



Breaking Open the Word of Faith

Good News Reflections for the Sundays of April, 2012

by Terry A . Modica



Passion (Palm) Sunday

April 1, 2012

Read:

Isaiah 50:4-7
Ps 22:8-9, 17-20, 23-24
Phil 2:6-11
Mark 14:1--15:47



Reflect:

Today begins a week of focusing on the Passion of the Cross – the sufferings and death that Jesus endured because of his tremendous love for us. But first let's take a look at the passion of the woman who anointed Jesus with perfume.

In those days, when people made perfumes, they created a mixture of oils and herbs, then let it sit in a jar to ferment. The longer they stored it, the more potent – and valuable – it became. For the perfume in today's scripture to be a "costly" gift for Jesus, it must have been fermenting for a long time.

When we want to give a gift, we usually go to the store to buy something new. But our most precious possessions are those that have been important to us for many years. Giving them to others feels like a very huge sacrifice.

What do you hold onto because it means so much to you? What has been fermenting in value because you've had it for such a long time? Can you imagine giving it away? You'd have to first feel very passionate about the person to whom you give it. The giving has to be more valuable than the keeping. This happens only because of love.

How passionate do you feel about Jesus? What's so precious to you that it's hard to let go of – something that he'd appreciate receiving from you? Are you willing to sacrifice this because of the love you feel for him? Do you feel *that* much love for him?

In other words, what's in your alabaster jar? Are you ready to pour it out to Jesus, freely and generously?

Think about what he poured out for you so freely and generously. It'd be good to think about this all week, at Mass on Holy Thursday, and on Good Friday, and in the tomb-like quiet of Holy Saturday.

And again, ask yourself: What's so precious to you that it's hard to let go of – something that he'd appreciate receiving from you? Will you let him have it?

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† Prayerfully imagine yourself sitting at the feet of Jesus. Knowing what Holy Week is all about and the sacrifice he made for you on the Cross, how do you feel about him?

† What gift can you give him as a thank-you? Nothing seems good enough, but what's so precious to you that anointing Jesus with it will be a gift of sacrificial love?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† What's in your alabaster jar? What talents or treasures or wisdom have you stored up, saved, protected, and developed, or what have you put on a shelf and forgotten about?

† As we prepare for Good Friday, share some ideas on how we can offer these saved-up gifts to Jesus. Why are these gifts like perfume to Jesus?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

Easter Sunday

April 8, 2012

Read:

Acts 10:34a, 37-43
Ps 118:1-2, 16-17, 22-23
Col 3:1-4 or 1 Cor 5:6b-8
John 20:1-9

Reflect:

Celebrate! Today is the anniversary of the Great Surprise, and just as the first disciples were surprised to find the tomb empty, so too does God have some resurrection surprises in mind for you!

In Easter Sunday's Gospel reading, there's a lot of scurrying around and excitement and reporting some amazing news that no one yet understands. Even though Jesus had given them advance notice that he would rise again after being put to death, God's plans took them by surprise. They did not expect a resurrection. They didn't understand that it was a necessary part of the Messiah's mission.

God's plans often take us by surprise. In so many situations of our lives, we don't understand that hard times are going to produce wonderful victories. We fail to realize that the empty tombs in our lives (the losses that we grieve) are beginnings of important new growth. We cannot imagine how Jesus is going to redeem bad times into great blessings.

We suffer through the hardships, just trying to cope, waiting for an opportunity to finally walk away from our crosses. Meanwhile, Jesus wants to give us an Easter morning because of the crosses.

How can we recognize the glory of God when we're depressed? How can we realize our resurrections when we're cursing our crosses? It's impossible!

To be the Easter people that we're supposed to be, we have to learn how to see the hope of resurrection



in the pain of the cross. We have to trust that Jesus is always there, working a plan to redeem bad into good. We have to allow ourselves to be surprised by God.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† What trials are you still enduring? What cross are you still carrying? Are you still being nailed for something you did not do? Which of your desires or dreams are dying?

† Ask the Father to use your sufferings for the glory of his kingdom. What new life is this creating for you?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† What are some of the ways in which God has surprised you?

† How is this an experience of resurrection?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

2nd Sunday of Easter**April 15, 2012**

Read:

Acts 4:32-35

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

1 John 5:1-6

John 20:19-31



for him to consume our lives with his presence. We want the divine Jesus to come to us in the flesh – in whatever manner he chooses – to transform us into his likeness.

It is this desire that makes us exclaim whenever we see the Eucharist, "My Lord and my God!"

Reflect:

"My Lord and my God!" This exclamation of Thomas in the Gospel reading used to be our exclamation at the raising of the Eucharist during Mass. It was a tradition that many Catholics have forgotten in recent years. It would be good to renew this habit. It's an awe-filled, humble recognition of Christ's Lordship *and* of the reality of his presence in the form of bread and wine.

Notice how Jesus convinced the disciples that he had truly come back to life in the flesh. They thought he was a ghost, or they didn't know what to think. They found the miracle of the resurrection too incredible to grasp.

Jesus revealed the truth of the miracle through his wounds. He does the same for us in every Mass.

Through the use of our logic and our senses, it's difficult to grasp the truth that the bread and wine miraculously become the actual body and blood of Christ – the same broken and bleeding body that died on the cross 2000+ years ago. It's even harder to see and understand that the resurrected Jesus is also there!

During Mass, we enter the timelessness of eternity to benefit from the living Christ. When we realize that we personally need the sacrifice he made on Good Friday, because we've sinned, we begin to look at his wounds from a crucial perspective. It is then that we begin to understand the truth about the Eucharist.

The first step toward believing in the miracle of the Eucharist occurs when we want Christ's death to save us from our sins and we want his resurrection to take us to heaven. The final step occurs when our desire to unite to Jesus is so thorough that we yearn

Questions for Personal Reflection:

- † Have you ever doubted the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist?
- † How do you feel when you look at the Eucharist? Does your spirit exclaim, "My Lord and my God"? Why or why not?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

- † How has Jesus revealed himself to you in surprising ways – "in his many forms of presence"?
- † When have you found him incredible, difficult to grasp? What helped you accept the truth of his presence in that situation?
- † And how has Jesus revealed his presence to you in the Eucharist?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

3rd Sunday of Easter

April 22, 2012

Read:

Acts 3:13-15,17-19

Psalm 4:2,4,7-9

1 John 2:1-5a

Luke 24:35-48

Reflect:

Now that we're a renewed people – an Easter people – the scriptures at Mass remind us of the stark difference between living a redeemed life and living in sin. The first reading says: "Repent, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be wiped away." The second reading says: "Those who say, 'I know him', but do not keep his commandments are liars, and the truth is not in them."

And the Gospel reading says: "Thus it is written that the Christ would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name...."

We are all liars in some way every day, professing our faith with our lips but not always in our behaviors. Our actions often say that we don't truly believe what we say about Christ's love. Our worries might be saying that we don't truly believe that God cares about each and every situation.

Our decisions say that we don't truly believe that Jesus knew what he was talking about when he commanded us to love our enemies and do good to those who hurt us. Our moral relativism says that we don't truly believe he was smarter than us when he gave us his commandments.

How loudly do your actions preach the truth about Jesus?

Many of us undervalue what Jesus has done for us, thinking that his death and resurrection is enough to



get us into heaven; we neglect the need to humble ourselves under the reality of the need for daily redemption.

God's not expecting perfection from us on this side of heaven's gate. What he does want, however, is our desire to become more and more like Christ every day. As long as we're continually examining our lives and educating ourselves about how we can improve, and following that up with doing what is necessary to produce changes, God is very pleased with us.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

- † What sinful tendencies still enslave you?
- † What will you do this week to turn these over to Christ and his redemptive power?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

- † What do you do to stay in touch with your need for Christ and his redemptive power?
- † How do you rely on the resurrected life of Christ to overcome sinful tendencies and enter into victorious Christian living?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

4th Sunday of Easter

April 29, 2012

Read:

Acts 4:8-12

Ps 118:1, 8-9, 21-23, 26, 28-29

1 John 3:1-2

John 10:11-18

Reflect:

Jesus is our Good Shepherd. We are the sheep for whom he has laid down his life. He put everything aside for our sake – his human desire for an easy life, the security and familiarity of a home of his own, his time, his sleep, his tiredness, and his natural preference to avoid persecution, torture and death.

We are the sheep who recognize our Shepherd's voice and willingly follow him to better pastures. We *want* him to be our Good Shepherd. We want his protection, his guidance, and his love.

However, sometimes we forget to listen for his voice. This usually happens when life doesn't go as planned, the way we want it to. In frustration and fear, we assume that Jesus has left the sheepfold. We think he's gone after the lost sheep and left us behind to fend for ourselves, and – oh no! – this is surely when the wolves attack! Doesn't he realize that? How could he do this to us if he really cares as much about us as he says he does? Why is he more concerned about the sheep who strayed than he is about us who are good sheep?

However, no matter how busy Jesus gets and no matter how far he has to go to rescue lost sheep, he never leaves our side. He is always with us. When the path of life takes us to dead ends or dangerous cliffs, it's not because he's abandoned us. The pain we feel is his shepherd's staff tapping and prodding us to get us to move in a different direction, and we just haven't understood.

We don't want to go in that other direction. We like

the familiarity of this old pasture. We're getting annoyed at the tap-tap-tapping of the staff on our heads. And we won't discover the blessing of this discipline until we turn again to Jesus with eyes of trust and ears that are attentive to everything he says, even if at first we don't like what he's saying.



Questions for Personal Reflection:

- † In what areas of your life do you feel lost and alone or abandoned?
- † What activities can you do that will restore your vision and your hearing so you can recognize the presence of your Good Shepherd?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

- † Name some of the ways that the Good Shepherd's voice calls out to us.
- † Share the story of a time when he prodded you but at first you didn't realize it was him. When did something feel painful until you realized that you were going in the wrong direction? What helped you recognize the voice and the staff of the Good Shepherd?

Comments/Prayer Requests: