

HOMILY FOR EASTER SUNDAY  
Sunday, 7 April 2024

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: 44

Reading 1 Acts 4:32-35

The community of believers was of one heart and mind,  
and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own,  
but they had everything in common.  
With great power the apostles bore witness  
to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus,  
and great favor was accorded them all.  
There was no needy person among them,  
for those who owned property or houses would sell them,  
bring the proceeds of the sale,  
and put them at the feet of the apostles,  
and they were distributed to each according to need.

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 Jn 5:1-6

Beloved:

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ  
is begotten by God,  
and everyone who loves the Father  
loves also the one begotten by him.  
In this way we know that we love the children of God  
when we love God and obey his commandments.  
For the love of God is this,  
that we keep his commandments.  
And his commandments are not burdensome,  
for whoever is begotten by God conquers the world.  
And the victory that conquers the world is our faith.  
Who indeed is the victor over the world  
but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

This is the one who came through water and blood, Jesus Christ,  
not by water alone, but by water and blood.  
The Spirit is the one that testifies,  
and the Spirit is truth.

Sequence - Victimae paschali laudes

Christians, to the Paschal Victim

Offer your thankful praises!

A Lamb the sheep redeems;

Christ, who only is sinless,

Reconciles sinners to the Father.

Death and life have contended in that combat stupendous:

The Prince of life, who died, reigns immortal.

Speak, Mary, declaring

What you saw, wayfaring.

"The tomb of Christ, who is living,

The glory of Jesus' resurrection;

bright angels attesting,  
    The shroud and napkin resting.  
Yes, Christ my hope is arisen;  
    to Galilee he goes before you."  
Christ indeed from death is risen, our new life obtaining.  
    Have mercy, victor King, ever reigning!  
    Amen. Alleluia.

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 you all.

Sometimes, when I read John's Gospel, I think of Lake Tahoe. This lake is remarkably deep (1645 feet) and remarkably clear (at least for now). There are great depths to be plumbed beneath the surface of John's Gospel as well.

In today's portion of John's Gospel, it is "the evening of the first day of the week." It's Easter Sunday. Rabbi Jesus has been crucified by the Roman occupation authorities. His disciples are hiding. Women in the community have disclosed that the body of their crucified rabbi is missing from the tomb. Fear and confusion reign.

Then, their rabbi "appears," and something transformative happens to them all.

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.

The Risen One appeared to his disciples and “breathed on them.” This is hardly the first time that we have felt the breath of God sweep over us.

The Book of Genesis tells us that, in the mythical moment of our creation,

the LORD God formed the man out of the dust of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

The word for “the man” in Hebrew is simply “adam.” The word for “breath” in Hebrew is *ruah*. By the way, *ruah* also means “spirit.”

We are the creation of God. We are the dust of the earth brought to life by the spirit of God. A human being – indeed, every human being – is dust animated by the spirit of God.

And so, a human person is a paradox: we are the union of matter and spirit, the dust of the earth and breath of God. This is the creature that God intended when he created humankind. And, sadly, this is the creature we stubbornly refuse to be.

Our refusal to be the creature God intended us to be is called “sin.” And sin is what is being overcome in the Resurrection of the Messiah.

He breathed on them and said to them,  
“Receive the Holy Spirit.”

John is showing us that the Resurrection – which has begun within us all in our Baptism – is bringing about a New Creation. We have fallen away from what God originally created us to be. In fact, we have turned our backs on our creatureliness.

And yet the Creator has not abandoned us. In fact, the Creator is re-creating us.

Saint Paul tells us,

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.  
The old has passed away; behold, the new  
creation has come.

In the poetry of the Prophet Isaiah, written during the  
darkness of the exile, the Lord assures his people,

See, I will create a new heavens and a new earth.  
The former things will not be remembered, nor will  
they come to mind.

Please pay close attention to how John imagines our re-  
creation. He sees our re-creation into a New Creation as a  
command to forgive:

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."

The outpouring of God's breath onto us comes with a  
weighty responsibility: we are to forgive the sins of the  
world; we are to be sacraments of reconciliation for the  
world.

This is what it means to be baptized.

But we have understand our baptism correctly: since we  
have the power to forgive, we have the responsibility to  
forgive. If we fail to do this, then the sins of the world - and  
the desperation of the world - will be "retained."

Do not be afraid to forgive those who have trespassed  
against you. Do not be afraid to be sacraments of  
reconciliation in the world. In our baptism and in the  
Resurrection of Christ, we are becoming a New Creation.

### 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?