucified by the inglorious kingdom of man. If we look no further than the appearance of the huge stone, sealed by the Roman guards, we will be left with nothing but sorrow and disappointment, like the downcast disciples walking away to Emmaus: "We were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel" (Lk 24:21). *We were hoping, but not anymore.* Death puts an end to hope. *We were hoping, but now it's too late.*

At this tomb, however, the finality of death gives way to something more powerful, divine love. Jesus the man is dead, but Jesus the Word is also alive. He is Life. Wherever he goes, he brings life, even when he goes to the realm of those long dead. He joins them in death in order to offer them new life. Thus, the author of *The Imitation of Christ* says to the Lord, "Where You are there is Heaven, and where You are not are death and hell" (59). In his descent to the dead, Christ grants them access to Heaven.

We cannot see any of this as we gaze at the tomb. This is often our difficulty when we meet with heavy trials in life, when we are "mourning and weeping in this valley of tears." We simply cannot see the power of divine love or the victory of Christ over death. We are too overwhelmed with contradiction and sorrow. Mary our Mother, however, can see what we cannot. She whose faith surpasses ours is our sure support in the face of death.

At the tomb, Mary can recall the words that the angel said about Jesus at the Annunciation: "He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his

Kingdom there will be no end” (Lk 1:32-33). At this moment there is no evidence that what the angel said back then was true. It seems to be utterly contradicted by all that has recently taken place. It seems impossible for Jesus to rule forever in a kingdom without end. But because of her faith, Mary knows that *nothing is impossible for God*. Therefore, though she is sorrowful, she is not overwhelmed at the tomb. In the darkest moments, she clings to the light of God’s word, which she treasures in her heart.

This is the way Mary teaches her children. She holds us close to her heart so that we may not give in to despair. She shows us how to trust in the Lord – and even to rejoice – through every trial. Even before we see the risen Lord, whom we will welcome with joy tomorrow morning, we can already rejoice in his victory because he allows us to share in it by faith.

What are my fears and my hopes when I face the contradiction of death? How does Mary’s faith support me in my darkest moments? In my personal “tomb experiences,” how do I persevere in faith and hope?

Sorrowful Mother Mary, give me the strength to remain with you at the Tomb of your Son.

Notes

***The Resurrection of the Lord
and
the Octave of Easter***

***Christ, our Paschal Lamb, has been sacrificed;
let us then feast with joy in the Lord. Alleluia!***

cf. 1 Corinthians 5:7b-8a

Theme for the Week

Jesus is risen! Alleluia! He is alive forever in glory and has opened the way for us to live forever in him. Let us open our hearts to the Easter mystery, that we may experience the fullness of life and proclaim it to the world.

***The Risen Lord Jesus Alone Can Roll Away the Stones
that Block the Path to Eternal Life***
A Spiritual Reflection by Pope Francis

Today throughout the world there resounds the message proclaimed two thousand years ago from Jerusalem: “Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified, has been raised!” (*Mk* 16:6).

The Church relives the amazement of the women who went to the tomb at dawn on the first day of the week. The tomb of Jesus had been sealed with a great stone. Today too, great stones, heavy stones, block the hopes of humanity: the stone of war, the stone of humanitarian crises, the stone of human rights violations, the stone of human trafficking, and other stones as well. Like the women disciples of Jesus, we ask one another: “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” (cf. *Mk* 16:3).

This is the amazing discovery of that Easter morning: the stone, the immense stone, was rolled away. The astonishment of the women is our astonishment as well: the tomb of Jesus is open and it is empty! From this, everything begins anew! A new path leads through that empty tomb: the path that none of us, but God alone, could open: the path of life in the midst of death, the path of peace in the midst of war, the path of reconciliation in the midst of hatred, the path of fraternity in the midst of hostility.

Brothers and sisters, Jesus Christ is risen! He alone has the power to roll away the stones that block the path to life. He, the Living One, is himself that path. He is the Way: the way that leads to life, the way of peace, reconciliation, and fraternity. He opens that path, humanly impossible, because he alone takes away the sin of the world and forgives us our sins. For without God’s forgiveness, that stone cannot be removed. Without the forgiveness of sins, there is no overcoming the barriers of prejudice, mutual recrimination, the presumption that we are always right and others wrong. Only the risen Christ, by granting us the forgiveness of our sins, opens the way for a renewed world.

Jesus alone opens up before us the doors of life, those doors that we continually shut with the wars spreading throughout the world. Today we want, first and foremost, to turn our eyes to the Holy City of

Jerusalem, that witnessed the mystery of the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus, and to all the Christian communities of the Holy Land.

My thoughts go especially to the victims of the many conflicts worldwide, beginning with those in Israel and Palestine, and in Ukraine. May the risen Christ open a path of peace for the war-torn peoples of those regions. In calling for respect for the principles of international law, I express my hope for a general exchange of all prisoners between Russia and Ukraine: all for the sake of all!

I appeal once again that access to humanitarian aid be ensured to Gaza, and call once more for the prompt release of the hostages seized on 7 October last and for an immediate cease-fire in the Gaza Strip.

Let us not allow the current hostilities to continue to have grave repercussions on the civil population, by now at the limit of its endurance, and above all on the children. How much suffering we see in the eyes of the children: the children in those lands at war have forgotten how to smile! With those eyes, they ask us: Why? Why all this death? Why all this destruction? War is always an absurdity; war is always a defeat! Let us not allow the strengthening winds of war to blow on Europe and the Mediterranean. Let us not yield to the logic of weapons and rearming. Peace is never made with arms, but with outstretched hands and open hearts.

Brothers and sisters, let us not forget Syria, which for thirteen years has suffered from the effects of a long and devastating war. So many deaths and disappearances, so much poverty and destruction, call for a response on the part of everyone, and of the international community.

My thoughts turn today in a special way to Lebanon, which has for some time experienced institutional impasse and a deepening economic and social crisis, now aggravated by the hostilities on its border with Israel. May the Risen Lord console the beloved Lebanese people and sustain the entire country in its vocation to be a land of encounter, coexistence, and pluralism.

I also think in particular of the region of the Western Balkans, where significant steps are being taken towards integration in the

European project. May ethnic, cultural, and confessional differences not be a cause of division, but rather a source of enrichment for all of Europe and for the world as a whole.

I likewise encourage the discussions taking place between Armenia and Azerbaijan, so that, with the support of the international community, they can pursue dialogue, assist the displaced, respect the places of worship of the various religious confessions, and arrive as soon as possible at a definitive peace agreement.

May the risen Christ open a path of hope to all those who in other parts of the world are suffering from violence, conflict, food insecurity, and the effects of climate change. May the Lord grant consolation to the victims of terrorism in all its forms. Let us pray for all those who have lost their lives and implore the repentance and conversion of the perpetrators of those crimes.

May the risen Lord assist the Haitian people, so that there can soon be an end to the acts of violence, devastation, and bloodshed in that country, and that it can advance on the path to democracy and fraternity. May Christ grant consolation and strength to the Rohingya, beset by a grave humanitarian crisis, and open a path to reconciliation in Myanmar, torn for years now by internal conflicts, so that every logic of violence may be definitively abandoned.

May the Lord open paths of peace on the African continent, especially for the suffering peoples in Sudan and in the entire region of the Sahel, in the Horn of Africa, in the region of Kivu in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in the province of Capo Delgado in Mozambique, and bring an end to the prolonged situation of drought which affects vast areas and provokes famine and hunger.

May the Risen One make the light of his face shine upon migrants and on all those who are passing through a period of economic difficulty, and offer them consolation and hope in their moment of need. May Christ guide all persons of good will to unite themselves in solidarity, in order to address together the many challenges which loom over the poorest families in their search for a better life and happiness.

On this day when we celebrate the life given us in the Resurrection of the Son, let us remember the infinite love of God for each of us: a love that overcomes every limit and every weakness. And yet how much the precious gift of life is despised! How many children cannot even be born? How many die of hunger and are deprived of essential care or are victims of abuse and violence? How many lives are made objects of trafficking for the increasing commerce in human beings?

Brothers and sisters, on the day when Christ has set us free from the slavery of death, I appeal to all who have political responsibilities to spare no efforts in combatting the scourge of human trafficking, by working tirelessly to dismantle the networks of exploitation and to bring freedom to those who are their victims. May the Lord comfort their families, above all those who anxiously await news of their loved ones, and ensure them comfort and hope.

May the light of the Resurrection illumine our minds and convert our hearts, and make us aware of the value of every human life, which must be welcomed, protected and loved.

A happy Easter to all!

Pope Francis, *Urbi et Orbi* Message
Easter Sunday, March 31, 2024
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Pastoral Note: What is the “Paschal Mystery”?

At Easter time, the clergy and the theologians like to use a term that the rest of us often hear but may not fully understand: *the Paschal Mystery*. This is such an important expression that it is mentioned in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* more than forty times. But what does it really mean?

To put it simply, when we say, “the paschal mystery,” we are talking about *everything* Jesus Christ has done to save us. “Paschal mystery” captures in two words the whole work of Christ. This is why it is such a useful expression. It is like a summary of the whole Bible, or a summary of the whole story of our salvation from sin and our new life in Christ.

The very center of the paschal mystery is Jesus’ life, suffering, death on the Cross, Resurrection from the dead and Ascension to the Father. It is his “passover” from death to life. (The word “paschal” comes from the Hebrew word for “passover.”)

Jesus Christ took on our human nature and died and rose again *for our sake*. Therefore the paschal mystery applies not only to Christ, but also to everyone who follows him. His “passover” is the key to our “passover.” The *Catechism* puts it this way: “The Paschal mystery has two aspects: by his death, Christ liberates us from sin; by his Resurrection, he opens for us the way to a new life” (#654).

The Church’s mission is to live, celebrate and proclaim the paschal mystery. We do this in a special way when we gather for the Sacrament of the Eucharist, in which all that Christ has done becomes present for us now. The Eucharist unites us with him, so that our whole life can give glory to God. This is the greatest fruit of the paschal mystery.

April 20, Easter Sunday of the Resurrection of the Lord

Readings for the Easter Vigil:

- (1) Gn 1:1–2:2 or 1:1, 26-31a The first seven days; the story of creation.
Ps 104:1-2, 5-6, 10, 12, 13-14, 24, 35 or Ps 33:4-5, 6-7, 12-13, 20-22
 - (2) Gn 22:1-18 or 22:1-2, 9, 10-13, 15-18 The test of Abraham's faith: the sacrifice of Isaac
Ps 16:5, 8, 9-10, 11
 - (3) Ex 14:15–15:1 The Israelites cross the Red Sea
(Ps) Ex 15:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 17-18
 - (4) Is 54:5-14 The enduring love of God is revealed
Ps 30:2, 4, 5-6, 11-12, 13
 - (5) Is 55:1-11 Seek the Lord; He is rich in mercy
(Ps) Is 12:2-3, 4, 5-6
 - (6) Bar 3:9-15, 32–4:4 Wisdom comes from God; walk in his ways
Ps 19:8, 9, 10, 11
 - (7) Ez 36:16-17a, 18-28 God's people were defiled, but he will cleanse them
Ps 42:3, 5; 43:3, 4 or Is 12:2-3, 4, 5-6 or Ps 51:12-13, 14-15, 18-19
 - (8) Rom 6:3-11 If we have died in Christ, we will also live with Him
Ps 118:1-2, 16, 17, 22-23
 - (9) Luke 24:1-12 Why do you seek the Living One among the dead?
-



Meditation:

The high point of the entire year is the Easter Vigil, “the mother of all vigils.” It is not simply another Mass; it is the richest expression, the principal celebration of the whole liturgical life. The rest of the year can be considered a continuously unfolding meditation on what takes place on this most holy night.

The Easter Vigil has four parts:

1. The Service of Light

We begin in darkness. From the light of a new fire, the Easter Candle is lit. This symbol of the Risen Christ is carried in procession into the church as the Light of Christ spreads to the whole congregation. Then the solemn and joyful Easter Proclamation, the *Exultet*, is sung.

2. The Liturgy of the Word

A rich feast of the Word of God – nine readings and eight Psalms or canticles – is at the heart of the Vigil (the number can be reduced if necessary). Each reading and Psalm is followed by a corresponding prayer. In the readings, the highlights of the history of salvation are recalled, not only as a memory of past events, but as a celebration of the salvation we experience on this very night. Between the Old Testament readings and the reading from Romans, we sing the *Gloria* and joyfully ring the church bells.

3. *The Liturgy of Baptism*

The Baptism of our newest brothers and sisters brings a special joy to the Easter Vigil. As we rejoice at the Resurrection of Christ, tonight we see with our own eyes his ultimate victory over sin and death being applied to us; we see the true rebirth of new Christians. We rejoice in the gift of Baptism, which is our personal participation in the Death and Resurrection of Christ. We invoke the Saints in the litany. The water is blessed through the immersion of the Easter Candle. We renounce sin and Satan, and profess our faith in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

4. *The Liturgy of the Eucharist*

The light of Christ, the word of God and the power of Baptism all prepare us for the moment of Easter Communion. We have shared in the Death of Christ, now we share in his Risen Life. Amen! Alleluia!

Mass of Easter Day:



First Reading: Acts 10:34a, 37-43

Peter proceeded to speak and said: “You know what has happened all over Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached, how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power. He went about doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree. This man God raised on the third day and granted that he be visible, not to all the people, but to us, the witnesses chosen by God in advance, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commissioned us to preach to the people and testify that he is the one appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness, that everyone who believes in him will receive forgiveness of sins through his name.”



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 118:1-2, 16-17, 22-23

This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad.
or *Alleluia.*

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,
for his mercy endures forever.

Let the house of Israel say,
“His mercy endures forever.”

R. This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad.
or *Alleluia.*

“The right hand of the LORD has struck with power;
the right hand of the LORD is exalted.
I shall not die, but live,
and declare the works of the LORD.”

R. This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad.
or *Alleluia.*

The stone which the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone.
By the LORD has this been done;
it is wonderful in our eyes.

R. This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad.
or *Alleluia.*



Second Reading: Colossians 3:1-4

Brothers and sisters: If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Think of what is above, not of what is on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ your life appears, then you too will appear with him in glory.

or **1 Corinthians 5:6b-8**

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.



Sequence: Victimae Paschali Laudes

Christians, to the Paschal Victim
Offer your thankful praises!

A Lamb the sheep redeems;

Christ, who only is sinless,
Reconciles sinners to the Father.

Death and life have contended in that combat stupendous:

The Prince of life, who died, reigns immortal.

Speak, Mary, declaring

What you saw, wayfaring.

“The tomb of Christ, who is living,

The glory of Jesus’ Resurrection;

Bright angels attesting,

The shroud and napkin resting.

Yes, Christ my hope is arisen;
To Galilee he goes before you.”
Christ indeed from death is risen, our new life obtaining.
Have mercy, victor King, ever reigning!
Amen. Alleluia.

Gospel Acclamation: see 1 Corinthians 5:7b-8a

Alleluia, alleluia. Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed; let us then feast with joy in the Lord. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***



Gospel: John 20:1-9

On the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark, and saw the stone removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them, “They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don’t know where they put him.” So Peter and the other disciple went out and came to the tomb. They both ran, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and arrived at the tomb first; he bent down and saw the burial cloths there, but did not go in. When Simon Peter arrived after him, he went into the tomb and saw the burial cloths there, and the cloth that had covered his head, not with the burial cloths but rolled up in a separate place. Then the other disciple also went in, the one who had arrived at the tomb first, and he saw and believed. For they did not yet understand the Scripture that he had to rise from the dead.

or Luke 24:13-35 (for afternoon or evening Masses)

That very day, the first day of the week, two of Jesus’ disciples were going to a village seven miles from Jerusalem called Emmaus, and they were conversing about all the things that had occurred. And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him. He asked them, “What are you discussing as you walk along?” They stopped, looking downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, said to him in reply, “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place there in these days?” And he replied to them, “What sort of things?” They said to him, “The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, how our chief priests and rulers both handed him over to a sentence of death and crucified him. But we were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel; and besides all this, it is now the third day since this took place. Some women from our group, however, have astounded us: they were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find his body; they came back and reported that they had indeed seen

a vision of angels who announced that he was alive. Then some of those with us went to the tomb and found things just as the women had described, but him they did not see.” And he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the Scriptures. As they approached the village to which they were going, he gave the impression that he was going on farther. But they urged him, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them. And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the Scriptures to us?” So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem where they found gathered together the eleven and those with them who were saying, “The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!” Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of bread.



Meditation:

Today’s Responsorial Psalm proclaims: “This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad.” We rejoice exceedingly because Christ our Lord, the Paschal Victim, who died for us on the Cross, has risen! Our Easter joy knows no bounds because new life and new hope have been given to us. Our faith is not baseless; it has a solid foundation: the fact that Christ has risen from death.

Given that Christ, on whom our faith is based and in whom we put our hope, has risen and is alive, we can assert that our entire life has meaning and purpose. It is for this reason that Easter is such a joyous celebration. It is the greatest solemnity of the Church – indeed the Feast of all feasts, because everything that came before it – the earthly birth of Christ, his life and teaching and miracles – all point to the great hour of his glorification, which is his Death and Resurrection. Our real life and the whole life of the Church flow from the Paschal Victim laying down his life and taking it up again that we may have life (cf. Jn 10:18).

The Scripture readings given to us on Easter Sunday underscore the fact that our faith in the Resurrection of our Lord is grounded on a true historical event. Some dissident theologians have brought confusion to the minds of many people by suggesting that Christ did not really rise

from the dead. They consider his Resurrection to be a “myth” or merely “spiritual imagination.” We, however, put more trust in the Scriptures, the Word of God, than in any human theory. Jesus Christ himself said that he was going to be killed and that he would rise on the third day. He who is the Truth cannot but say what is true. And St. Paul strongly affirms that if there is no resurrection then our whole faith is worthless, and we are the most pitiable of all people (cf. 1 Cor 15:17-19).

The eyewitnesses of the risen Lord, Mary Magdalene, John, Peter, and Paul, all confirm to us that they truly encountered the Lord physically and not in a dream or vision. With his usual insightful analysis, Pope Benedict sheds light on the historical reality of our Lord’s Resurrection. He writes: “The encounters with the risen Lord are not just interior events or mystical experiences – they are real encounters with the living one who is now embodied in a new way and *remains* embodied.” “He [the risen Lord] appears now as true man and yet as coming from God – as being God himself” (*Jesus of Nazareth, Part Two: Holy Week*, p. 268).

St. Peter bears witness to the Resurrection by recounting that he and the other witnesses “ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.” This eating and drinking shows that the risen Lord is not a ghost. He does not belong to the realm of the dead; he is alive! At the same time, we are not to think that Jesus’ Resurrection was simply a return to normal biological life, for he remains alive and will never die again.

While the Resurrection of Jesus is a historical event, at the same time it transcends history. This is because it is an event that ushers us into a reality that extends beyond this world, the reality of life in God. St. Paul exclaims that there is nothing that can be compared with the “supreme advantage of knowing Jesus Christ and the power of his Resurrection” (cf. Phil 3:8-10). Jesus Christ with the power of his Resurrection dispels gloom and darkness in our lives and then imbues us with his own life, joy, and peace – a life that already begins here on earth and that will be fully manifest for all eternity in Heaven. Thus, in today’s second reading, St. Paul urges us to fix our gaze on “what is above,” for we now have a new life which at present is “hidden with Christ in God,” but which will appear in glory.

To attain the reality of Heaven – to have access to the supreme advantage of knowing Christ and the power of his Resurrection, which is the true joy of Easter – St. Paul encourages us to clear out the “old

yeast of malice and wickedness.” This remains an important task for us, because to cling to sin is to prevent the great victory of Christ from having its full effect in us. The corporeal and spiritual disciplines we practiced throughout Lent are not to be forgotten. They are the means by which we clear out the old yeast of sin so as to celebrate Easter meaningfully. Our Easter joy depends on our collaboration with the grace of God.

The clearing out of “the old yeast” applies in a particular way to our participation in the Eucharist. Every Mass is essentially an Easter celebration where the sacrifice of Christ our Paschal Victim is made present. The Church teaches us that we cannot survive spiritually unless we receive Holy Communion at least once a year (the “Easter duty”). Following the wisdom of St. Paul, she urges us to clear out the old yeast – to be in the state of grace – in order to receive Communion worthily and profitably. “Therefore, let us celebrate the feast” – Easter – “with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”

How do I express awe, joy, and gratitude in my heart on this, the most important feast of the year? What aspects of the “old yeast” of sin must I clear out from my life today? How is the Lord calling me to go beyond what I can see with my eyes and to “seek what is above”?

Mary, may the joy of Easter Sunday fill my heart daily.

Notes



First Reading: Acts 2:14, 22-33

On the day of Pentecost, Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice, and proclaimed: “You who are Jews, indeed all of you staying in Jerusalem. Let this be known to you, and listen to my words.

“You who are children of Israel, hear these words. Jesus the Nazorean was a man commended to you by God with mighty deeds, wonders, and signs, which God worked through him in your midst, as you yourselves know. This man, delivered up by the set plan and foreknowledge of God, you killed, using lawless men to crucify him. But God raised him up, releasing him from the throes of death, because it was impossible for him to be held by it. For David says of him:

*I saw the Lord ever before me,
with him at my right hand I shall not be disturbed.
Therefore my heart has been glad and my tongue has exulted;
my flesh, too, will dwell in hope,
because you will not abandon my soul to the nether world,
nor will you suffer your holy one to see corruption.
You have made known to me the paths of life;
you will fill me with joy in your presence.*

My brothers, one can confidently say to you about the patriarch David that he died and was buried, and his tomb is in our midst to this day. But since he was a prophet and knew that God had sworn an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants upon his throne, he foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that neither was he abandoned to the netherworld nor did his flesh see corruption. God raised this Jesus; of this we are all witnesses. Exalted at the right hand of God, he poured forth the promise of the Holy Spirit that he received from the Father, as you both see and hear.”



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 16:1-2a, 5, 7-8, 9-10, 11

Keep me safe, O God; you are my hope.

or *Alleluia.*

Keep me, O God, for in you I take refuge;
I say to the LORD, “My Lord are you.”
O LORD, my allotted portion and my cup,
you it is who hold fast my lot.

R. Keep me safe, O God; you are my hope.

or *Alleluia.*

I bless the LORD who counsels me;
 even in the night my heart exhorts me.
I set the LORD ever before me;
 with him at my right hand I shall not be disturbed.

R. Keep me safe, O God; you are my hope.

or *Alleluia.*

Therefore my heart is glad and my soul rejoices,
 my body, too, abides in confidence;
because you will not abandon my soul to the nether world,
 nor will you suffer your faithful one to undergo corruption.

R. Keep me safe, O God; you are my hope.

or *Alleluia.*

You will show me the path to life,
 fullness of joys in your presence,
 the delights at your right hand forever.

R. Keep me safe, O God; you are my hope.

or *Alleluia.*

Gospel Acclamation: Psalm 118:24

Alleluia, alleluia. This is the day the LORD has made; let us be glad and rejoice in it. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***



Gospel: Matthew 28:8-15

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went away quickly from the tomb, fearful yet overjoyed, and ran to announce the news to his disciples. And behold, Jesus met them on their way and greeted them. They approached, embraced his feet, and did him homage. Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.”

While they were going, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had happened. The chief priests assembled with the elders and took counsel; then they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, telling them, “You are to say, ‘His disciples came by night and stole him while we were asleep.’ And if this gets to the ears of the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.” The soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has circulated among the Jews to the present day.



Meditation:

We celebrate the risen life of Jesus with a solemn Octave, during which we ponder Gospel accounts of the Resurrection. There is an Octave for Christmas also, but in those eight days the Gospel

readings are not focused only on Jesus' birth. The Octave of Easter is treated as if it were one single day, the new day of new and eternal life. Each day this week the Alleluia verse is the same: "This is the day the LORD has made; let us be glad and rejoice in it. Alleluia!" Since we will be repeating the Hebrew word *Alleluia* many times during this Octave, it is good to know what it means: *Praise the Lord!*

In today's Gospel, Matthew picks up the story of the women who went to the tomb of Jesus early on Easter morning. They had just seen an angel descend from Heaven and roll away the huge tombstone. He told them not to be afraid and to "come and see the place where he lay" (Mt 28:6). The empty tomb was the proof the angel offered to convince them that Jesus had risen from the dead. He sent the women to the Apostles to tell them the good news. As they hurry away from the tomb, Jesus appears to them. The reason he was not lying in the tomb is that he is now alive! He repeats what the angel said moments earlier: "Do not be afraid!" Afraid? If they were "fearful yet overjoyed" at seeing the angel, what overwhelming emotions must have arisen in them when they saw Jesus himself!

The response of the guards is quite different. They too saw the angel and the empty tomb; they too were struck with fear. Unlike the women, however, they are not open to the good news of the Resurrection. They are not dedicated to the truth. They are more concerned about saving themselves from the negative consequences of what has happened. Will they get the blame for the absence of Jesus' body? The guards accept a bribe and tell a lie. They know their story is false, but they spread it anyway. How can they live with their conscience now? They have a lot of money, but they do not have inner peace.

What a huge difference there is between truth and lies. Jesus' risen life is inseparably connected to truth. This is why yesterday's reading urged us, now that Jesus is risen, to live "with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth," without the corrupting influence of the "old yeast" of sin (1 Cor 5:8). The freedom that comes from living in the truth is something like the freedom of Jesus rising out of the tomb. Ultimately, nothing can hinder the truth! When we choose to live in truth, we are united with the risen Lord Jesus and have a share in his power over death.

When we lie, or when we cling to an agenda that contradicts the truth, we act as if we do not really believe in the victory of Christ. We find ourselves enslaved by the “cover-up” phenomenon, a chain of lies that only gets heavier and heavier. When we lie, we do not kill the truth, we kill our own conscience. Since the conscience keeps re-awakening to identify the truth, one lie leads to another as we keep trying to defend ourselves from the living truth. Truth can reveal itself without fear, but lies must always hide behind other lies. The truth is not overcome by the common worldly strategy of paying people off. Some people will be deceived, but in the end, the truth will prevail.

St. Peter knows well the cost of lying and the freedom that comes with truth. Three times he lied about his relationship with Jesus, and his conscience was deeply pierced. When he repented and recovered, and when he was filled with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, he dedicated himself to living and proclaiming the truth of Jesus Christ to everyone. In today’s first reading, Peter proclaims the Gospel of the Resurrection, finding support for his proclamation in the Book of Psalms. Pondering Psalm 16 in light of the Resurrection, Peter points out that King David had prophesied long ago that the Lord would not allow the Messiah to experience corruption. “He [David] foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that neither was he abandoned to the netherworld nor did his flesh see corruption.” We celebrate Easter with the same faith as Peter and the Apostles. Our joy is founded on truth, the truth that Jesus is truly risen. And because he is alive forever, we can have confidence in his promise of eternal life for all who believe in him.

When have I experienced joy that goes beyond words, a joy beyond joy? In what ways have I closed my heart to the truth? When have I truly experienced Jesus alive in my daily life?

Mary, open my heart to fully accept the saving truth of Christ’s new life in me.



First Reading: Acts 2:36-41

On the day of Pentecost, Peter said to the Jewish people, “Let the whole house of Israel know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and they asked Peter and the other Apostles, “What are we to do, my brothers?” Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is made to you and to your children and to all those far off, whomever the Lord our God will call.” He testified with many other arguments, and was exhorting them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand persons were added that day.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 33:4-5, 18-19, 20, 22

The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.

or ***Alleluia.***

Upright is the word of the LORD,
and all his works are trustworthy.

He loves justice and right;
of the kindness of the LORD the earth is full.

R. The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.

or ***Alleluia.***

See, the eyes of the LORD are upon those who fear him,
upon those who hope for his kindness,

To deliver them from death
and preserve them in spite of famine.

R. The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.

or ***Alleluia.***

Our soul waits for the LORD,
who is our help and our shield.

May your kindness, O LORD, be upon us
who have put our hope in you.

R. The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.

or ***Alleluia.***

Gospel Acclamation: Psalm 118:24

Alleluia, alleluia. This is the day the LORD has made; let us be glad and rejoice in it. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***



Gospel: John 20:11-18

Mary Magdalene stayed outside the tomb weeping. And as she wept, she bent over into the tomb and saw two angels in white sitting there, one at the head and one at the feet where the Body of Jesus had been. And they said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken my Lord, and I don’t know where they laid him.” When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus there, but did not know it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” She thought it was the gardener and said to him, “Sir, if you carried him away, tell me where you laid him, and I will take him.” Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni,” which means Teacher. Jesus said to her, “Stop holding on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am going to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” Mary went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord,” and then reported what he had told her.



Meditation:

Who is this Mary Magdalene to whom Jesus appears in today’s Gospel? Both Mark and Luke identify her as a woman from whom Jesus cast out seven demons. From the moment she was set free, she became a tenacious follower of Jesus. She was one of the women who served him and his disciples during their missionary travels (cf. Lk 8:1-3). Mary Magdalene holds a special place in the accounts of Jesus’ Death and Resurrection. She was among the few who remained with him at the foot of the Cross; she accompanied his Body to the tomb; and she was the first to see him after he had risen from the dead. Mary is presented to us as a model Christian disciple. We who love the Lord and who search for him daily in our prayer and our service can learn from Mary how to persevere in times of suffering until the Lord reveals himself to us in a new way.

The Gospel takes us back to that extraordinary moment when Mary met the risen Lord Jesus for the first time. She had been looking for him inside the tomb, but of course, he was not there. First she sees two angels in the place where the Body of Jesus had been laid. However, even this

remarkable vision does not distract her from her purpose. She is looking for the Lord, not for angels. In the Liturgy of St. Mary Magdalene's feast day (July 22), there is a selection from the Song of Songs that expresses what is taking place in Mary's grieving heart. The reading speaks of a woman who makes an eager search for her beloved. She goes out at night, going through all the streets and sectors of the city to seek him whom her heart loves. She asks the night watchmen if they have seen him. Then suddenly she finds him whom her heart loves (cf. 3:1-4). Indeed, there is a great similarity between this passage and today's Gospel.

Mary's inner disposition is revealed in her actions: her *presence* at the tomb shows her love; her *weeping* shows her deep sorrow; and her *stooping* shows her humility. These attitudes go together. If we remain humble in times of sorrow, we can continue to search for the Lord. Weeping does not have to mean that we give up our hope. The virtue of humility prevents us from coming to the false conclusion that God is not with us. Mary's tears are neither self-pity nor despair. They are evidence of a pure love.

Love is Mary Magdalene's greatest attribute. She did not exercise faith as she wept at the tomb, for at that point she did not believe that Jesus had risen. What gave her the inner strength to persevere in sorrow was her love. Peter and John had also come to the tomb. They too had stooped and even entered the empty tomb. But then they left and returned home. Only Mary remained, because her love would not let her do otherwise.

Jesus rewards her persevering love with the grace of a most personal encounter. When she first catches sight of him standing nearby, she supposes he is the gardener. But then Jesus says her name – "*Mary!*" When she realizes he knows her, she recognizes him. He is not the gardener, not a stranger, but the Good Shepherd who "calls his own sheep by name... and the sheep follow him, because they recognize his voice" (Jn 10:3-4).

Mary's eyes are opened and her heart is filled with an unimaginable joy. She falls at Jesus' feet to worship him. Then Jesus speaks to her about his ascension to the Father, and he gives her a new mission as the "Apostle to the Apostles." He entrusts her with a

profound message to carry to his “brothers” – that is, to all of us, all who by faith become children of the Father. The message is this: *his* Father is also *our* Father! We are not orphans, abandoned by God; we are his own children, filled with his Holy Spirit.

The great gift of becoming adopted children of God comes to us in Baptism – which we recalled on Easter Sunday when we renewed our baptismal promises. In today’s first reading, Peter urges the crowd in Jerusalem to accept the same gift. He was one of the “brothers” who first received the Gospel of the Resurrection from Mary Magdalene. He learned that his sin had been overcome: the Lord whom he had denied three times is alive! Now on Pentecost Peter wants everyone to share the new life he has received.

Peter calls his audience to repentance and Baptism. Though we are already baptized, we can still take his words to ourselves, so that the grace of Baptism may continue to transform us. When we repent, we acknowledge that we too have a personal responsibility for the death of Jesus. When we accept his forgiveness, we open the way for the gift of the Holy Spirit to reign in our lives. This is how we can “save ourselves from this corrupt generation.” We too have been corrupted by sin, but the way to salvation is gloriously open to us through faith and Baptism. Every member of the Church, from the three thousand who were baptized on Pentecost Sunday to our newest brothers and sisters baptized two days ago at the Easter Vigil, is a sinner who is saved by the Death and Resurrection of Jesus. This is the good news proclaimed by Mary Magdalene, by Peter, and by all of us who believe and are saved.

*What are the things of this world that I am still holding on to?
What enables me to let go of these things and seek the fullness
of life in God? Like Peter and Mary Magdalene, how am I
being called and sent to proclaim the Good News of Jesus
Christ risen from the dead?*

Mary, help me to persevere in faith and love as I follow the risen Lord.



First Reading: Acts 3:1-10

Peter and John were going up to the temple area for the three o'clock hour of prayer. And a man crippled from birth was carried and placed at the gate of the temple called "the Beautiful Gate" every day to beg for alms from the people who entered the temple. When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked for alms. But Peter looked intently at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us." He paid attention to them, expecting to receive something from them. Peter said, "I have neither silver nor gold, but what I do have I give you: in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean, rise and walk." Then Peter took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles grew strong. He leaped up, stood, and walked around, and went into the temple with them, walking and jumping and praising God. When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized him as the one who used to sit begging at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, and they were filled with amazement and astonishment at what had happened to him.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 105:1-2, 3-4, 6-7, 8-9
Rejoice, O hearts that seek the Lord.

or *Alleluia*.

Give thanks to the LORD, invoke his name;
make known among the nations his deeds.

Sing to him, sing his praise,
proclaim all his wondrous deeds.

R. Rejoice, O hearts that seek the Lord.

or *Alleluia*.

Glory in his holy name;
rejoice, O hearts that seek the LORD!

Look to the LORD in his strength;
seek to serve him constantly.

R. Rejoice, O hearts that seek the Lord.

or *Alleluia*.

You descendants of Abraham, his servants,
sons of Jacob, his chosen ones!

He, the LORD, is our God;
throughout the earth his judgments prevail.

R. Rejoice, O hearts that seek the Lord.

or *Alleluia*.

He remembers forever his covenant
which he made binding for a thousand generations—
Which he entered into with Abraham
and by his oath to Isaac.

***R. Rejoice, O hearts that seek the Lord.
or Alleluia.***

Gospel Acclamation: Psalm 118:24

Alleluia, alleluia. This is the day the LORD has made; let us be glad and rejoice in it. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***



Gospel: Luke 24:13-35

That very day, the first day of the week, two of Jesus' disciples were going to a village seven miles from Jerusalem called Emmaus, and they were conversing about all the things that had occurred. And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him. He asked them, "What are you discussing as you walk along?" They stopped, looking downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, said to him in reply, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place there in these days?" And he replied to them, "What sort of things?" They said to him, "The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, how our chief priests and rulers both handed him over to a sentence of death and crucified him. But we were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel; and besides all this, it is now the third day since this took place. Some women from our group, however, have astounded us: they were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find his Body; they came back and reported that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who announced that he was alive. Then some of those with us went to the tomb and found things just as the women had described, but him they did not see." And he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the Scriptures. As they approached the village to which they were going, he gave the impression that he was going on farther. But they urged him, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, "Were not our

hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the Scriptures to us?” So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem where they found gathered together the Eleven and those with them who were saying, “The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!” Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.



Meditation:

Today is the fourth day in the Octave of Easter. We continue to celebrate the Lord’s glorious Resurrection from the tomb. The *alleluias* we sang at the Easter Vigil are still resounding in our hearts.

In today’s Gospel, it is still Easter, “that very day, the first day of the week.” Jesus approaches two disciples as they journey from Jerusalem to the village of Emmaus. We may be surprised that Jesus chose to appear to these two discouraged men, even before appearing to the Twelve. First Mary Magdalene, then Cleopas and his unnamed companion – the Lord certainly does not do things the way we expect! He reveals himself to those who persevere in love (like Mary), and he also walks alongside those who have given up on the journey of faith. Next Sunday, when we reflect on the story of Thomas, we will realize that the Lord is also with those who refuse to believe.

The two men who are walking to Emmaus represent us when we are sad and discouraged, when it seems that the Lord has failed us or abandoned us. How hard it is for us to persevere when we feel that the Lord has not persevered! He has not fulfilled his promises! The men say, “We were hoping...” There have been times when we too were hoping, but then what we hoped for seemed lost forever. Today’s Gospel reminds us that Jesus is walking with us when we feel this way. He is teaching us, even when we do not recognize him. Our hearts often respond more quickly than our discouraged minds.

Jesus calmly interprets for them the passages of the Old Testament that refer to him. When we ponder the Scriptures, we reflect on the Old Testament in light of the New and the New in light of the Old. It is Jesus who “opens the Scriptures to us,” allowing us to understand both Testaments, for they are but two parts of one whole message, centered on Jesus himself. The Scriptures teach us – though we are sometimes “slow of heart to believe” – that suffering has a place in the divine plan, and is connected to a glory that surpasses all that we were hoping for: “Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?”

This conviction is strengthened when we receive the Real Presence of the Lord Jesus in the Eucharist, the “breaking of the bread.” When our hearts are open in faith, we do not need to see Jesus with our eyes. Fed by the Eucharist, with our hearts burning with love, we are sent out to bring the Gospel to others. When we find that our faith is weak due to disappointment, when we feel that God is far away, we can find renewed strength in the Presence of the Eucharist, both at Mass and when we visit the Lord for a moment of adoration.

When the two newly revived disciples arrive back in Jerusalem, they learn that the Lord has also appeared to Simon Peter. Before long Peter too will recover from whatever fears or doubts he may have had and will become a solid rock to strengthen the faith of his brothers (cf. Lk 22:32). Peter’s firm faith in the hidden yet powerful Presence of Jesus is the basis for his remarkable words to the crippled man begging at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple. Peter is a poor man; he has no silver or gold to give the beggar. Yet on a deeper level, Peter is rich indeed. He has something much greater than money to give to the man: he has faith in Jesus Christ. In the power of Jesus’ Name, Peter gives him the ability to walk – and not only walk but even to jump and praise God with joy.

The crippled man, now healed, represents us. In our fallen nature, we are all crippled. We can barely walk straight. We tend to weaken especially in the face of disappointment and suffering. But we have been healed in Jesus’ Name. We have been given the power to walk in faith, by the gift of the Holy Spirit. We too can leap for joy in our faith journey. Joy is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit; it is one sign of living Easter faith. We see it in Cleopas and his companion as they run back to Jerusalem, in Peter and John, and in the healed man. As we celebrate Easter, we do not necessarily have to physically jump for joy, but interiorly we give praise and give thanks to God. Throughout the day we can let the words of today’s Psalm re-echo in our hearts: “Sing to him, sing his praise, / proclaim all his wondrous deeds!”

I may not be physically disabled, but what in me needs spiritual healing? When I am confused or discouraged, why do I try to flee from reality like the two disciples in the Gospel? When have I been slow of heart to believe that what God is doing in my life is good?

Mary, open my eyes and my heart to the presence of the Lord today.



First Reading: Acts 3:11-26

As the crippled man who had been cured clung to Peter and John, all the people hurried in amazement toward them in the portico called “Solomon’s Portico.” When Peter saw this, he addressed the people, “You children of Israel, why are you amazed at this, and why do you look so intently at us as if we had made him walk by our own power or piety? The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, 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, but God raised him from the dead; of this we are witnesses. And by faith in his name, this man, whom you see and know, his name has made strong, and the faith that comes through it has given him this perfect health, in the presence of all of you. Now I know, brothers and sisters, that you acted out of ignorance, just as your leaders did; but God has thus brought to fulfillment what he had announced beforehand through the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer. Repent, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be wiped away, and that the Lord may grant you times of refreshment and send you the Christ already appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the times of universal restoration of which God spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old. For Moses said:

*A prophet like me will the Lord, your God, raise up for you
from among your own kin;*

to him you shall listen in all that he may say to you.

*Everyone who does not listen to that prophet
will be cut off from the people.*

“Moreover, all the prophets who spoke, from Samuel and those afterwards, also announced these days. You are the children of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your ancestors when he said to Abraham,

In your offspring all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

For you first, God raised up his servant and sent him to bless you by turning each of you from your evil ways.”



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 8:2ab, 5, 6-7, 8-9

O Lord, our God, how wonderful your name in all the earth!

or *Alleluia*.

O LORD, our Lord,

how glorious is your name over all the earth!

What is man that you should be mindful of him,

or the son of man that you should care for him?

R. O Lord, our God, how wonderful your name in all the earth!

or *Alleluia*.

You have made him little less than the angels,

and crowned him with glory and honor.

You have given him rule over the works of your hands,

putting all things under his feet.

R. O Lord, our God, how wonderful your name in all the earth!

or *Alleluia*.

All sheep and oxen,

yes, and the beasts of the field,

The birds of the air, the fishes of the sea,

and whatever swims the paths of the seas.

R. O Lord, our God, how wonderful your name in all the earth!

or *Alleluia*.

Gospel Acclamation: Psalm 118:24

Alleluia, alleluia. This is the day the LORD has made; let us be glad and rejoice in it. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***



Gospel: Luke 24:35-48

The disciples of Jesus recounted what had taken place along the way, and how they had come to recognize him in the breaking of bread.

While they were still speaking about this, he stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." But they were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost. Then he said to them, "Why are you troubled? And why do questions arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you can see I have." And as he said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While they were still incredulous for joy and were amazed, he asked them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of baked fish; he took it and ate it in front of them.

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

minds to understand the Scriptures. And he said to them, “Thus it is written that the Christ would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and 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.”



Meditation:

As we enter the fifth day of the Octave of Easter, the Responsorial Psalm expresses our joy and wonder: “O Lord, our God, how wonderful your name in all the earth! / What is man that you should be mindful of him / or the son of man that you should care for him?”

In today’s Gospel, the Apostles are all gathered in the Upper Room on Easter Sunday evening. They are pondering all the events that have happened on this amazing day. Perhaps they are even reciting some verses of the Psalm. But there is too much to take in all at once. The miracle of the Resurrection is overwhelming. Even these men, who had been personally prepared by Jesus for three years, who had seen him work countless miracles, and had seen him raise Lazarus from the tomb – even they are not prepared to encounter the glorious risen Lord. He tries to console them with words of peace, “Peace be with you!”, but they are not at peace, for they think they are seeing a ghost!

The doubts of the Apostles have become our blessing. Because they personally passed from doubt to faith, now they can testify with confidence that Jesus is indeed alive. They are reliable witnesses. They have seen him with their own eyes, and they know that they did not simply imagine it. They saw the wounds left by his crucifixion; they touched him; they watched him eat a piece of baked fish. And, in case these physical signs were still unconvincing, Jesus “opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.” In this way, the Apostles’ faith in the Resurrection is based both on the physical evidence Jesus gave them and on his fulfillment of the inspired prophecies of Scripture.

Jesus did not physically appear to many people. According to St. Paul, he once appeared to more than five hundred people together (cf. 1 Cor 15:6), but aside from that, there are few eyewitnesses of the risen Lord. He appeared only to “the witnesses chosen by God in advance, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead” (Acts 10:41). The Lord wants us all to see him, but with faith, not sight. “Although the Resurrection was an historical event that could be verified by the sign of the empty tomb and by the reality of the Apostles’

encounters with the risen Christ, still it remains at the very heart of the mystery of faith as something that transcends and surpasses history. This is why the risen Christ does not reveal himself to the world, but to his disciples, ‘to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people’” (CCC 647; Acts 13:31).

On Easter night, Jesus tells his chosen witnesses to testify to his Resurrection and to preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins. A few months later, in the Temple in Jerusalem, in the very heart of the city where Jesus was condemned to death, Peter and John do exactly what he told them to do. They fulfill their commission as witnesses, proclaiming that the formerly crippled man, now standing before them in perfect health, was cured in the Name of Jesus. “By faith in his Name, this man, whom you see and know, his Name has made strong.”

The power of the miracle testifies to Jesus’ Resurrection and attracts the attention of the crowd. The other part of the Apostles’ commission is to preach repentance. They do this by speaking the truth in love. The truth is, “you denied the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. The Author of Life you put to death, but God raised him from the dead.” But love immediately tempers the harshness of the accusation: “Now I know, brothers and sisters, that you acted out of ignorance, just as your leaders did.” Peter is following the example of Jesus, who prayed for those who were crucifying him, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Lk 23:34).

Peter’s words apply to us all. By our sins we have denied the very One who was sent to save us. However, the Lord does not hold our sins against us. His Death and Resurrection is the solution to our fallen condition. The message of faith is one of hope, not condemnation. “Repent, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be wiped away, and that the Lord may grant you times of refreshment.” When we have personal experience of the mercy of God, we too can serve as reliable witnesses, proclaiming his love to the world.

What are the fears and problems that cause me to question whether Jesus truly loves me and died for me? Why is it important for me to encounter the Lord in his living word? Like Peter, how am I a faithful witness proclaiming to all that Jesus has truly risen from the dead?

Mary, open my heart to the joy of God’s word each day.



First Reading: Acts 4:1-12

After the crippled man had been cured, while Peter and John were still speaking to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple guard, and the Sadducees confronted them, disturbed that they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. They laid hands on Peter and John and put them in custody until the next day, since it was already evening. But many of those who heard the word came to believe and the number of men grew to about five thousand.

On the next day, their leaders, elders, and scribes were assembled in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly class. They brought them into their presence and questioned them, “By what power or by what name have you done this?” Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, answered them, “Leaders of the people and elders: If we are being examined today about a good deed done to a cripple, namely, by what means he was saved, then all of you and all the people of Israel should know that it was in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead; in his name this man stands before you healed. He is *the stone rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone*. There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved.”



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 118:1-2, 4, 22-24, 25-27a

The stone rejected by the builders has become the cornerstone.

or ***Alleluia.***

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,
for his mercy endures forever.

Let the house of Israel say,
“His mercy endures forever.”

Let those who fear the LORD say,
“His mercy endures forever.”

R. The stone rejected by the builders has become the cornerstone.

or ***Alleluia.***

The stone which the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone.

By the LORD has this been done;
it is wonderful in our eyes.

This is the day the LORD has made;
let us be glad and rejoice in it.

R. The stone rejected by the builders has become the cornerstone.
or *Alleluia*.

O LORD, grant salvation!

O LORD, grant prosperity!

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD;
we bless you from the house of the LORD.

The LORD is God, and he has given us light.

R. The stone rejected by the builders has become the cornerstone.
or *Alleluia*.

Gospel Acclamation: Psalm 118:24

Alleluia, alleluia. This is the day the LORD has made; let us be glad and rejoice in it. *Alleluia, alleluia.*



Gospel: John 21:1-14

Jesus revealed himself again to his disciples at the Sea of Tiberias. He revealed himself in this way. Together were Simon Peter, Thomas called Didymus, Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, Zebedee's sons, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We also will come with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. When it was already dawn, Jesus was standing on the shore; but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, have you caught anything to eat?" They answered him, "No." So he said to them, "Cast the net over the right side of the boat and you will find something." So they cast it, and were not able to pull it in because of the number of fish. So the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord." When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he tucked in his garment, for he was lightly clad, and jumped into the sea. The other disciples came in the boat, for they were not far from shore, only about a hundred yards, dragging the net with the fish. When they climbed out on shore, they saw a charcoal fire with fish on it and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you just caught." So Simon Peter went over and dragged the net ashore full of one hundred fifty-three large fish. Even though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come, have breakfast." And none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they realized it was the Lord. Jesus came over and took the bread and gave it to them, and in like manner the fish. This was now the third time Jesus was revealed to his disciples after being raised from the dead.



Meditation:

As we follow the path of the Liturgy and ponder the Easter experiences of the first disciples, we can identify two aspects of our own journey of faith. On one hand we recognize that we are filled with great joy and hope at the wonder of the Resurrection. Now that Jesus has broken through all the barriers that have enslaved us, life is full of new and endless possibilities. On the other hand, we find that, like the disciples, we are still slow to believe – even six days into the Octave of Easter. Or, though we believe, we do not really live like believers. We easily slip back into our former ways of thinking and acting.

Therefore, we can easily identify with Peter and the Apostles who decide to go out fishing. Yes, they have seen the risen Lord, and they have been commissioned as his witnesses to all nations. Thomas in particular was given special attention when the Lord appeared to the Eleven the second time. But it is not so easy to “go to all nations.” What does the Lord even mean by that? The Apostles do not have much money – neither silver nor gold – and no one seems so interested in them, now that Jesus is not around. If they start to speak about him, it seems that they will just stir up more hostility. So we can understand why the Apostles are tempted to let things settle down a bit before doing anything too drastic.

This is exactly the sort of uncertainties and doubts and temptations that can enter our own thoughts from time to time. Our growth in faith can be crippled by second thoughts. The Apostles have another disadvantage, for we have received the Holy Spirit, but at this point they have not. So what do they do? It is intolerable to sit around doing nothing. They do what we all tend to do: they turn back to what is known and comfortable. Rather than face an uncertain and difficult future, they try to return to their past. They go fishing. It seems normal to them. They are only fishermen, after all.

Their decision results in utter failure. They are no longer “only fishermen”; they are fishers of men, so their long night of work brings in nothing. What went wrong? There is nothing wrong with fishing, but this is no longer the task assigned to them. They were not doing the will of God! Their empty nets are a very good symbol of what happens when we rely on our abilities and strengths instead of putting our trust in God.

“If the Lord does not build the house, in vain do the builders labor” (Ps 127:1). How different is the result when we let go of our controls and submit ourselves in faith to the will of God! Then the Lord can “build the house.” He can make our little, inadequate efforts abundantly fruitful. And when we are serving as we should, it is very clear who is responsible for the huge catch of fish – “It is the Lord!”

Together with Peter and John and the others, we learn from this appearance of the risen Lord that we do not have to be preoccupied with taking care of ourselves. The Lord is with us. If we follow him in faith, he will provide all that we need. This lesson is vividly confirmed in the first reading when the same Apostles, now ex-fishermen, find themselves standing before the most powerful religious leaders in Jerusalem. Certainly their natural reaction is fear. They are facing the very council that condemned Jesus to death. In their flesh, no doubt they would rather be fishing! But they are no longer living according to the flesh. Filled with the Spirit, they boldly and joyfully proclaim their faith in Jesus Christ: “All of you and all the people of Israel should know that it was in the Name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead; in his Name this man stands before you healed.”

There will be many times in our journey when we will feel afraid, inadequate, or hopelessly out of place. But in the power of the Spirit, we can rise beyond these natural feelings. In faith we call on the same holy Name that the Apostles invoke. The Name of Jesus is truly the “cornerstone” of our lives. With faith and confidence, we too declare in our deeds and in our words that, “there is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved.”

When and why do I tend to fall back into my old ways of thinking and acting? What happens when I do my own will rather than put my trust in God's plan for me? When have I felt afraid, inadequate, or hopelessly out of place in my journey of faith?

Mary, teach me to rejoice in my powerlessness so that I may rely on the strength of the Lord.



First Reading: Acts 4:13-21

Observing the boldness of Peter and John and perceiving them to be uneducated, ordinary men, the leaders, elders, and scribes were amazed, and they recognized them as the companions of Jesus. Then when they saw the man who had been cured standing there with them, they could say nothing in reply. So they ordered them to leave the Sanhedrin, and conferred with one another, saying, “What are we to do with these men? Everyone living in Jerusalem knows that a remarkable sign was done through them, and we cannot deny it. But so that it may not be spread any further among the people, let us give them a stern warning never again to speak to anyone in this name.”

So they called them back and ordered them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. Peter and John, however, said to them in reply, “Whether it is right in the sight of God for us to obey you rather than God, you be the judges. It is impossible for us not to speak about what we have seen and heard.” After threatening them further, they released them, finding no way to punish them, on account of the people who were all praising God for what had happened.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 118:1, 14-15ab, 16-18, 19-21

I will give thanks to you, for you have answered me.

or *Alleluia.*

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,
for his mercy endures forever.

My strength and my courage is the LORD,
and he has been my savior.

The joyful shout of victory
in the tents of the just.

R. I will give thanks to you, for you have answered me.

or *Alleluia.*

“The right hand of the LORD is exalted;
the right hand of the LORD has struck with power.”

I shall not die, but live,
and declare the works of the LORD.

Though the LORD has chastised me,
yet he has not delivered me to death.

R. I will give thanks to you, for you have answered me.

or *Alleluia.*

Open to me the gates of justice;

I will enter them and give thanks to the LORD.

This is the gate of the LORD;
the just shall enter it.

I will give thanks to you, for you have answered me
and have been my savior.

***R. I will give thanks to you, for you have answered me.
or Alleluia.***

Gospel Acclamation: Psalm 118:24

Alleluia, alleluia. This is the day the LORD has made; let us be glad and rejoice in it. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***



Gospel: Mark 16:9-15

When Jesus had risen, early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons. She went and told his companions who were mourning and weeping. When they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they did not believe.

After this he appeared in another form to two of them walking along on their way to the country. They returned and told the others; but they did not believe them either.

But later, as the Eleven were at table, he appeared to them and rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart because they had not believed those who saw him after he had been raised. He said to them, “Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature.”



Meditation:

Throughout this Easter Octave we have been pondering the mystery of the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead. We have reflected on Jesus’ appearances to Mary Magdalene, to the two disciples on their way to Emmaus, and to the Eleven. In today’s Gospel, the Evangelist Mark gives a summary of these appearances of Jesus. Mark emphasizes the Apostles’ unbelief and stubbornness in putting no faith in the testimony of the first witnesses. Since the Holy Spirit had not yet descended upon them, their faith was very weak indeed. However, this does not stop Jesus from coming to them! Tomorrow, on the Feast of Divine Mercy, we will see a beautiful example of Jesus’ persistent love when we read of his special appearance and personal appeal to the “doubting Thomas.”

Today's Gospel, then, presents us with two surprises. One is that the disciples are so unbelieving. The other is that, despite of their lack of faith, Jesus renews his command that they should be his witnesses. "Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature." He rebukes them, but he does not reject them. They have proven themselves unworthy, but he sends them forth anyway. How patient God is with our weaknesses! He puts more trust in us, though we are weak, than we put in him, though he is strong. Divine mercy far surpasses any human standards.

When we read the Gospels, we are reading the true testimony of trustworthy witnesses. But simply receiving this word is not enough. The question remains: do we believe it? Faith cannot be forced upon us. In the face of convincing evidence, we are still free to reject it. As the *Catechism* tells us, "to obey in faith is to submit freely to the word that has been heard, because its truth is guaranteed by God, who is Truth itself" (CCC 144).

To deny what is obviously true is a foolish option to choose, but it is not uncommon. Sometimes we simply do not want to face the truth. We find it too demanding. So we lie, or we hide, or we "forget" and think about something else. In the first reading, the members of the Sanhedrin are firmly committed to avoiding the truth and its challenging consequences. They cannot deny that Peter and John worked a marvelous miracle. They even admit that "everyone living in Jerusalem knows that a remarkable sign was done through them, and we cannot deny it." Also, they can see that the power to do such a thing cannot have come from the Apostles themselves, since they are clearly simple, "uneducated, ordinary men." However, the elders and scribes refuse to take the next logical step and accept the Apostles' testimony. Instead, in their determination not to accept the truth of Jesus' power, they come up with a most feeble solution: they order the Apostles never to mention the Name of Jesus again.

Peter and John can see immediately that such an order has no teeth. Human authority, even the highest court or government official, has no claim over the authority of God. The stronger one's faith, the more obvious this is. The Apostles put the matter right back on the consciences of the elders: "Whether it is right in the sight of God for us to obey you rather than God, you be the judges." Surely these religious

leaders, of all people, must know that it is more important to obey God than men! The Apostles continue: “It is impossible for us not to speak about what we have seen and heard.”

The powerful members of the Sanhedrin are reduced to powerlessness, while the lowly Apostles stand with indomitable strength. This shows us clearly the difference between what happens when we refuse to believe and what happens when we live by faith, in the strength of the Spirit. When we live by faith, though we may look weak in the eyes of the world, we have a strength that the world cannot overcome. This is important to remember when we face authorities and laws that violate the law of God – for example, the legalization of abortion, or the many legal attacks against marriage and family life. We have no obligation to obey them, and we need not fear their threats and warnings. The world may consider us foolish, but our faith assures us that “the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength” (1 Cor 1:25). This is why, if we are wise, we obey God rather than men.

When have I been afraid to allow the Holy Spirit to speak through me? When have I allowed my human limitations to keep me from proclaiming God’s truth with love? How do I testify to others by my actions and words that I am a Christian?

Mary, pray that I may have the courage to testify by my words and actions to my faith in the Risen Lord Jesus.

Notes