

HOMILY FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER
4 MAY 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: 48

Reading 1 Acts 5:27-32, 40b-41

When the captain and the court officers
had brought the apostles in
and made them stand before the Sanhedrin,
the high priest questioned them,
"We gave you strict orders, did we not,
to stop teaching in that name?
Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching
and want to bring this man's blood upon us."
But Peter and the apostles said in reply,
"We must obey God rather than men.
The God of our ancestors raised Jesus,
though you had him killed by hanging him on a tree.
God exalted him at his right hand as leader and savior
to grant Israel repentance and forgiveness of sins.
We are witnesses of these things,
as is the Holy Spirit whom God has given
to those who obey him."

The Sanhedrin ordered the apostles
to stop speaking in the name of Jesus,
and dismissed them.
So they left the presence of the Sanhedrin,
rejoicing that they had been found worthy
to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name.

Responsorial Psalm Psalm 30:2, 4, 5-6, 11-12, 13

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

I will extol you, O LORD, for you drew me clear
and did not let my enemies rejoice over me.
O LORD, you brought me up from the netherworld;

you preserved me from among those going down into the pit.

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

Sing praise to the LORD, you his faithful ones,
and give thanks to his holy name.

For his anger lasts but a moment;
a lifetime, his good will.

At nightfall, weeping enters in,
but with the dawn, rejoicing.

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

Hear, O LORD, and have pity on me;

O LORD, be my helper.

You changed my mourning into dancing;

O LORD, my God, forever will I give you thanks.

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

Reading 2 Revelation 5:11-14

I, John, looked and heard the voices of many angels
who surrounded the throne
and the living creatures and the elders.

They were countless in number,
and they cried out in a loud voice:

"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain
to receive power and riches, wisdom and strength,
honor and glory and blessing."

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth
and under the earth and in the sea,
everything in the universe, cry out:

"To the one who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be blessing and honor, glory and might,
forever and ever."

The four living creatures answered, "Amen, "
and the elders fell down and worshiped.

Alleluia

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Christ is risen, creator of all;
he has shown pity on all people.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel John 21:1-19

At that time, 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.

When they had finished breakfast,
Jesus said to Simon Peter,
"Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?"
Simon Peter answered him, "
Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."
Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs."
He then said to Simon Peter a second time,
"Simon, son of John, do you love me?"
Simon Peter answered him,
"Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."
Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep."
Jesus said to him the third time,
"Simon, son of John, do you love me?"
Peter was distressed that
Jesus had said to him a third time,
"Do you love me?" and he said to him,
"Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you."
Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep.
Amen, amen, I say to you, when you were younger,
you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted;
but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands,
and someone else will dress you
and lead you where you do not want to go."
He said this signifying by what kind of death
he would glorify God.
And when he had said this, he said to him, "Follow me."

PART TWO: REFLECTION ON THE READINGS

Happy Easter everyone!

We buried a pope a little over a week ago. The Gospel reading for Pope Francis' requiem mass was the Gospel we have just proclaimed this morning together. Francis himself chose this passage from the Gospel according to John to be read at his funeral.

I think this reading reveals a great deal about the pope we have just buried. It reveals a great deal about us as well.

In 2013, shortly after his election as pope, a journalist asked Pope Francis, "Who are you?" and Francis answered,

I am a sinner.

Francis was not being modest. Long before he ever became pope, Jorge Mario Bergolio had done things he would come to regret. As a very young Jesuit provincial in Argentina, during the so-called "dirty war" carried out by the military, Bergolio had to make difficult decisions. He was the leader of the Jesuits in Argentine and he had made mistakes.

I am a sinner.

In saying this, Pope Francis was simply telling the truth about himself and, let me add, telling the simple truth about us all.

Just before he was elected pope, as Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Jorge Mario Bergolio said something very important about sinners. He said,

The life of faith is not about never falling down. The life of faith is about always getting back up.

It's Easter Season, and so, let me modify what Jorge Bergolio said just a little: The life of faith is not about never falling down. The life of faith is about always being raised up.

I think this helps us to understand why Pope Francis chose the story about the appearance of the Risen Christ to Peter for his funeral. It is a story about a sinner who has fallen and is being raised back up.

In John's story, Peter is doing exactly what he was doing when he first appears in the Gospels: he's fishing. In fact, he's fishing and catching nothing - just as he was back when Jesus called him to become a "fisher of men."

After all that Peter had seen and heard as a disciple of Rabbi Jesus, Peter has gone back to Galilee and taken up his old life once again.

Then, the Risen Christ appears to Peter on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, just like when Peter first encountered Jesus, and asks him three times,

Peter, do you love me?

And each time, Peter answers,

Yes, Lord, you know I love you.

And then, each time, the Risen One calls Peter to service:

Feed my sheep.

Why does the Risen Christ ask this question not once, but three times? I think it's because Peter betrayed Jesus three times.

Peter fell down three times. And now, the Risen Christ is raising Peter up into the New Life of the Resurrection.

The New Life of faith is not about never falling down. It is about always being raised up.

And we must understand what this New Life looks like. The New Life of the Resurrection is not about being transported to some unrecognizable realm beyond this world. The New Life is about a transformation of our lives within this world. The Kingdom of God looks like the faithful, patient, humble service of a sinner whose sins have been forgiven. Taking delight in service - rejoicing in being called to serve those who are suffering - is a sign that our sins have been forgiven in the Mystery of the Resurrection.

I want us all to understand that Good Pope Francis chose this reading to be proclaimed at his requiem mass for a reason. He wanted this reading to be his last gift to us.

"I am a sinner," he told us back in 2013, shortly after becoming pope. I am a man who has fallen down but also a man who has been raised up.

Happy Easter everyone. The Risen Christ is giving us a chance to serve.

[] [] []

FYI: I will give a presentation on Pope Francis and the upcoming conclave to elect a new pope at Saint Leo's Church in Sonoma on Sunday, 4 May, a little after 10:30 in the Benziger room. The presentation will also be streamed on YouTube.

<http://www.youtube.com/@stleoschurchsonoma539>

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?