

HOMILY FOR SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER
Sunday, 24 April 2022

- 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: 45

Reading I [Acts 5:12-16](#)

Many signs and wonders were done among the people
at the hands of the apostles.
They were all together in Solomon's portico.
None of the others dared to join them,
but the people esteemed them.
Yet more than ever, believers in the Lord,
great numbers of men and women, were added to them.
Thus they even carried the sick out into the streets
and laid them on cots and mats
so that when Peter came by,
at least his shadow might fall on one or another of them.
A large number of people from the towns
in the vicinity of Jerusalem also gathered,
bringing the sick and those disturbed by unclean spirits,
and they were all cured.

Responsorial Psalm [Ps 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24](#)

R 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 II [Rev 1:9-11a, 12-13, 17-19](#)

I, John, your brother, who share with you
the distress, the kingdom,
and the endurance we have in Jesus,
found myself on the island called Patmos
because I proclaimed God's word
and gave testimony to Jesus.
I was caught up in spirit on the Lord's day
and heard behind me a voice as loud as a trumpet,
which said,

"Write on a scroll what you see."

Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me,
and when I turned, I saw seven gold lampstands
and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man,
wearing an ankle-length robe, with a gold sash
around his chest.

When I caught sight of him, I fell down at his feet
as though dead.

He touched me with his right hand and said,

"Do not be afraid.

I am the first and the last, the one who lives.

Once I was dead, but now I am alive forever and ever.

I hold the keys to death and the netherworld.

Write down, therefore, what you have seen,

and what is happening, and what will happen afterwards."

Alleluia [Jn 20:29](#)

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

You believe in me, Thomas, because you have seen me, says
the Lord;
blessed are those 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
Happy Easter to all.

The Gospel today is what we call an appearance story. After the discovery of the empty tomb, very early on the morning of the third day after the death of Christ on the cross, women came to the tomb with the aim of anointing the body of their crucified rabbi. Jesus had died late in the day the previous Friday and, because the Sabbath begins at sundown, the body of Christ had not been prepared properly for burial.

The empty tomb, of course, proves nothing. The discovery of the empty tomb led the women, and then the menfolk, to confusion and fear. The transfiguration of the disciples happens only when they become witnesses to the Risen One.

We would do well to recognize that the Risen One appears to us on his own terms and at the time and place of his own choosing.

In today’s Gospel, the Risen One appears to the disciples

when the doors were locked
where the disciples for fear of the Jews.

His appearance takes them by surprise. Locked doors are apparently not a problem for the Risen One. His aim is to appear to us. His aim is to gather us up into his Resurrection.

We all hide behind locked doors of one kind or another. Hiding behind locked doors is a good metaphor for our sinfulness. Hiding behind locked doors is a metaphor for what we have done with our freedom. In forgiving our sins,

the Risen One unlocks the doors that we ourselves have locked to imprison ourselves.

There is an ancient tradition in the Church about an appearance story that takes place just the story recounted in today's Gospel.

This other appearance story is only hinted at in the Bible.

In the Gospel according to Matthew, for example, we are told,

For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so for three days and three nights the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth.

In the Letter of Peter, we are told that Christ, after his death on the cross,

went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison

"Spirits in prison," here, means souls that have been imprisoned in hell.

Then the Letter goes on to make a beautiful affirmation,

For this is the reason the gospel was proclaimed even to the dead, so that, though they had been judged in the flesh as everyone is judged, they might live in the spirit as God does.

There is an ancient sermon about this earlier appearance of the Crucified Christ in hell. We don't know who wrote this sermon (Bishop Melito of Sardis in 180 AD?), but it is very beautiful.

The sermon begins,

What is happening? Today there is a great silence over the earth, a great silence, and stillness, a great silence because the King sleeps; the earth was in terror and was still, because God slept in the flesh and raised up those who were sleeping from the ages. God has died in the flesh, and the underworld has trembled.

The underworld trembles because the Messiah has descended into hell in search of Adam and Eve.

Truly he goes to seek out our first parent like lost sheep; he wishes to visit those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. He goes to free the prisoner Adam and his fellow-prisoner Eve from their pains, he who is God, and Adam's son.

Christ, the New Adam, has descended into hell to rescue the Old Adam. The Risen One appears to our first parents, who have been confined in the belly of the whale since their fall from their original innocence. And in appearing to them in hell, our first parents are gathered up into the Resurrection that is about to begin.

The crucified Christ takes Adam by the hand and says,

Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead.
Christ shall give you light

Then, as the New Adam grasps the hand of the Old Adam, the Old Adam grasps the hand of Eve, the mother of all. And Eve grasps the hand of Abel, her slain son. Able grasps the hand of Noah and then Abraham and Sarah and Hagar and Isaac and Ishmael and Jacob and all his sons and Rachel and David and Solomon and the Hebrew Prophets. The Holy Innocents, slaughtered by Herod, are gathered up. John the Baptist is gathered up. The good thief, who opened his heart to Jesus on the cross, is gathered up.

And then, when those in hell are embraced by the Messiah, the Resurrection from the dead finally begins.

This appearance in hell happens, I guess, just before the discovery of the empty tomb by the Holy Women. Thus, later in the evening of that day, when the Risen Christ appeared to his disciples, who were hiding behind locked doors, he had already descended into hell to embrace our first parents.

The Good News is just this: If the Rising Christ can descend into hell in order to rescue Adam and Eve from the prison of their Original Sin, then we should not be surprised to discover

that the doors we have locked behind us out of fear are no hinderance to him.

We are all hiding behind locked doors. We are all in the belly of the whale. But Christ is risen. Our locked doors will not delay the appearance of the Risen One, who has already descended into hell for the redemption of the First Adam and, indeed, the entire human race.

Happy Easter to you all.

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?