

Breaking Open the Word of Faith

Good News Reflections for the Sundays of April, 2017

by Terry A . Modica



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5th Sunday of Lent

April 2, 2017

Read:

Ezekiel 37:12-14

Ps 130:1-8

Romans 8:8-11

John 11:1-45



Questions for Personal Reflection:

† What needs to be resurrected in your life?

† What will you do this week to accept the death of what has ended so that you can prepare for the new life that Jesus is preparing for you?

Reflect:

Lent is not about suffering and sacrifice. It's a corridor to new life.

Good Friday is not about evil and pain and death. It's the door that Jesus opens to invite us into that new life.

Yes, suffering is part of the Lenten journey (which can be experienced at any time of the year). Yes, Lent includes the sacrifices of fasting and abstinence, almsgiving and extra time in church. But these are just vehicles for the trip.

God uses our sufferings (if we let him) to help us grow in compassion, persistence, and ministry. Our sacrifices help us learn discipline (which is discipleship) so that we can purify our will and grow stronger in holiness. But the trip is not the destination.

Lent is all about reaching the resurrection: renewing our faith, entering a new life free of old sins, reconciling damaged relationships, and living in the Spirit of God more than we ever did before.

Which day is more important to your faith: Good Friday or Easter Sunday? That horrid day on Calvary was absolutely necessary for Easter, but we are living in the resurrection! Catholics are an Easter people. This means that nothing bad can ever happen to us that will not be transformed into blessings if Jesus is the Lord of our lives.

He proved himself to be the Resurrection and the Life by displaying his power over life and death. Now he wants to prove it again – to you and to all those who are watching.

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† We can personalize the first reading by understanding that God will open our graves (whatever is dead inside of us) and will place his Spirit of Life within us. How does the Holy Spirit help us discover healing and hope amidst our daily sufferings and dyings?

† In the scripture from Romans, we are reminded again of the Holy Spirit within us. Since the Spirit is alive in you, what affect does this have on your Lenten journey? What is being purified, strengthened, and renewed?

† In the Gospel, Jesus proves his power over death just before he enters Jerusalem and heads toward Calvary. How does this prove to you that your own sufferings and sacrifices will not lead to permanent disaster?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

Easter Sunday

April 16, 2017

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:

Are you ready to proclaim the Good News about how Jesus has helped you? What holds you back? Do you hesitate because you don't yet understand how the deaths in your life (the sacrifices, the lost hope, the broken relationships, etc.) have been resurrected into new life?

Such hesitation was the mental state of the disciples on the first Easter morning, as depicted in the Gospel of John.

The attitude of Peter in the reading from Acts is quite a contrast! The disciples now know their calling: They were empowered and commissioned to testify that Jesus is the Savior, and they fully embraced this vocation.

Do you understand how Jesus is turning your tragedies and other difficulties into triumphs and great blessings?

To "testify" means to share the truth based on your own experiences.

Peter specifically proclaimed that everyone who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of sins. Of course he did! Peter knew first-hand what it's like to need and then receive Christ's forgiveness.

We will not understand much about how our sufferings have led us to a new and blessed life until we start talking about it. The first inklings of insight awaken when we discuss it within our close, holy friendships, like Mary of Magdala did when she ran to Peter and John after discovering the empty tomb. They, in turn, told the other disciples.

It was while they were together – in community – that Jesus appeared and revealed his resurrection to them. Later, after having lots of time to talk about it with friends, the Holy Spirit empowered them to go out and evangelize the world by sharing their experiences with anyone willing to listen.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

- † The empty tomb doesn't immediately make sense. What has been confusing to you during your faith journey?
- † What has caused you to feel empty and frightened?
- † Where might Jesus be in this?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

- † How have your own experiences of being forgiven enabled you to feel more compassionate toward others? Does that change the way you talk to them about God and church and other spiritual or moral issues?
- † What is the biggest change that Jesus has brought into your life? What were you like before this change? How did God intervene? What were the results? This is your testimony. Practice sharing it by telling the story to your community of

Comments/Prayer Requests:

friends.

3rd Sunday of Easter

April 30, 2014

Read:

Acts 2:14, 22-33
Ps 16:1-2, 5, 7-11
1 Peter 1:17-21
Luke 24:13-35



Reflect:

The two disciples in this Sunday's Gospel reading did not recognize Jesus until after they heard him explain the scriptures and then broke bread with him. It was a two-part process.

First, while listening to him teach about the scriptures, only their hearts recognized him. ("Were not our hearts burning within us?") Their eyes didn't see his true identity until Jesus shared a meal with them, raised the bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them to eat.

When we celebrate Mass today, we're on a similar journey with Jesus. First, we have the Liturgy of the Word, during which we hear the scriptures and a homily that explains them. This is a time of opening our hearts to him.

A well-trained reader will speak the words of scripture with meaning and emphasis so that our hearts can recognize God in the words. A well-trained priest or deacon will set our hearts on fire as if Jesus himself were teaching us the meaning of the scriptures. But even when the reader or homilist does a poor job, we can open our hearts to hear Jesus speaking to us directly.

Then we move into the Liturgy of the Eucharist. When the presiding priest consecrates the bread and wine, it is Jesus himself who is actually doing it, using the priest's hands and vocal chords. Jesus is doing for us what he did for those two disciples at Emmaus.

If we have opened our hearts to Jesus during the first part of Mass, and if we are still paying attention, we see much more than a piece of bread and a chalice of wine. We see Jesus. We recognize him with

our hearts *and* our heads. We know beyond all doubt that the resurrected Jesus is truly present in the Eucharist.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

- † In what area(s) of your life does Jesus seem to be absent?
- † How can the Mass help you recognize Jesus and feel his closeness?
- † What else can you do to discover the presence of Jesus when you are not able to sense his nearness?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

- † When did you discover that Jesus is truly present in the Eucharist? What helped you with that discovery?
- † How do you know that the bread and wine change into the substance of Jesus while retaining their original form (which is called "transubstantiation")?
- † How easy is it for you to recognize Jesus in the Eucharist? Why?

Comments/Prayer Requests: