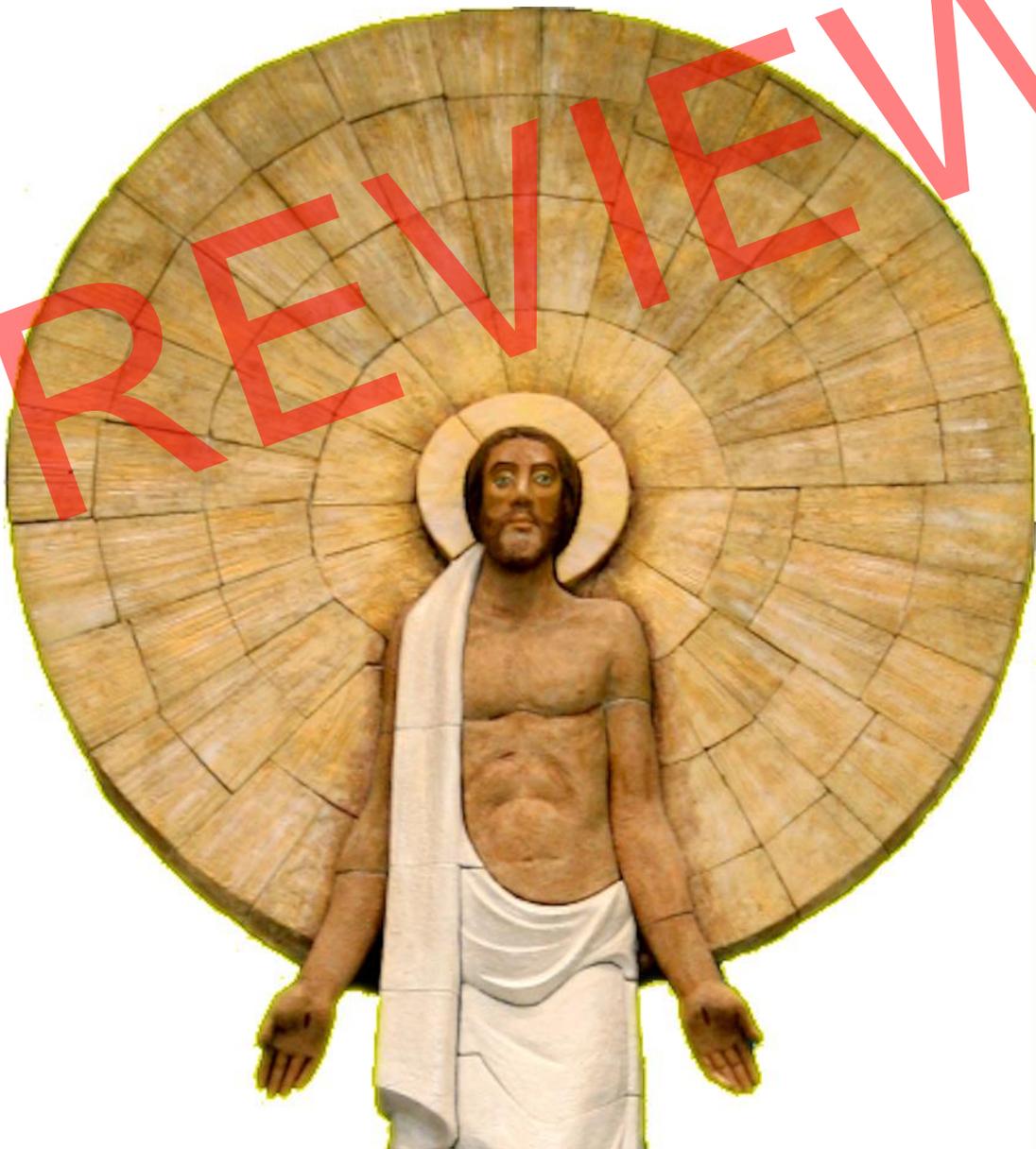


Breaking Open the Word of Faith
Good News Reflections for the Sundays of April, 2018

by Terry A . Modica



Easter Sunday

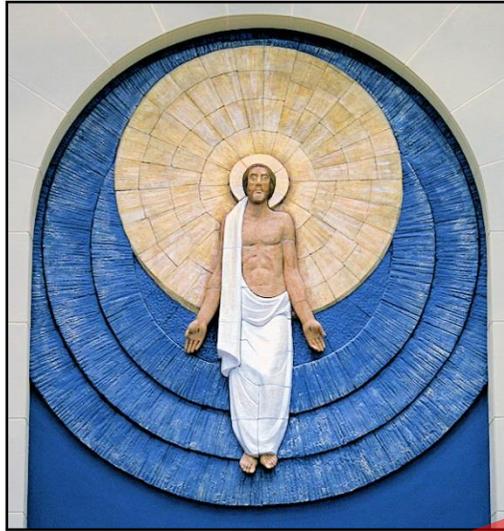
April 1, 2018

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!



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?

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!

Comments/Prayer Requests:

Second Sunday of Easter

April 8, 2018

Read:

Acts 4:32-35

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

1 John 5:1-6

John 20:19-31



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 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.

Saint John Paul II wrote in his encyclical on the Holy Eucharist, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*: "To contemplate Christ involves being able to recognize him wherever he manifests himself, in his many forms of presence, but above all in the living sacrament of his body and his blood."

Notice how Jesus convinced the disciples that he had truly come back to life in the flesh. At first, 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 opened their minds to the truth of the miracle by showing his wounds. He does the same for you and me 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 is to want Christ's death to save us from our sins and to want his resurrection to take us to heaven. The final step occurs when we yearn for him to consume our lives with his presence. We want the divine Jesus to transform us into his likeness.

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

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?

† How has Jesus revealed his presence to you in the Eucharist?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

Third Sunday of Easter

April 15, 2018

Read:

Acts 3:13-15, 17-19

Ps 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 for this Sunday 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 as long as we follow through by 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:

Fourth Sunday of Easter

April 22, 2018

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:

In this Sunday's Gospel reading, Jesus identifies himself as the 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.

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:

5th Sunday of Easter

April 29, 2018

Read:

Acts 9:26-31

Ps 22:26-28, 30-32

1 John 3:18-24

John 15:1-8



Reflect:

As we see in this Sunday's Gospel reading, all of us who belong to Christ are fruit-bearing branches of one vine. Jesus is the vine, and because we are all attached to him, we share the same calling: to bear good fruit. And not just any fruit that seems good, but the same fruit that Jesus produced.

However, most of us underestimate how important this is! You are more valuable than you know. God wants you to produce Christ's fruit – and more of it. Today too many Christians are settling for mediocrity. As long as we get some personal satisfaction from being Christian, we feel all too easily satisfied. As long as we're helping some people with our kindness or generosity or love, we think God is satisfied with the good fruits we're producing.

Have you ever asked why there's so much evil in the world? Why doesn't God raise his almighty hand against war, against corruption in government, against the greed of high-salaried managers who lay off their employees while giving themselves huge bonuses, against the perpetrators of physical and emotional abuse, against legislation that discriminates against Christian faith, against rising crime rates, or against any evil that's corrupting our world?

Why doesn't God do something?

Actually, *he does!* However, he does it the same way he grows grapes. The life-force of the vine (Jesus) travels through the vine to the little twigs (you and me and all Christians) that hold the grapes.

The more open we are to receiving nourishment from Christ, the more fruit Jesus produces through us. But the grapes are not supposed to stay there!

We're nourished by Christ in order to take his fruits abundantly out into the world. We must grow strong and healthy, branch out, and use everything we've received from Christ for the sake of others.

Evil is stopped to the extent that we Christians continue Christ's earthly ministry. Victory over evil comes from Christ, that is, *through* us from Christ. Holiness in the world comes from Christ's Holy Spirit actively transforming it through our holiness..

Questions for Personal Reflection:

- † Are you doing everything you can to grow the best grapes on your branch of Christ's vine?
- † How healthy is your connection to Christ?
- † What in your life needs to be pruned off because it's not producing full, abundant fruit?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

- † Name some of the things we do that fertilize the vineyard.
- † What has helped your branch grow stronger and bear more fruit?
- † How does ignoring the need to prune ourselves hinder the growth of good fruit – evil-defeating good fruit?

Comments/Prayer Requests: