

HOMILY FOR EASTER SUNDAY  
20 APRIL 2025

Fr. Jim Fredericks

Part One: the readings for the day  
Part Two: reflections on the readings  
Part Three: guidelines for *lectio divina*

PART ONE: READINGS FOR THE DAY  
Lectionary: 42

Reading 1 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

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

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.

"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.

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.

#### Reading 2 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.

#### Alleluia cf. 1 Corinthians 5:7

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

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

R. 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.

PART TWO: REFLECTION ON THE READINGS  
Happy Easter to you all.

I need to do something difficult today. I want to explain a  
passage from the Exultet, the Easter Proclamation, that we  
have just sung.

Oh Love! Oh charity beyond all telling!  
To ransom a slave, you gave away your Son!

Oh happy fault!  
Oh necessary sin of Adam,  
that brought us so great a redeemer.

We have proclaimed these joyous words, gathered around  
the Pascal Candle, for over seventeen centuries. These  
ancient words go to the very heart of the Pascal Mystery we  
are celebrating tonight.

Yesterday, we gathered around the cross of the Messiah  
and together we told the story of the Lord's Passion.

Remember, at the trial of Jesus, Pontius Pilate gave us a  
choice: he could pardon Barabas, a thief, or he could  
pardon Jesus. And we shouted back,

Give us Barabas!

Pilot asks the mob: Shall I crucify your king?

And we shouted back in reply,

Crucify him! Crucify him!

There is a chilling irony in this. Even as we were being expelled from Eden for our rebellion against our Creator, God promised that he would not abandon us to our self-loathing and folly. He would send us a Messiah.

And then, in the fullness of time, when the Messiah came to us, he was mild and compassionate, wise and humble. Remember the time when a leper approached him - in defiance of the Law of Moses? The leper said to him,

If you will to do so, you can heal me.

And what did the Messiah say? He said,

Of course I want to heal you!

And, when he taught us about the Kingdom of God, he said to us,

Fear not little flock,  
for it has pleased your Father  
to give you the Kingdom.

He came to us not in judgment, but to show us the mercy of God and God's *hesed* - God constant, unwavering, steadfast love.

And what did we do? How did we receive God's Messiah?  
How did we welcome him?

Crucify him... crucify him.

We made the Messiah into a scapegoat. We love scapegoats. We scapegoat the poor, especially poor children. We scapegoat immigrants and those who don't look like us. We scapegoat those who cannot defend themselves.

And we do this so we can feel righteous about ourselves.  
This demonic ritual has remained hidden since the  
foundation of the world.

And now we have made the Messiah our scapegoat.

But remember the words of the Exultet:

O Happy Fault!  
O necessary sin of Adam,  
That brought us so great a redeemer.

Who can understand these ancient words?

The death of the Messiah - was this God's plan all along?  
Did God understand that, from the time of Adam, we  
would hang His Son on a cross?

At the Good Friday service, Pina Brocco proclaimed the  
Song of the Suffering Servant from the Book of the Prophet  
Isaiah. The Messiah will not be a triumphant king. He will  
be despised and rejected - "a man of suffering,  
accustomed to infirmity."

It was our infirmities that he bore,  
our sufferings that he endured.  
We thought of him as stricken,  
as one smitten by God and afflicted.  
*But he was pierced for our offenses,*

We say that he has been cursed by God and deservedly  
spurned by us all. We are right to hold him in contempt.  
But this is just scapegoating by those desperate to believe  
in their own righteousness.

And then, in Isaiah's great poem, God speaks for Himself  
about His Messiah:

Through his suffering,  
my servant shall justify many,  
and their guilt he shall bear.  
Therefore I will give him  
his portion among the great.  
Because he surrendered himself to death

and was counted among the wicked;  
he shall take away the sins of many,  
and win pardon for their offenses.

This is how God has brought about our redemption: he has sent us his only beloved Son to be our Messiah. And we have crucified him. And now the Messiah, the Suffering Servant, our scapegoat, has been raised up out of the darkness of the tomb by the unfailing love of God.

The scapegoat has become the Pascal Lamb who has died so that the people might live. The ancient sin of the first Adam has been remitted in the New Life of the Second Adam.

Who can understand this Mystery?

Oh Love! Oh charity beyond all telling!  
To ransom a slave, you gave away your Son!

Oh happy fault!  
Oh necessary sin of Adam,  
that brought us so great a redeemer.

### PART THREE: INSTRUCTIONS FOR *LECTIO DIVINA*

I suggest that you use the readings and my reflections as an opportunity for practicing *lectio divina* ("divine reading"). This is an ancient spiritual practice that started with the great monks in the Syrian and Egyptian desert back in the early days of the Church. It is really quite simple.

Step one: calm your mind (my Buddhist friends describe the mind as "a mango-tree full of chattering monkeys"). I find that paying attention to your breath for a few minutes is a practical and effective way to do this.

Step two: read the readings slowly and attentively. Savor the words as if you were tasting a great Pinot Noir. Don't rush. You are not looking for information or instructions. You are making friends with a sacred text which will bless you abundantly if you will only open your heart to it and let it speak to you. In *lectio divina*, we are not actually

“reading” the Bible. Rather, we are “listening” to the Bible as the sacred words speak to us.

Step three: repeat step two.

Step four: read the homily on the readings.

Step five: Ask yourself a few questions:

- What particular words in the readings call out to me most forcefully?
- What is going on in my life such that these words call to me so forthrightly?
- How am I being asked to change, both interiorly and exteriorly?
- In light of this *lectio divina*, how am I being invited to be of service to the world today?