

HOMILY FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER
Sunday, 31 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: 48

Reading I 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 Ps 30:2, 4, 5-6, 11-12, 13

R (2a) 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 II Rev 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 Jn 21:1-19 or 21:1-14

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: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

Happy Easter.

Liturgically, Easter Season is the time of "mystagogy," when we
are invited to enter more deeply into the spiritual practice of
the Resurrection which has been set loose in the world by the
Risen Christ.

In doing so, as I said on Easter Sunday, we are discovering the
meaning of our baptism. We have been baptized into the
death of Christ. Over the many years that I have served you as
your priest, you have testified to this truth with a sobering

eloquence. But in baptism, we also share in the Resurrection of Christ. You bear eloquent witness to this truth of your baptism as well and I am grateful to be able to say this.

If you look carefully, you can see the Church's mystagogy going on in the scriptures. Take today's Gospel for example.

The Risen Christ appears to Peter on the shore of the Lake of Tiberius (aka the Sea of Galilee). Peter has been fishing all night long and does not recognize the stranger on the shore as his rabbi risen from the dead. All four Gospels agree that we can see the Risen Christ only if he "appears" to us. The stranger directs Peter to cast his nets one more time into the sea. The Risen One appears to Peter in an enormous catch of fish.

In becoming a witness to the Risen Christ, Peter comes to share in Christ's Resurrection as well. Take this whole appearance story as a parable about the Mystery of Baptism.

Now that Peter has been baptized into Christ's Resurrection, John gives us some mystagogy about the meaning of this "baptism" which has taken hold of him.

"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."

The Risen Christ asks this question two more times. After the third time, Peter is "distressed."

"Lord, you know everything;
you know that I love you."
Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."

This is mystagogy. This is John's way of delving deep into the meaning of the Resurrection by exploring the meaning of our baptism. What does it mean to die and rise with Christ? What does it mean to be baptized into Christ's death so as to share in Christ's resurrection?

Being baptized means that we have begun to rise out of the tomb of our pride and self-absorption into the New Life of loving service to our neighbor. At our baptism, the Risen Christ stands before us as he stood before Peter on the shore and says to us, "Feed my sheep."

I am told that Saint Francis of Assisi preached something like the following:

Above all the graces and the gifts that Christ gives to those he loves is the ability to overcome oneself.

This is mystagogy as well.

Il Poverello is teaching us that, through the grace of God poured out on us in our baptism, we have begun to put aside an old self in the hope of embracing a new self, a transformed self.

And John is teaching us that this New Life in the Resurrection takes concrete form and become visible to the world in our service to those in need. To be baptized means that Christ stands before us saying,

"Feed my sheep."

But there is much more at work in John's mystagogy.

In baptism, we share in Christ Resurrection only because we have first been incorporated into Christ's death. This is how we have been set free from the prison of our sins.

This is exactly what John is showing us.

Let me explain.

The Risen Christ asks, "Peter, do you love me?" three times. Why three times? Take this as a reference to an incident in John's account of Jesus's passion.

In the courtyard of the high priest, Peter denied that he knew Jesus - that he loved Jesus - three times.

After Peter's third betrayal, the cock crows, in keeping with the prediction Jesus made earlier that evening during the Last Supper, and sinful Peter withdraws into a tomb of despair.

Although Peter does not understand this at the time, he is being baptized into the death of Christ. Understanding comes to Peter after Easter, when the Risen One takes ahold of sinful Peter and says to him: put away your despair and the self-absorption that comes with despair; come out of your tomb, Peter - the time has come for the New Life of service.

"Feed my lambs."

Remember Saint Francis, *Il Poverello*.

Above all the graces and the gifts that Christ gives to those he loves is the ability to overcome oneself.

By embracing a life of service, Peter is overcoming himself. He is putting aside an old self in order to welcome a new self.

And this is no abstraction. The Mystery of the Risen One becomes a visible and tangible force at work within the world in the form of our loving service.

This is the Church's mystagogy. In our baptism, the Risen Christ stands before us on the shore as we begin the New Life of Easter Faith. The Risen One gently commands us to rise up out of our tomb and feed his sheep.

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?