



Bringing Home the Word

Easter Sunday (B)
April 4, 2021

Victory!

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

Fr. Lorenzo Ricci, SJ, placed the painting, *The Resurrection* by Domenico Cresti, in the chapel commemorating the spot outside Rome where Ignatius had a vision confirming his desire to ask the pope to found the Jesuit order. It's significant because Fr. Lorenzo enthroned this painting as a symbolic act just before his order was suppressed throughout the Portuguese and Spanish Empires. It was one of their darkest hours.

We all have dark moments in our histories. It seems death will swallow us; that God has abandoned us, and there is no solution. The darkness in the painting

suggests just that—the world of darkness and despair without the light of Christ. The soldiers sleep, the cold world waits below, and a once-strong trunk is dry and sapped of vigor.

Above, the beautiful Christ figure is surrounded in light, while he hoists the victory standard: the blood-red cross of martyrdom set upon the pure white of resurrection. He, like a new Moses, is leading them into the promised land of eternal life.

These contrasting scenes of darkness and light are the message of the painting and of the resurrection itself. Peter, John, and Mary Magdalene had locked themselves at home, engulfed in darkness, fear, and sadness. The next morning, they arrive to the tomb only to find it open and the body of their beloved Savior gone. Victory was being won even as they slept.

Entrust your ways to the Lord and he will act. God is at work winning your salvation! Do not let hope be vanquished! Hold on. Trust in him. Victory is right around the corner! +

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A Word from Pope Francis

You cannot give [courage] to yourself, but you can receive it as a gift. All you have to do is open your heart in prayer and roll away, however slightly, that stone placed at the entrance to your heart so that Jesus' light can enter....With you, Lord, we will be tested but not shaken.

—Easter Vigil Homily, April 11, 2020



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS REFLECTION

- Do I trust in Christ's power, which I cannot see, more than the problems that I can see?
- Do I believe God is a good Father and only permits that which leads to greater glory for both of us?

Sunday Readings

Acts 10:34a, 37-43

[Peter said,] "He commissioned us to preach to the people and testify that he is the one appointed by God as judge."

Colossians 3:1-4 or 1 Corinthians 5:6b-8

Think of what is above, not of what is on earth.

John 20:1-9

Then the other disciple also went in, the one who had arrived at the tomb first, and he saw and believed.

Fifty Days of Easter

By Kathleen M. Basi

On Easter Sunday, anything seems possible. The triumph of life over death and heaven over hell seems to resound throughout a world poised on the cusp of spring.

But it's hard to hold on to the euphoria of resurrection for fifty days. White lilies fade and are discreetly removed from the altar, the spring rush of baseball and soccer starts. As the planet spins one day to the next, we get caught up in ordinary life until one day that newness of purpose is gone altogether.

Faith is like a muscle: healthier when exercised. In the years after the resurrection, the Church flourished because Christianity wasn't just something you did on Sundays and holidays. It was something radical—something so powerful, so threatening to the establishment that claiming it could get you fed to wild animals. That kind of commitment changes what you do and think and say every day.



You and I will probably never face execution for our beliefs, but the reality of the resurrection should still impact the way we live—not just on the holy day itself, but throughout the Easter season and beyond. It should illuminate what endeavors are worthwhile and which are not. It should challenge us to temper

our anger and expand our willingness to sacrifice for others. In short, it should challenge us to do something.

Nobody needs a longer to-do list. But living the faith doesn't require commitments of epic proportions. Imagine what could happen if every one of us celebrated the fifty days of Easter by doing one thing each day to grow, demonstrate, or share our faith.

It doesn't have to be earth shattering in importance. It just needs to be real. Set aside five minutes for quiet, contemplative prayer. Count to ten before reacting to that inflammatory tweet. Dig into the mystery of death and resurrection with your children. Read the

Acts of the Apostles and figure out one concrete way you can imitate their fervor in the context of your life. Read a book about the saints. Pick up that fast-food bag blowing around the mall parking lot. Send a donation to a crisis-pregnancy center. Buy a can of coffee and deliver it to a homeless shelter.

Doing one thing every day may not change the world, but it will change us. Our souls and our bodies are made to work in harmony to reflect God's image.

Our actions shape our inner reality. The more we act as Christ would have us act, the more our view of the world reflects his. In short, by doing as God does, we become more like God.

And that *can* change the world. +

PRAYER

Lord, your resurrection pierces the darkness of doubt and fear. May the power of your resurrection help me to deepen my love for you and all people.

From *Mindful Meditations for Every Day of Lent and Easter*,
Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

*Doing one thing every day may not change the world,
but it will change us.*

WEEKDAY READINGS

April 5-10

Monday, Octave of Easter:
Acts 2:14, 22–33 / Mt 28:8–15

Tuesday, Octave of Easter:
Acts 2:36–41 / Jn 20:11–18

Wednesday, Octave of Easter:
Acts 3:1–10 / Lk 24:13–35

Thursday, Octave of Easter:
Acts 3:11–26 / Lk 24:35–48

Friday, Octave of Easter:
Acts 4:1–12 / Jn 21:1–14

Saturday, Octave of Easter:
Acts 4:13–21 / Mk 16:9–15

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Bringing Home the Word

Second Sunday of Easter (Sunday of Divine Mercy) (B)
April 11, 2021

Leaning Upon God

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

The Embrace, a painting by Pedro Cano, is a powerful image of paternal love and union. It recalls the historic moment when St. John Paul II, at the Mass of his elevation to the papacy, embraced his lifelong mentor, Stefan Cardinal Wyszyński. The painting is a moment frozen in time that represents something much bigger than the event that inspired it.

The two figures are barely distinguishable. They seem to be fused, like two figures carved out of one piece of marble. It is the mutual love of giving and receiving that makes this exchange

so moving. Indeed, it reminds us of the embrace of love we seek in this life from our loved ones as well as in eternal life. There is no distance between them, rancor, or questioning—only the total happiness of being united with a friend.

The pope's strong, broad shoulders are penetrated by the grasping hands of the one embraced. There is a clenching need to find security in the other. We all search for love, forgiveness, and for strength we do not find in ourselves. We wish our faith were stronger but, the truth is, we need to be constantly turning to God for his mercy.

Yet, he is pleased to be our rock upon which we lean, the one we can touch in our doubt. Turn to him in need, for he is happy to save you from the trials of this life. He wants to be the risen one who restores our faith. He rejoices that we need him and return to him. +

Sunday Readings

Acts 4:32-35

With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great favor was accorded them all.

1 John 5:1-6

Whoever is begotten by God conquers the world. And the victory that conquers the world is our faith.

John 20:19-31

[Jesus said,] "Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed."

We wish our faith were stronger but, the truth is, we need to be constantly turning to God for his mercy.

A Word from Pope Francis

[The disciples] had abandoned the Lord at his passion and felt guilty. But meeting them, Jesus did not give a long sermon. To them, who were wounded within, he shows his own wounds. Thomas can now touch them and know of Jesus' love and how much Jesus had suffered for him, even though he had abandoned him.

—Divine Mercy Sunday, April 19, 2020



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Do I find security in the love of another in a healthy way? Is it the fruit of giving and not possessing?
- Is my strongest foundation in the love and mercy of Jesus?

A Parable of Mercy

By Johan van Parys

When my grandmother died, I inherited her personal papers. Though I was hesitant to go through them, I was soon immersed as stories that had been relayed only through whispers or hints became abundantly clear.

The most amazing story concerned my grandparents' plight during World War II. In the late 1930s, my grandmother inherited her family's shoe business. Her biggest client was the Belgian army. When the Nazis took over Belgium, they ordered her to make shoes for them. She refused, so they closed her factory and sent her employees and my grandfather to work camps in Germany. Nazi officers took over the family home, and my grandmother and great-grandmother were made to serve them.

The story was illuminated by two sets of letters. The first set, tied with a red ribbon, was written by my grandfather to my grandmother from the work camp. Most of the letters are filled with small anecdotes of camp life, nothing



No matter what we've done, we can and should ask our merciful God for forgiveness and help.

incriminating because the letters were scrutinized by the Nazis before being mailed. He also thanks my grandmother for the occasional package of soap or chocolates and for news from home. His letters are all very strong and full of words of encouragement. The most moving among all of them is the letter written in response to the birth of his youngest daughter a few months after he was sent to the camps. He writes about how he longs to return home and wishes he could hold her.

After the war, my grandfather came home, and the Nazi officers returned to Germany.

The second set of letters, tied with a blue ribbon, was written by one of the officers who had occupied my grandparents' home. In the first letter, the former Nazi officer apologizes and asks forgiveness. In ensuing letters he speaks about his two sons who were killed in the war, the destruction of their hometown, and the absolute poverty he and his wife live in. Then he starts asking my grandparents for clothes, shoes, and food. In other letters, he thanks my grandparents for

sending them whatever they needed.

In 1967 my aunt got married. Though I was very young, I do remember an unknown couple at my grandparents' home. I didn't understand their language, but I liked their accordion playing. I deduced from the letters that this was the former Nazi officer and his wife.

I was incredulous. I couldn't comprehend how he dared ask forgiveness after all he'd done to my family. Even worse, how could he ask my grandparents for help? I also didn't understand how my grandparents could forgive him, help him, and invite him into their home.

I've given much thought to this amazing story of sin and sorrow that led to forgiveness and reconciliation. It's a true parable of God's forgiveness and mercy and of the mercy and forgiveness God requires of us. No matter what we've done, we can and should ask our merciful God for forgiveness and help. And regardless of what has been done to us or what we've done to others, we can and must ask for forgiveness—and give it in return. +

PRAYER

Risen Lord, you fulfilled your promise by rising from the dead. Help me to practice what I preach.

From Hopeful Meditations for Every Day of Easter Through Pentecost, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

April 12-17

Monday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 4:23-31 / Jn 3:1-8

Tuesday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 4:32-37 / Jn 3:7b-15

Wednesday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 5:17-26 / Jn 3:16-21

Thursday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 5:27-33 / Jn 3:31-36

Friday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 5:34-42 / Jn 6:1-15

Saturday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 6:1-7 / Jn 6:16-21

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Bringing Home the Word

Third Sunday of Easter (B)
April 18, 2021

Sharing Our Wounds

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

The glorified Jesus is not easy for the apostles to recognize. There is a deep truth here. The Twelve are startled and terrified to see Jesus again. In fact, they even think they are seeing a ghost. Their fear and lack of faith makes it impossible to see him for who he is—their resurrected Savior. Before they can truly see, they need to first accept him and believe.

And how does Jesus prove his identity to them? He shows them his wounds, the signs of his suffering and crucifixion. We often want to hide our wounds. We

are ashamed of them and afraid of how others will react if they really knew. But Jesus, unashamed, shows his wounds and uses them as signs of who he is.

There is a message for us here. We need to allow our brokenness to find fullness and resurrection in Christ. It is at that point that the love of God is perfected in us. First, we need to acknowledge our wounds and not bury or hide them. Then we need to admit our need for healing. Finally, through prayer, confession, and help from those who love us, we allow Jesus' redemptive love to wash over our wounds and give us renewal, rebirth, and healing.

As a result, like Jesus, we will no longer be ashamed of our wounds, but rather we will share them as evidence of the power of Jesus Christ. +

Sunday Readings

Acts 3:13-15, 17-19

The author of life you put to death, but God raised him from death; of this we are witnesses.

1 John 2:1-5a

Whoever says, "I know him," but does not obey his commandments, is a liar."

Luke 24:35-48

[Jesus] asked them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of baked fish; he took it and ate it in front of them.

We need to acknowledge our wounds and not bury or hide them. Then we need to admit our need for healing.

A Word from Pope Francis

We know that slander always kills. This "diabolical cancer" that arises from the desire to destroy the reputation of a person also attacks the ecclesial body and seriously damages it when, as a result of malicious interests or to cover up one's own inadequacies, people unite to denigrate someone.

—General Audience, September 25, 2019



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Is there an area of my heart and life where I need Jesus' healing?
- Am I confident in God's power to raise me up out of my weakness?

When Is It Time to Forgive?

By Fr. Bruce Lewandowski, CSsR

The first time it happened, I was speechless. A mother had come to the rectory. She didn't like the answer she'd gotten from the parish school's principal about the importance of timely tuition payments. When I gave her the same answer, she screamed at me. She called me a pedophile.

I had never been called that before. It's happened a few times since, once by a homeless man and another time by a stranger—and the shock hasn't worn off. Each time, my reaction has been the same. I think of the victims of sexual abuse. I think of the priests accused, the innocent and the guilty. I think of the Church. And I think about forgiveness.

The book of Genesis says that after Cain killed his brother Abel, God put an indelible mark on him to prevent him from being killed. It seems God either wanted Cain to suffer a long life of shame for his sin or have plenty of time to repent. Maybe it was both. The point is that God gave time to Cain for either to happen.



Indelible marks have been left on the Church for what it did and didn't do to protect children and young people from predator priests.

Indelible marks of sorts have been left on the Church for what it did and didn't do to guard and protect children and young people from predator priests. Much has happened since the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops issued its Charter for the Protection of Children & Young People in 2002. Look at the websites of dioceses and religious orders across the country. The mark says *Virtus* or *Praesidium*. Departments for child and youth protection are everywhere, even in the Vatican. Standards and training sessions have been developed to teach

ethical ministry practices with minors. Notices posted in church vestibules say in bold, black letters, "Report Sexual Abuse." Criminal and civil suits abound. So do shame and repentance—as they should.

Does time heal all wounds? Maybe it's too soon to ask. There's something missing amidst the shame, repentance, diocesan departments, and survivor networks. It's the same thing I'll bet Cain longed for: forgiveness. How long did

Cain live in unforgiveness? Did he ever run home to Adam and Eve and tearfully beg their forgiveness? Did God forgive him? The Book of Genesis says only that time was given to Cain. Maybe that was the mark—that Cain couldn't be forgiven. But I like to think that, in time, he was.

Can the Church, that through the centuries forgave millions, ever be forgiven for its role in the sexual abuse of minors? What will it take? For how long will the clerical collar be a mark of shame and repentance? I remember a time not long ago when it was the mark of forgiveness.

There's still time for repentance and shame—and forgiveness. +

PRAYER

Risen Lord, your resurrection revealed to the world the hope and promise of new life. Help me to be a faithful, hopeful, loving presence to all people.

From Hopeful Meditations for Every Day of Easter Through Pentecost, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

April 19-24

Monday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 6:8–15 / Jn 6:22–29

Tuesday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 7:51—8:1a / Jn 6:30–35

Wednesday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 8:1b–8 / Jn 6:35–40

Thursday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 8:26–40 / Jn 6:44–51

Friday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 9:1–20 / Jn 6:52–59

Saturday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 9:31–42 / Jn 6:60–69

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Bringing Home the Word

Fourth Sunday of Easter (B)
April 25, 2021

A Love-Filled Sacrifice

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

At the center of his painting, *Hands of the Crucified*, Renato Guttuso (1912-1987) places the piercing reality of pain represented by the hand of Jesus. The dark reds, blacks, and blues give way to the brightness of the oranges, yellows, and whites. This choice of palette is purposeful. Death is depicted with the same palette as a sunset, when darkness closes in on the light. But then night gives way to the colors of the sunrise when new life springs forth. The brutal darkness that leads to his death is replaced by the light-giving act of the love of God.

The Good Shepherd also shows the beauty of this love-filled sacrifice. This is why the Father loves Jesus; because he lays down his life for us. He has the power to do so and does it freely. This is because the Shepherd's mission and vocation is centered on the good of the sheep. They are the center of his daily cares and concerns. Jesus tells us that you and I are the utter focus of his heart and life. You are worth it. It is a beautiful thing to be loved by someone. Imagine if this someone is God himself.

As modern as this painting looks, the artist honors a traditional symbol. Byzantine art often depicted the blood from Jesus' side falling into a chalice to connect the passion of Jesus with the eucharistic sacrifice. Notice that the artist does the same by showing the blood falling into a simple chalice with a host at its center. +

A Word from Pope Francis

True rest is not simple, because there is false rest and true rest....Man has never rested as much as today, yet man has never experienced as much emptiness as today! Opportunities to amuse oneself, to go out, cruises, travels; but many things do not give you fullness of heart. Indeed, they do not give you rest.

—General Audience, September 5, 2018



Sunday Readings

Acts 4:8-12

[Peter said,] "He is 'the stone rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone.'"

1 John 3:1-2

See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are.

John 10:11-18

[Jesus said,] "I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

*Jesus tells us that you
and I are the utter
focus of his heart
and life.*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS REFLECTION

- Jesus, how well do I imitate your love by sacrificing for others?
- Do I seek salvation, peace, and healing from Jesus?

Words That Change Hearts

By Kathleen M. Basi

It's really hard to say "I'm sorry."

Maybe it's a pride thing. We want to believe we're good people, and rightly or wrongly, admitting fault calls that into question. Plus, it leaves us vulnerable. There's always a chance that the other person won't accept our apology. We no longer have control over the direction of the relationship—we've given the control to someone else.

However, as difficult as it is to say "I'm sorry," it's even more difficult to say "I forgive you." In fact, most people don't say it at all. They tend to say "It's OK" or "Don't worry about it" even though clearly it was not OK, or an apology wouldn't have been necessary.

The words "I forgive you" feel incredibly presumptuous. It's as if we're putting ourselves on a pedestal of self-righteousness: Look at me; I'm so holy I can forgive you. It seems better for the relationship if we pretend we were square in the first place.

At a deeper level, though, those three words are so challenging because they actually require a change of heart. They're



"I'm sorry" and "I forgive you" are gifts of self.

hard to say, because often we don't want to forgive. We'd rather gloss over the offense and pretend to dismiss it while secretly burying it in a deep emotional hole, where we can dig it up and mull it over at our leisure.

But the hardest words to say are often the most important. "I'm sorry" and "I forgive you" are gifts of self. An apology is a gift of one's vulnerability. Forgiveness is a gift of unconditional love. In both cases, simply saying the words

changes our hearts.

There are words within the sacraments of the Church that are "efficacious" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1131). They don't require an accompanying action—the words themselves are the action. When your confessor says "your sins are forgiven," that's it. The words have done the work.

Laypeople can't forgive others' sins, but our words do have great power to move our own hearts. It's almost impossible to say "I forgive you," for instance, to someone who has hurt you unless you really mean it. (Just try it sometime.)

Of course, it's not always that simple. Some wounds are fathoms deep—layered by time, distance, and severity. Yet, choosing repentance and forgiveness in the relationships of the here and now might well be the key to unlocking healing for older, deeper hurts as well.

It puts us closer to the heart of the God whose forgiveness and mercy know no bounds. +

PRAYER

Risen Lord, you are the Good Shepherd who watches over us and protects us from all harm. Give me the courage to be a loving shepherd and advocate for the poor and vulnerable.

From Hopeful Meditations for Every Day of Easter Through Pentecost, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

April 26-May 1

Monday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 11:1–18 / Jn 10:1–10

Tuesday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 11:19–26 / Jn 10:22–30

Wednesday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 12:24—13:5a / Jn 12:44–50

Thursday, St. Catherine of Siena:
Acts 13:13–25 / Jn 13:16–20

Friday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 13:26–33 / Jn 14:1–6

Saturday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 13:44–52 / Jn 14:7–14

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