

HOMILY FOR SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER  
Sunday, 16 April 2023

- Fr. Jim Fredericks

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

PART ONE: READINGS FOR THE DAY  
Lectionary: 43

Reading 1 Acts 2:42-47

They devoted themselves  
to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life,  
to the breaking of bread and to the prayers.  
Awe came upon everyone,  
and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.  
All who believed were together and had all things in common;  
they would sell their property and possessions  
and divide them among all according to each one's need.  
Every day they devoted themselves  
to meeting together in the temple area  
and to breaking bread in their homes.  
They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart,  
praising God and enjoying favor with all the people.  
And every day the Lord added to their number those who were  
being saved.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24

R. (1) Give thanks to the LORD for he is good, his love is  
everlasting.

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

Let the house of Aaron say,  
"His mercy endures forever."

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

R. Give thanks to the LORD for he is good, his love is  
everlasting.

I was hard pressed and was falling,  
but the LORD helped me.

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. Give thanks to the LORD for he is good, his love is  
everlasting.  
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. Give thanks to the LORD for he is good, his love is  
everlasting.

Reading 2 1 Pt 1:3-9

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
who in his great mercy gave us a new birth to a living hope  
through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,  
to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading,  
kept in heaven for you  
who by the power of God are safeguarded through faith,  
to a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the final time.  
In this you rejoice, although now for a little while  
you may have to suffer through various trials,  
so that the genuineness of your faith,  
more precious than gold that is perishable even though tested  
by fire, may prove to be for praise, glory, and honor  
at the revelation of Jesus Christ.  
Although you have not seen him you love him;  
even though you do not see him now yet believe in him,  
you rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy,  
as you attain the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Alleluia Jn 20:29

R. Alleluia, alleluia.  
You believe in me, Thomas, because you have seen me, says  
the Lord;  
blessed are they who have not seen me, but still believe!  
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Jn 20:19-31

On the evening of that first day of the week,  
when the doors were locked, where the disciples were,  
for fear of the Jews,

Jesus came and stood in their midst  
and said to them, "Peace be with you."  
When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side.  
The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.  
Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you.  
As the Father has sent me, so I send you."  
And when he had said this,  
he breathed on them and said to them,  
"Receive the Holy Spirit.  
Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them,  
and whose sins you retain are retained."

Thomas, called Didymus, one of the Twelve,  
was not with them when Jesus came.  
So the other disciples said to him, "We have seen the Lord."  
But he said to them,  
"Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands  
and put my finger into the nailmarks  
and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

Now a week later his disciples were again inside  
and Thomas was with them.  
Jesus came, although the doors were locked,  
and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you."  
Then he said to Thomas,  
"Put your finger here and see my hands,  
and bring your hand and put it into my side,  
and do not be unbelieving, but believe."  
Thomas answered and said to him, "My Lord and my God!"  
Jesus said to him,  
"Have you come to believe because you have seen me?  
Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed."

Now, Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his  
disciples that are not written in this book.  
But these are written that you may come to believe  
that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,  
and that through this belief you may have life in his name.

#### PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

At the Easter Vigil, we gathered to bless the New Fire of  
the Resurrection. From the New Fire, we lit the Pascal  
Candle. Then, we gathered around the Pascal Candle

inside the church and sang the *Exultet*, as Christians have done for the last sixteen centuries.

There is a verse in the *Exultet* that is disturbing and worthy of our attention.

O happy fault!  
O necessary sin of Adam!  
Which brought us so great a Redeemer.

How can the sin of Adam and our fall into the despair of sin be a "happy fault"? In what sense was the sin of Adam "necessary"?

The *Exultet* plunges us into one of the most difficult and paradoxical mysteries of Easter Faith: the *felix culpa*. For the Church, now gathered around the Pascal Candle, Adam's ancient sin can be recognized as a "happy fault."

Today's Gospel reading immerses us into this same mystery as well.

On the evening after the discovery of the empty tomb, the disciples are huddled behind locked doors, frightened and confused.

Suddenly, the Risen Christ appears to them.

Jesus came and stood in their midst  
and said to them, "Peace be with you."

Then, the Savior does something I think is of great significance: he shows them his wounds.

When he had said this,  
he showed them his hands and his side.

I think this little detail, which might easily go unnoticed, is of great significance in understanding why the loss of our original innocence is a "happy fault," and indeed, why the fall of Adam is a "necessary sin."

The body of the Risen Christ has been raised up and glorified. Yet this glorified body still bears the wounds

inflicted on the cross. In fact, the Risen Christ invites doubting Thomas, who shows up later in John's story, to place his fingers into the wounds of his rabbi's crucified hands.

One day, our bodies will be glorified too. After lying in the grave, our bodies will be raised up into the New Life that appeared to the disciples in the form of Christ's glorified body.

And our glorified bodies, like Christ's body, will be wounded. All the wounds that mark our bodies will rise with us into the New Life of the Resurrection.

There is a very good reason for this. The wounds we have suffered during our sojourn through this world mark us as the persons we have become. And this is of capital importance: the Holy Spirit recognizes us by our wounds and then claims us for Christ.

Christ loves all wounded things.

If we could only learn this, we would be happier, and the world would be a safer place for us all.

I don't pretend that this is easy to understand. So, let me tell you a story in the hope of putting some flesh and blood on this teaching.

Decades ago, I used to speak with a man after mass. Steve introduced himself to me in a memorable way...

Hi Father. My name is Steve and I'm a drunk.

Happily, Steve had been in recovery from alcoholism for about twenty-five years when we first spoke. In fact, Steve was serene. God had touched his heart with the grace he needed to stop drinking.

Alcohol had wounded Steve. He was divorced and his children were not speaking to him.

One day, after mass, Steve told me something important about himself but difficult to understand.

Father, every evening, I offer a prayer to God,  
thanking God for making me an alcoholic.

This is a shocking statement, but Steve went on...

Father, I thank God for making me an alcoholic  
because alcoholism is how God found me.

Finally, Steve said,

I know that this is difficult to understand,  
but what I am saying is true. It's my truth.

The Church thinks this is true as well. In fact, Steve is showing us the Pascal Mystery itself: the Spirit finds us in our tomb, recognizes us by our wounds and raises us up.

Steve has died, marked with the sign of faith. In the New Life, promised us in our Baptism, I have no doubt that Steve's glorified body bears the wounds that has made him the beloved creature he is in the sight of God.

Alcohol wounded Steve. And yet the wretchedness of alcoholism is how God led Steve to embrace his cross and to find the grace that really does surpass all understanding.

If Steve were still with us in the world, he would tell you without a moment's hesitation: alcoholism was his "happy fault" - his *felix culpa*. He would tell you that, in his case, alcoholism is what "brought us so great a Redeemer," (as we sing in the *Exultet*).

Christ had to be crucified. We had to nail the Savior to a cross. I cannot explain why. No one can. But this is what God willed for his beloved Son that he might bring our banishment to an end. Neither can I explain why Steve suffered the peculiar wounds that mark the lives of alcoholics. But this is what God willed for my friend, Steve. And Steve accepted God's will for him with Easter Faith.

Not all of us are alcoholics, but we have all been given a cross. We are all wounded by our own sins and the sins of others. And we are all being raised up out of our tombs by the steadfast love of our faithful God.

And, like the Risen Christ, our glorified bodies will also bear the wounds that we have suffered. I cannot explain why, but this is the incomprehensible will of God.

O happy fault!  
O necessary sin of Adam!  
Which 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 reflection 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?