

Breaking Open the Word of Faith

Good News Reflections for the Sundays of March, 2018

by Terry A . Modica



3rd Sunday of Lent

March 4, 2018

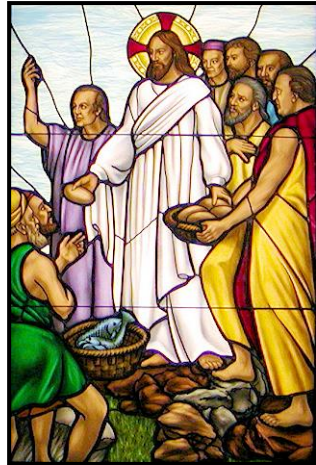
Read:

Exodus 20:1-17

Ps 19:8-11

1 Corinthians 1:22-25

John 2:13-25



Reflect:

The final paragraph of the Gospel reading is very revealing: Jesus did not "trust" himself to the converts whose faith in him was based on the signs and wonders that he had done. The reason: He did not want anyone to testify (i.e., spread the faith) about the limitations of human nature.

Faith based on signs and wonders is human nature: It's easier to put faith in what we can humanly see, touch, and hear than to believe in a God who is invisible and who usually sounds very silent. There is nothing supernatural about this kind of faith, but God is very supernatural.

What happens to our faith when we pray and pray and pray for God's intervention and there are no signs indicating that we'll get what we want? Our reaction to unanswered prayers is an indicator of how natural or supernatural our spiritual life really is.

Jesus knew that his physical presence was the greatest sign of all, but it would soon be taken away. Don't we sometimes wish that Jesus would appear in front of us and make himself audible to our human ears? We think it would make our faith stronger.

Typically, we base our faith on many signs: prayers being answered, love being evidenced, peace and happiness filling our hearts, etc. But what happens to our faith when we enter the dark night of trials and difficulties? Do we continue to trust God when we can no longer see or feel signs that he cares?

The kind of faith we need when faith matters most comes from a relationship of trust. Real trust. We choose to trust God for who he really is and how much

he really cares, rather than on what the evidence seems to say.

To succeed in this, we need supernatural faith. When we're united to the divinity of Christ, we join ourselves to *his* faith.

Remember this the next time you receive Jesus in the Eucharist. Not only are you consuming his body, you are also uniting yourself to his divinity. And he is uniting himself to you! Of course there will be miracles, but that is not the greatest gift that he's sharing with you. What he wants to give you most of all is HIS ALL.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† Name some of the signs you rely upon that convince you that God is real and that he truly cares about you.

† How do you feel when those signs are taken away? Are these feelings based on the reality of God's unending love or on fear?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† Have you ever wished that Jesus would appear to you? Why? Did God provide what you needed some other way?

† How do you remind yourself that God cares during those difficult times when you can't see it or feel it?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

4th Sunday of Lent

March 11, 2018

Read:

2 Chronicles 36:14-16,19-23

Ps 137:1-6

Ephesians 2:4-10

John 3:14-21



Reflect:

Why do we hide in darkness? Why do we prefer to conceal our sins rather than face them and go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation and speak about them out loud?

It's Jesus who meets us in the confessional, appearing to us in the form of a priest who's sworn to secrecy. In the Gospel reading, Jesus assures us that he did not come to condemn us. It is safe to come into the light where our sins are exposed.

However, we don't like going to Confession when guilt is driving us deeper into the darkness of low self-esteem, the fear of being unlovable, or an inability to forgive ourselves.

Guilt is a good motivator for repentance, and regret motivates us to change, but low self-esteem triggers shame, which says that we are undeserving of forgiveness. Shame makes us even more afraid to face the truth about our sins.

However, God's image of you is not poor: He sees what is wonderful about you. He says you do deserve forgiveness. He wants to replace shame with joy.

What keeps you from repenting? Perhaps you would benefit from a therapist or spiritual director who helps you heal from low self-esteem. Whatever opportunity will help you get into the confessional, this is where your healing begins.

Jesus completes the healing by curing your spirit with forgiveness, mercy, and unconditional love through the words of absolution that he speaks to you through the priest.

In the Gospel reading, Jesus points out that whoever lives the truth (whoever is honest about themselves) "comes to the light" to be rescued. When we admit our sins, speaking it out loud to the ears of one of Christ's servants, we are rescued by Jesus. We hear Jesus minister to us through the vocal chords of the priest, and we receive from Jesus the power to resist the same sins in the future.

Why suffer any longer, hiding in the darkness of fear and a poor self-image? Jesus has come to rescue you!

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† What do you feel ashamed about? Have you taken this to the Sacrament of Reconciliation? If yes, remember that since God has forgiven you and the Church has forgiven you, they do not condemn you, so stop condemning yourself! If not, what are you waiting for? Blessings and healing await you!

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† Why does admitting our sins and receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation set us free to live in joy and peace?

† How have you experienced special graces from going to Confession?

† Describe a time when you lived in darkness; how did Jesus bring you into the light?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

5th Sunday of Lent

March 18, 2018

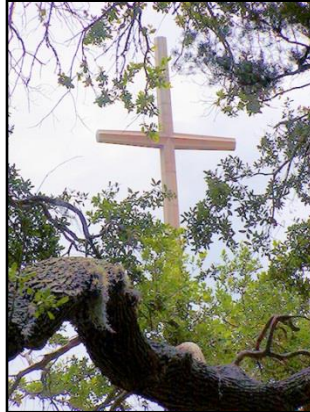
Read:

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Ps 51:3-4,12-15

Hebrews 5:7-9

John 12:20-33



Reflect:

In our desire to trust God and follow Jesus wherever he leads us, it's not a sin to feel troubled about it.

Yes, we do have to be willing to lose our lives (i.e., our own agendas, our own desires, our own ideas on what we should do with our time, etc.) so that we can unite ourselves to Christ and his mission. However, we don't have to like the loss.

In the Gospel reading, Jesus feels troubled by the sacrifices he would have to make. Yes, even Jesus himself felt troubled! And the Father glorified him.

Jesus came to earth to reveal God's ways and God's love and lead us to heaven. Now we, his followers, are called, commissioned, and prepared by the Sacraments to reveal God's ways and God's love to those around us, so that Jesus can lead them to heaven.

The Sacrament of Baptism initiates us into this calling. Confirmation commissions us to do it. Confession enables us to do it better. Marriage and Holy Orders give us a venue for perfecting it. The Anointing of the Sick converts our illnesses into opportunities to bear witness to Christ's Passion. And the Eucharist unites us so fully to the Passion of Christ that we become what we are called to do.

This is our everyday ministry of evangelization: We love others as Jesus loves them, we do for them what Jesus would like to do for them, and we spread the good news about this as a continuation of the ministry of Jesus.

Often, this involves making difficult sacrifices and doing good to those who reject us and scourge us and crucify us or in any other way cause us to suffer. This

is our unity with Christ, our Passion. We're not supposed to like it, but we are supposed to do it. The Father honors us for this. Just like he glorified Jesus, he honors us with his compassion, his rewards, and his approval.

It's okay to feel troubled by the challenges we face in our mission. What keeps us going is knowing that God is raising us up. There is always resurrection after crucifixion.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† What troubles are you facing? Where is Jesus in this? Is he ahead of you, leading the way? Are you following him? Rest with him for a little while and tell him your complaints. It's okay to get angry at him, if that's how you feel, as long as it's kept private, between you and him, so that it doesn't give the wrong witness to the people around you.

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† How do you feel hearing Jesus admit, "I am troubled now"? Does it make you more aware of his humanness?

† When you make sacrifices for others, how does this connect you more closely to the human heart of Jesus? How does the Father honor you as you serve in Christ's mission?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

Passion (Palm) Sunday

March 25, 2018

Read:

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



Reflect:

For Palm Sunday, before we get caught up in the Passion of the Cross -- the hardships and sufferings and death of Jesus that he endured because of his tremendous love for us -- let's take a look at the passion of the woman who anointed Jesus with perfume.

In those days, there were no deodorants and indoor plumbing for taking showers to get rid of body odors caused by the hot, sweaty climate. So people made perfumes. After creating a mixture of oils and herbs, they let it sit in a jar to ferment. The longer they stored it, the more potent--and valuable--it became.

For the perfume to be a "costly" gift for Jesus, it must have been fermenting for a very long time.

When we want to give someone a gift, we usually head to the store to buy something new. Right? 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? Most of us couldn't do it unless we feel very passionate about the person to whom we 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. And again, ask yourself: "What's so precious that it's hard to let go of -- something that Jesus would appreciate receiving?" And then give it to him before the week ends; he will give you a new victory on Easter.

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 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, come up with ideas on how to offer these saved-up gifts to Jesus. Why are these gifts like perfume to Jesus?

Comments/Prayer Requests: