

The Little White Book
Six-minute reflections
on the Sunday Gospels of Easter (Year A)

*This book is dedicated to
Bishop Ken Untener
(1937-2004)
who was inspired to create
the Little Books. His life and faith
continue to be their driving force.*

This Easter booklet is based on the writings of Bishop Ken Untener, and put together by Catherine Haven, editor of the *Little Books*, with the help of Sr. Nancy Ayotte, IHM, who works with the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd.

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How to Use the *Little White Book*

This *Little White Book* is meant to help you enjoy six minutes a day in prayer during these next 50 days of the Easter season.

The key is the right-hand page. On that page each day (except Sundays), we'll walk through the Sunday Gospels of Cycle A (this year's liturgical cycle).

The left-hand page is like a buffet table with information about the Easter season, or various traditions and customs, or the saint whose feast is celebrated on that particular day. This year, on Sundays and periodically throughout the week, we'll focus on the 12 apostles.

Start with either page, as you wish.

The main thing is to spend some quiet time with the Lord using one of our oldest traditions of prayer called *lectio divina* – sacred reading. We take a short Scripture passage and simply let God speak to us through the words, guiding us to reflections that sometimes seem to come from nowhere. But they're not "from nowhere." They're from God.

People are often surprised at how easy it is to pray this way, and how deep such prayer can be.

On Monday, April 13, we'll begin walking through Sunday's Gospel reading.

April 13, 2020



Easter season

Records show that Christians, besides celebrating Easter Sunday, celebrated a continuing Easter *season* as far back as the beginning of the third century.

Outside of Ordinary Time, it became the Church's longest season – a 50-day stretch from Easter Sunday to Pentecost Sunday. It was not a time for penitential practices. Fasting and kneeling were not permitted. It was a time to exult in God's goodness.

Why is the Easter season so long?

Because Christians believed that the Resurrection was just too big and too important to be celebrated for only one day, or even one week.

Why 50 days . . . not 10, or 20?

Because there was already in place a Jewish feast called "Pentecost" (a harvest festival) which took place 50 days after Passover. When Pentecost became a Christian feast celebrating the descent of the Spirit, Christians turned the time between Passover and Pentecost into the "Easter season."

The symbol of the Easter season is the paschal candle. Consider having a special candle in your home to light during these 50 days. Symbols help.

Monday, First Week of Easter

After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, approached, rolled back the stone, and sat upon it. (Mt 28:1-2)

At times like Easter there is something within me that wants to be hopeful. Yet I may be afraid to let it out, particularly when I have seen so many hopes dashed.

Hope is a tender feeling, easily bruised. When you hope, you are vulnerable. You can make a fool of yourself especially when your hopes do not turn out. When the pessimist turns out to be right, then you appear foolish, naive. To have hoped and lost often makes us more guarded.

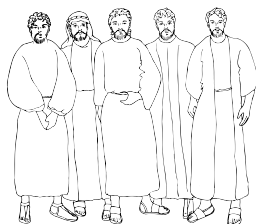
In the Bible, even those who suffer are able to hope because their hope is based upon what *God* can do, not what they can do.

Perhaps this Easter season, I should allow myself to hope. There is the reality of Good Friday which means that I accept the fact of suffering and failure.

But Easter is also a reality – it shows what God can do and it offers me hope no matter the situation.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*



Who were the 12 apostles?

Luke names the apostles as Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James (son of Alphaeus), Simon the Zealot, and Judas (son of James). Matthias would later join this group to replace Judas Iscariot, the betrayer of Jesus.

John's Gospel refers to 12 apostles but only gives names for nine of them: Peter, Andrew (identified as Peter's brother), the sons of Zebedee (plural form implies at least two apostles), Philip, Nathanael, Thomas (also called Didymus), Judas Iscariot, and Judas (not Iscariot).

Matthew and Mark's list of the 12 apostles agrees with Luke's for the most part. But they substitute Thaddeus for Judas, son of James (the saint normally referred to as St. Jude Thaddeus).

Why do the apostles' names differ on the evangelists' lists? In some cases, it wasn't unusual for a person to be known by two different names. Peter, for example, is also known as Simon. Possibly Judas, the son of James, preferred to be called Thaddeus so that he wouldn't be confused with Judas Iscariot.

Tuesday, First Week of Easter

The angel's appearance was like lightning and his clothing was white as snow. The guards were shaken with fear of the angel and became like dead men. (Mt 28:3-4)

The cross has become a victory sign.

If God can bring meaning even to the cross, then God can bring meaning to anything. Only God could transform suffering and failure into victory.

This is the joy of Easter.

We all have parts of our lives that seem so useless, so senseless, so meaningless.

Some of my failures I bring on myself. Some of them are not my own doing, I can't control what happens.

Some are small pockets of our life – irritations and frustrations.

Some are major concerns.

Easter celebrates God's ability to bring meaning to any aspect of human life, even something apparently useless, even a total failure.

Easter celebrates the fact that God's capacity for goodness is greater than my capacity for failure.

Now *that's* something to celebrate.



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April 15, 2020



Fire at Notre Dame Cathedral

One year ago today, a major electrical fire damaged the centuries-old Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, France.

Many of the cathedral's priceless artifacts were rescued during the blaze when bystanders formed a human chain to retrieve art and religious artifacts. Among the items saved was a reliquary (a repository for relics) containing Jesus' crown of thorns, and a 13th-century tunic said to belong to St. Louis.

Some of the 850-year-old cathedral's valuable art was undamaged because it had been removed a few days before the fire. As part of Notre Dame's multi-million dollar renovation that was underway, the art pieces had been taken from the cathedral for cleaning and repair due to damage from time and pollution. Among the saved art were sculptures of the 12 apostles and the four evangelists.

The sculptures of the apostles each weigh about 500 pounds. They were installed at Notre Dame in 1859 and 1860 during an earlier major reconstruction of the cathedral by a 30-year-old Gothic-Revival architect named Eugene Viollet-le-Duc. He faced a daunting task. During the French Revolution, the cathedral's statues had been destroyed, and its bells melted down into cannons. After years of neglect, the cathedral also needed a new spire.

Viollet-le-Duc is said to be the model for the statue of St. Thomas the Apostle.

Wednesday, First Week of Easter

**Then the angel said to the women in reply,
“Do not be afraid! I know that you are seeking
Jesus the crucified. He is not here, for he has been
raised just as he said. Come and see the place
where he lay.”** (Mt 28:5-6)

There is greatness and grandeur in the universe, and there is so much about it that I don't know. Perhaps the earth and the sun and the planets are just like tiny atoms in some molecule . . . and the molecule is part of something so much larger and different than the universe that I can't even imagine it.

It could be so. I really don't know.

Some physicists talk about matter and anti-matter, so that for every atom that exists here, there is an unseen mirror of it on the other side that we cannot get into contact with . . . and from this they posit the possibility of a whole other universe.

But Scripture doesn't give a detailed map of the universe. Scripture gives insights. It doesn't tell how big the universe is, only that God made it all. Jesus didn't give all the details of a structured cosmos. He taught that it all belongs to God, and that each of us is loved, protected and cherished.

I walk by faith and not by sight. If I follow these insights, whatever the shape of this vast cosmos, I walk down right paths and need never fear.

Do not be afraid. That's good advice.



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April 16, 2020



Patron saint of coffeehouses

Today is the feast of St. Drogo, the patron saint of coffeehouses.

Drogo was born in 1105 in what is today known as Flanders, an area of southern Belgium near the French border. He was orphaned as an infant, and later blamed himself for the fact that his mother had died giving birth to him.

Although his parents had left him with a comfortable lifestyle, Drogo chose to live a simple life. He gave away much of his inheritance, and worked as a shepherd in Sebourg, France. After several years, he sensed a call from God to become a pilgrim, and traveled to religious sites throughout France and Italy, including the tombs of SS. Peter and Paul in Rome.

When illness made him physically unattractive, he lived as a hermit in Sebourg where he built a small room attached to the parish church. He died on this day in 1186 (or 1189), and is the patron saint of shepherds.

No one knows why this ascetic saint is also the patron saint of coffeehouses. Perhaps it was because Drogo would only drink warm water.

Thursday, First Week of Easter

The angel said, “Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘Jesus has been raised from the dead, and he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him.’ Behold, I have told you.” (Mt 28:7)

Sometimes today, it is hard to have hope.

A recent survey indicated that most people are unwilling to place their hope and trust in anything.

We protect hope carefully, especially when it comes to the most important things in life.

We don't want our hopes to be bruised . . . or completely crushed.

I might watch television and hope that a certain game show contestant wins the big prize or hope that my team wins the game. But that is hope from a safe distance.

But when it comes to the crucial things in my life and the lives of those I love, I can sometimes be reluctant to hope.

The message of Easter speaks directly to this. Jesus tells me that it is safe to hope. Do not be afraid. Jesus has met head-on the things I may fear the most – suffering, failure, sin, death – and he has beaten them all.

It is safe to hope.



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April 17, 2020

Easter Island

On April 5, 1722, Dutch explorer Jacob Roggeveen came upon an isolated island west of Chile in the south Pacific Ocean. Because it was Easter Sunday, he named his discovery Easter Island.

French missionaries arrived at Easter Island in the 1860s. On January 2, 1864, Brother Eugène Eyraud (1820-August 23, 1868), a member of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, was the first foreign missionary to live on the island. He had used his own money to sail from Tahiti to Easter Island. The bishop of Tahiti, Florentin-Etienne Jaussen (April 12, 1815-September 9, 1891) is credited with introducing the island's language to the world. He also ended slave raids on Easter Island, and ordained the first Eastern Polynesian priest in 1874.



Today, about 2,500 people live on the island, which is noted for its large rock carvings along the coastline. The only Catholic church on the island is Holy Cross Church, which was founded in 1937 by a German Capuchin friar, Fr. Sebastian Englert.

Fr. Englert served as a missionary on the island for more than 30 years, and often incorporated the native language of Rapa Nui into the liturgy.

* * *

Norwegian explorer Thor Heyerdahl visited the island in the 1950s and in the 1980s, and purchased thousands of artifacts which he took back to Norway. In 2019, the Norwegian government agreed to return his collection to Easter Island.

Friday, First Week of Easter

Then they went away quickly from the tomb, fearful yet overjoyed, and ran to announce this to his disciples. (Mt 28:8)

Jesus has risen, and what he promised has come true.

Even in the face of the power of the Roman governor, even in the face of the ugly, senseless death on the cross – Jesus has promised I can overcome evil by responding with love.

Even in the face of all the sad and terrible things that can go on in life – broken relationships, lost jobs, addictions, sickness – Jesus has promised that I can overcome evil by responding with goodness.

Sometimes it's awfully hard to believe in that promise. Maybe it would be easier to accept if I could see the promise work out on a large scale. If the factions in Iraq or Afghanistan came together and made peace, it would make headlines and we'd say the world is now a better place. I might believe in the promise if responding to violence and hatred with love led to peace in a large-scale situation like that. Maybe.

But with the small-scale stuff – responding with love to the family jealousies and petty problems that go on every day in my life, responding with patience and prayer just doesn't seem like it can have much effect.

But at the time, the crucifixion of Jesus was small-scale stuff. It was nothing on the world scale. It was nothing on the scale of Israel. It wasn't even a big event in Jerusalem. One person getting killed in that city didn't bring anything to a stop. But look what Jesus did, what he said. He responded with goodness and love, and it made this world something that it had never been before.

Perhaps I need to try responding to my problems with goodness and love – the way he did.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

April 18, 2020

Thomas, 'the Outspoken Twin'



Thomas the Apostle is mentioned several times in John's Gospel. Although he is best known as the "doubting Thomas," he also comes across as a person of courage who speaks his mind.

At one point, some Jewish people in Jerusalem threatened to stone Jesus because he had said, "The Father and I are one." Jesus left the city and went to a deserted place with his disciples. While there, he heard that his friend Lazarus had died. Jesus tells the disciples that he is going back to the Jerusalem area to "awaken" Lazarus. They warn Jesus that a return there so quickly would be dangerous. Thomas says, "Let us also go to die with him."

* * *

The feast of St. Thomas at Kurisumudy is held in Malayattoor, India, each year on the Sunday after Easter. It celebrates the proclamation of Thomas the Apostle that Jesus was God. (This Gospel is always read on the second Sunday of Easter.)

Thomas holds special meaning for Malayattoor. Tradition says, after the resurrection of Jesus, Thomas came to India aboard a Roman ship with a group of spice merchants in 52 A.D. and then traveled to this village. He spent 20 years in India where he founded seven Christian communities. While he was in Malayattoor, Thomas' life was threatened and he fled to the top of Kurisumudy mountain where he spent many days in prayer.

The feast of St. Thomas in the universal Church is July 3.

Saturday, First Week of Easter

And behold, Jesus met the women on their way and greeted them. They approached, embraced his feet, and did him homage. Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.” (Mt 28:9-10)

The disciples had heard Jesus speak for a couple of years about the way to fulfillment. They heard him say that the way things work out best, the way to life, is to entrust everything to God. They heard him say that they were daughters and sons of God, and they were to act like God acts, responding to evil with goodness, turning the other cheek, being gentle and truthful.

They had seen it work in situations in Jesus' own home town when people got stirred up against him. He never, ever drew a sword, he was always forgiving and gentle . . . and it worked.

When Jesus was arrested, and Judas and others came at him with swords and clubs, the disciples must have been terrified and probably thought, “Jesus' way doesn't work.” They all abandoned him, not to be heard from again until after his death.

Now, on Easter Sunday, they get the news that the tomb was empty. Perhaps they began to think, “Could it be . . . that trusting in God works, even in the face of the power of the Roman governor, even in the face of the ugly, senseless death on the cross? Could it be that the way of life Jesus taught us works even against death?”

That's the good news we celebrate on Easter.

Trust God.

It works.



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April 19, 2020



Orthodox liturgical colors

Today is Orthodox Easter.

There are four liturgical colors in the Roman Catholic Church: green (Ordinary Time), red (martyrs and Pentecost), purple (Advent and Lent), and white (Easter).

But in the Orthodox Church, liturgical colors are different: white (Resurrection), red (Advent season and feasts of martyrs), purple (Lent), blue (feasts of the Blessed Mother).

On the feast of Pentecost, the liturgical color is green to symbolize that God gives life to all creation, as a life-giving Spirit.

Today is Divine Mercy Sunday.

What it means to be a disciple



The Gospels were preached long before they were written, and Peter would have heard the story of his repeated denial of Jesus.

I wonder how he felt? Imagine him sitting there when it was one of the other apostles' turn to preach, and he hears the apostle say: "Whoever disowns me before men, I will disown before my Father in heaven."

I wonder how the other disciples felt? Every single one of them fled when Jesus was arrested. They must have heard this preached too, and they must have felt bad.

Probably Peter would have stood up for Jesus had he been hauled before the magistrate (rather than before a maid servant in the courtyard) and called upon to accept or reject Christ publicly. Probably I would do the same if I were called up before some pagan tribunal to accept or reject Christ. It would be difficult, but the adrenalin would flow, and I would summon up all my spiritual strength, and I could do it.

But the problem is in the courtyards of my life where I am often called upon, or at least given the opportunity, to say whether or not I am a follower of Christ. The people are just ordinary people who want to know what kind of life I really live. And lots of times I may hedge in my response.

It's not a question of whether or not I believe in God. It's whether or not I am a follower of Jesus, much as the maid servant asked Peter. People want to know what value system I follow in my life.

Jesus said: "Do not let them intimidate you. What I tell you in darkness, speak in light. What you hear in private, proclaim from the housetops."

Something to think about.

April 20, 2020

'I attended Mass there long ago
and prayed until I got my first job.'

– Gregory Peck

Actor's Chapel

St. Malachy Church in New York City is known for its Actors' Chapel.

The parish was founded in 1902 by Archbishop John Farley (who was born on this day in 1842). Because of its proximity to Broadway's theatre district, Catholic actors, musicians, dancers, and other show business people became part of St. Malachy's congregation. Masses, confessions and missions were arranged to accommodate their theatre schedules.

By the 1930s, St. Malachy's parishioners included such Catholic actors as Spencer Tracy, Irene Dunne, and Rosalind Russell. Rudolph Valentino's funeral Mass was held at St. Malachy's in 1926. Douglas Fairbanks Jr. married Joan Crawford there in 1929. Bing Crosby's movie, "Going My Way," was filmed at St. Malachy's in 1944. George M. Cohen donated an altar railing for the church, and, over the years, altar servers included Don Ameche, Jimmy Durante, and Pat O'Brien.

Despite its star-studded history, St. Malachy's faced closure many times in later years due to finances, a declining parish membership, and a changing neighborhood that soon became unsafe.

Fr. George W. Moore is credited with infusing new life into St. Malachy's after he became its pastor in 1976. He established a residence for elderly homeless people, and worked with folks with AIDS. He died at age 64 on May 3, 1991, three days before it was announced that he was to receive a special Tony award for his commitment to the poor and elderly.

Monday, Second Week of Easter

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be with you.”

(Jn 20:19)

In this week’s Gospel meditation, the main theme is belief – Jesus urges Thomas to be believing, not unbelieving, and the author of John’s Gospel also urges us to believe.

For many years now, Catholics have been drifting away from regular Mass attendance. People speculate on the reasons for this and there is probably a combination of reasons. But one possibility is: some people do not come to Mass because they don’t believe any more, or at least because their belief has weakened.

For a long time, people took faith for granted. We assumed that we all believed in God, and Jesus Christ, and life after death. We spent our time talking about what we do as Catholics, not what we believe. It may be harder to believe today because society does not support Christian faith – it not only challenges what we do but also what we believe.

Faith is a gift of God, but it takes personal courage and conviction in order to believe. You have to take a risk. You have to think about faith and reflect on it.

You have to be attentive to your faith and you may have to wrestle with it.

I need to take a hard look at my faith, because I can’t take it for granted.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

April 21, 2020



'To be a Catholic doesn't mean to be an imbecile.'

– Mary McGrory

Mary McGrory

Born in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1918, Mary McGrory was a columnist for the Washington Star, and later the Washington Post. Her column was syndicated to 187 newspapers, and in 1975, she became the first woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for commentary.

McGrory was also a devout Catholic. She gave 20 percent of her income to charity, especially to a home for unwed mothers and their children, St. Ann's Infant and Maternity House in Washington, D.C. She volunteered weekly at St. Ann's, paid children's tuition, and wrote checks to cover the orphanage's costs.

She attended Mass daily, and her biographer notes that she kept a copy of Thomas a Kempis' "Imitation of Christ" on her nightstand. She also identified with liberation theology, believing that the Catholic Church didn't measure up to its responsibility to oppressed people. McGrory was a regular contributor to America magazine.

Mary McGrory died on this day in 2004. Her funeral Mass was celebrated at the Shrine of the Most Blessed Sacrament in Washington, D.C.

Tuesday, Second Week of Easter

When Jesus had said this, he showed the disciples his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” (Jn 20:20-21)

The 20th chapter of John’s Gospel contains four episodes of faith:

- Mary Magdalen discovers the empty tomb and runs to tell the disciples. Peter and the beloved disciple run to the tomb and see and believe. This is the first recorded act of faith in the risen Jesus.

- Mary Magdalen meets Jesus at the tomb. He calls her by name and she believes in him.

- Jesus appears to the disciples in the Upper Room. They see and believe.

- A week later Thomas is with the disciples when Jesus appears and he expresses explicitly: “My Lord and my God.”

Why does the author of this Gospel focus so intensely on the theme of faith in the risen Christ?

This “Easter faith” is so important because it gives color and meaning to life and to death, even to suffering. When I have faith in Christ who is risen from the dead, I am no longer dealing with a flat, dull world. Faith is luminous with the presence of God, and holds the promise of a destiny in God’s hands. Faith brings life and verve to my existence, even when nothing else seems to make sense.

I should think about that. It could change how I look at the world . . . and my place in it.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

April 22, 2020

Matthew the Apostle

Matthew was a tax collector in Capernaum when Jesus called him to be a disciple. Mark and Luke call him Levi.



Little is known about his life in the early Church. Tradition says he preached in Ethiopia, Parthia (modern-day Iran) and Persia, and that he was beheaded for his faith. His feast is September 21, and he is the patron saint of accountants.

* * *

Is Matthew the Apostle also Matthew the Evangelist?

Early Christian tradition attached Matthew's name to what is now known as the "Gospel of Matthew." However, since this Gospel appears to have been written sometime after 80 A.D., and uses a great deal of material from an earlier Gospel (that of Mark), biblical scholars think it unlikely that the author was an eyewitness of the events narrated.

Toward the end of the first century, there was a tendency to attach the names of deceased apostles to various writings, because these writings preserved the apostolic tradition. It may be that the name of the apostle Matthew was given to this Gospel because it was written by someone who was part of an early Christian community evangelized by Matthew himself.

* * *

The Sunday Gospel readings during Cycle A (which are used this year) are generally taken from the Gospel of Matthew, especially during Ordinary Time.

Wednesday, Second Week of Easter

When Jesus had said this, he breathed on the disciples and said to them, “Receive the holy Spirit.” Jesus said to the disciples: “Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.” (Jn 20:22-23)

It is Easter Sunday evening, about 48 hours after Jesus’ death on the cross.

During the passion and death of Jesus, the disciples were not the world’s finest disciples. Peter denied Jesus three times. The rest of them (except, in John’s account, the beloved disciple) were noticeably absent from the moment he was arrested.

But notice Jesus’ first words to them 48 hours later – not, “Where were you?” or “How could you have done such a thing?” or “I am so disappointed in you.”

Look again at his first words: “Peace be with you.”

Then he starts talking about forgiveness, a welcome word to those disciples who needed forgiveness.

I can almost feel the sense of relief that must have come over them.

We’re all sinners, and down deep we know it. And the Lord always approaches us with words of peace and forgiveness.

Maybe I need to thank the Lord for this great kindness to me.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

April 23, 2020



Didymus

Thomas apparently had a nickname – “Didymus” (the Greek word for “twin”). There is an interesting tradition that the disciples gave Thomas this nickname because, in appearance, he closely resembled Jesus. They would refer to him, not as “Thomas,” but as “The Twin.”

Apocryphal Gospels have also said that Thomas was the twin brother of Matthew or even of Jesus himself.

While Thomas might have indeed been the twin brother of *someone*, the Church has never believed that it was Jesus.

Thursday, Second Week of Easter

Thomas, called Didymus, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the disciples said to him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nail marks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.” (Jn 20:24-25)

It doesn't seem fair.

The other disciples had a visual experience of the risen Lord. He appeared to them in the Upper Room. Thomas (perhaps through no fault of his own) missed out. But the rest of the disciples expect Thomas to believe in the Resurrection just as much as they do.

It's not fair . . . and Thomas tells them that in so many words. He says in effect, “Look. You say you *saw* Jesus. Fine. But *I* didn't see him and I'm not going to take this on hearsay! I want to *see*, just like you did.”

Perhaps the disciples argued with him and told him that what they saw was real – Jesus showed them his wounds.

Thomas gets a little carried away (perhaps he's ticked off). He says that he wants not only to *see* the risen Lord, but also to put his finger into the nail marks.

Sometimes I might feel just as Thomas felt – it's not fair. The appearances of the risen Lord in those first days after the Resurrection were miraculous, one-time special events that aren't available to me.

But the experience of the risen Lord truly present within me, around me, and alongside me, is just as real.

It's an experience that is available to me – sometimes when I least expect it.



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April 24, 2020



Fra Mauro

In February 1971, Apollo 14 astronauts Alan Shepherd and Edgar Mitchell collected samples of rock on the Fra Mauro formation, a crater on the moon.

The crater was named after a 15th-century monk and cartographer who created what was called the “ultimate map of the world.” His map included pictures of a region’s minerals, and comments about a particular geographic area.

Little is known about Fra Mauro. Born about 1400, as a young man he traveled as a merchant and soldier throughout the Middle East. Eventually he became a Camaldolese monk at the Monastery of St. Michael on Murano Island in Venice, Italy.

As a religious, Fra Mauro had to curtail his traveling, but his interest in faraway lands never waned. He frequently quizzed returning travelers, sailors, missionaries, and pilgrims about places they had visited. Once his mapmaking skill became known, King Alfonso V of Portugal commissioned him to create a world map. The monk completed the task in 1459, but the map was lost when he sent it to Portugal. Fra Mauro died the following year while making a copy of the map for the Republic of Venice. The map was completed by a Venetian cartographer who had collaborated with Mauro in drawing the earlier map.

For many years, Mauro’s map was considered the most accurate ever made. Fra Mauro also corrected previous mapmakers’ depictions of the world. He drew Japan as an island, and didn’t make Jerusalem the center of the map.

Years later, NASA called the map surprisingly accurate, considering the information available to the monk in the 15th century.

Friday, Second Week of Easter

Now a week later his disciples were again inside and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, although the doors were locked, and stood in their midst and said, “Peace be with you.” Then Jesus said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe.” Thomas answered and said to him, “My Lord and my God!” (Jn 20:26-28)

John’s Gospel is ending with a powerful statement of faith.

Throughout the Gospels, faith was terribly important to Jesus. Faith got him excited.

To be sure, Jesus got excited about someone who showed great charity.

And he got excited about someone who performed some great work of penance.

And he got excited when someone performed a great act of forgiveness.

But Jesus got *particularly* excited when he saw great faith:

- “I have not seen such great faith in all of Israel!”
- “Receive your sight; your faith has saved you.”
- “Everything is possible to one who has faith.”

If there was one thing Jesus wanted *most* of all, it was faith – faith in him as the Lord . . . faith in his work.

Would Jesus be excited with my level of faith?



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

April 25, 2020

'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?'

– Nathanael's question to Philip (Jn 1:45)

Nathanael of Cana

Very little is known about Nathanael of Cana, who is fishing with the other disciples when the risen Christ appears.

The Gospel of John says that he was a good friend of the Apostle Philip. Originally skeptical about Jesus, Nathanael soon became a devoted disciple.

Some scholars believe he is St. Bartholomew, whose name (not Nathanael's) is mentioned in the list of the apostles that is found in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 1:13).

Tradition says that after the death and resurrection of Jesus, Nathanael/Bartholomew preached in Ethiopia, India, Persia, and Armenia, where he was flayed and beheaded for his faith.

His feast day is August 24.



Saturday, Second Week of Easter

Jesus said to Thomas, “Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are they who have not seen and have believed.” Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name. (Jn 20:29-31)

A most dramatic thing happens at the end of this week’s Gospel reading.

Jesus is talking to Thomas and, suddenly, Jesus is talking to me.

He really is. Jesus says to Thomas, “Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are *they* who have not seen . . . and have believed.”

His last words in the Gospel of John are a blessing upon me.

Then, as if that isn’t enough, the Gospel writer says: “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written that *you* may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief *you* may have life in his name.”

That’s me he’s referring to. All these things were written down to help *me* believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.

Imagine. Jesus had me in mind all along.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

April 26, 2020

Oura Cathedral in Nagasaki

On this day in 2016, the Holy See granted basilica status to the co-Cathedral of Oura in Nagasaki, Japan. It is the oldest wooden Christian Church in Japan.



St. Francis Xavier had brought the faith to Japan in 1549, and within 30 years, there were more than 200,000 converts. But by the late 16th century, Japanese authorities began to expel the missionaries and to persecute Christians. In 1597, 26 Christians were crucified on the city's Nishizaka Hill. But even without churches and priests, Catholic laity covertly passed their faith on to future generations.

In 1865, Japan was reopened for Westerners. A French missionary named Fr. Bernard Petitjean soon arrived to dedicate prayers to the 26 Christians martyred on Nishizaka Hill. He also established a Catholic church, which became the Oura Cathedral.

In 1895, the people decided to build a larger cathedral, which took 30 years to complete. Often called the Urakami Cathedral, it is officially known as the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. On August 9, 1945, the faithful had gathered to prepare for the upcoming feast of the Assumption. When the nuclear bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, the cathedral was flattened, killing everyone inside. Reconstruction of the cathedral began in 1959. In 1980, it was remodeled to match the original Urakami Cathedral. Inside is the Madonna of Nagasaki, a blackened and damaged statue of the Blessed Mother which survived the bombing.

When the Summer Olympics are held in Tokyo, Japan, this year, they will conclude on August 9, the 75th anniversary of the bombing of Nagasaki.

Travel light like the apostles



In the Gospels, Jesus tells his apostles to travel light. That's a good idea. Life is too short to be weighed down with excess baggage.

The reason for traveling light isn't because material things are evil. It'd be wrong to think that I'm supposed to tiptoe through the world and avoid the "contamination" of material things. A religion that believes in a God who became flesh and blood cannot have a negative attitude toward material things. A religion that believes in the Resurrection cannot have a negative attitude toward material things. I am not called to have a pious discomfort with material goods. I am called upon to use and enjoy the things of the earth.

Then why travel light? Because accumulating things can get in the way of my relationship with people. Things can be important, but people are always more important.

Things can also bog me down. I was created by God to grow, to move, to journey, to experience the great adventure of life. The more things I pile up, the less I am able to move in this or that direction. I become less an adventurer and more a watchman.

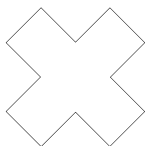
Life is too short to invest too much time and too much talent and too much love in things.

The advice Jesus gives says it all: go forth to the great adventure of life, and as you go, travel light.

'Then Jesus called together his twelve apostles and sent them out two by two . . . He told them, "You may take along a walking stick. But don't carry food or a traveling bag or any money. It's all right to wear sandals, but don't take along a change of clothes."

– Mark 6:7-13

April 27, 2020



Andrew the Apostle

St. Andrew worked as a fisherman in the town of Bethsaida in Galilee. At first, he was a disciple of St. John the Baptist, but later he followed Jesus and encouraged his brother, Simon Peter, to also become a disciple of Jesus.

After the death of Jesus, Andrew is thought to have served as a missionary in Greece and Russia. However, it is unknown exactly where he preached or where he died. Legend suggests he died in Patras, which today is Greece's third largest city.

His feast day is November 30.

* * *

Legend says that Andrew was tied to an X-shaped cross (also called a *saltire* cross) to prolong his suffering. It is said that he died after two days.

* * *

Andrew is the patron saint of Scotland (which includes his X-shaped cross on its national flag), Greece, and Russia. His cross also adorns the state flag of Alabama. He is also the patron saint of fishermen.

Monday, Third Week of Easter

Now that very day two of them were going to a village seven miles from Jerusalem called Emmaus, and they were conversing about all the things that had occurred. And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him.

(Lk 24:13-16)

When Jesus died on Friday, the disciples thought he had left them. He was gone. This was shattering to them. They had depended so much upon him. He taught them, led them, gave them courage.

And now he had left them.

What they didn't know was that Jesus had gone through death to the other side, and now was free of all the restrictions on this side of death.

Now the risen Lord could be with them even more closely.

From Easter Sunday onward, they gradually discovered this. The two disciples on the road to Emmaus discovered that Jesus was with them when they read the Scriptures together and when they broke bread.

It's what Simon Peter discovered when the risen Lord appeared to him, and the disciples also began to catch on that the Lord was with them in a new way.

Have I discovered that the risen Christ is here with me today?



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

April 28, 2020

Society of St. Peter the Apostle

The Society of St. Peter the Apostle supports the education and formation of priests and religious in developing countries. It was founded in 1889 in Caen, France, by Stephanie Bigard and her daughter Jeanne.

In 1878, Stephanie's husband committed suicide, and later her son Rene was killed. After these tragedies, Stephanie and her daughter found comfort in their faith, and began to focus their energy on helping the missions.

In 1888, they received a letter from a French missionary soliciting money to build a church in Kyoto, Japan. Then Bishop Jules-Alphonse Cousin of Nagasaki, Japan, contacted them for funds to educate seminarians. The situation was so dire, he wrote, that he was forced to turn away young men hoping to become priests.

The mother and daughter began raising money for both appeals. They sold possessions, and Jeanne even sold her home and donated her dowry. The Bigards' efforts became known as the Society of St. Peter the Apostle. Soon they were traveling throughout Europe to raise funds for other seminaries in Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Korea, and China.

Stephanie Bigard died in 1903; two years later, ill health forced Jeanne Bigard to step down from leadership of the society. Fifteen years later, its central office was moved to Rome. In 1922, Pope Pius XI proclaimed the society "pontifical," with the task of supporting seminaries in mission dioceses. Today approximately 30,000 seminarians and 10,000 religious novices receive assistance from the society.

Jeanne Bigard died on this day in 1934.

Tuesday, Third Week of Easter

Jesus asked the two, “What are you discussing as you walk along?” They stopped, looking downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, said to him in reply, “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place there in these days?” And he replied to them, “What sort of things?” They said to him, “The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, how our chief priests and rulers both handed him over to a sentence of death and crucified him. But we were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel.” (Lk 24:17-21)

The disciples didn't recognize Jesus in some dramatic meeting, as when Peter spotted him on the shore. They recognized him “in the breaking of bread.”

That is the kind of presence I can experience in expected and unexpected ways, and know that the risen Lord is here with me today.

Jesus has gone through death to the other side so that he can be even closer to his disciples than he was before his death.

And Jesus is with me as well. He is there all the time. He never abandons me. He is there to help me, to give me courage, to show me the way, to help me deal with problems.

We've all got problems in our lives and to know that the Lord is with me through these kinds of things can make a huge difference.

I know I'm not alone.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

April 29, 2020



Bethsaida

Five of the apostles – Peter, Andrew, James, John, and Philip – came from the ancient fishing village of Bethsaida.

The village's exact location is unknown today. Some scholars favor Et-Tel, a mound located along the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Others suggest the Jewish village was along the eastern shore of the Jordan River.

Bethsaida was founded about 10 centuries before Jesus was born. In its early years, the village was possibly the capital of the Kingdom of Geshur (located in what is today the Golan Heights. King David married the daughter of the king of Geshur.)

Besides calling several disciples from the village, Jesus also performed miracles there. At Bethsaida, Jesus restored the sight of the blind man, and performed the miracle of the loaves and fishes.

During the first century A.D., one of Herod the Great's sons, Philip the Tetrarch (who ruled from 4 B.C. until his death in 34 A.D.), renamed Bethsaida "Julias," in honor of Julia, the wife of Roman Emperor Augustus and mother of the Emperor Tiberius. Philip is believed to have died in Bethsaida and was buried there.

Wednesday, Third Week of Easter

The two disciples said: “And besides all this, it is now the third day since this took place. Some women from our group, however, have astounded us: they were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find his body; they came back and reported that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who announced that he was alive. Then some of those with us went to the tomb and found things just as the women had described, but him they did not see.” (Lk 24:21-24)

As a disciple of the Lord, I experience the Lord in many ways in my life, sometimes unpredictable ways, like under the starry sky or before a beautiful sunset or sunrise.

I experience the Lord sometimes when I think deep thoughts . . . sometimes powerfully in other people . . . sometimes in tragedy.

But the only place where I can count on experiencing the Lord is in the Eucharist. He comes in a hundred different ways and they are beautiful and they are real. But the one place that is predictable and the one place where my experience of the Lord should be more intense is in the Eucharist.

Some days, I may ask myself: if the Lord can be encountered in so many places, why go to Mass? This week's story of Emmaus tells me why: to meet Jesus in this sacramental way and to have him speak his words, and to break bread with him, is to experience a special kind of regular, intense, predictable, recognizable presence that is different from any other kind.

That's why I go to Mass.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

April 30, 2020



St. James the Greater

James the Greater was the son of Zebedee and Salome, and the brother of John the Apostle. He was a fisherman in Galilee when he was called to be a disciple.

He was the first apostle to be martyred for his faith and his death is described in the Acts of the Apostles – the only apostle’s death to be detailed in the New Testament.

Legend says that after the resurrection of Jesus, James preached in Spain before returning to Jerusalem. After his death, his followers transported his body back to Spain, where it is said to be buried at the Shrine of Santiago de Compostela. It has also been a popular spiritual destination for pilgrims since medieval times.

St. James is the patron saint of Spain and of laborers.

The Catholic Church celebrates his feast on July 25, while the Eastern Byzantine Church celebrates the feast of St. James the Greater today.

Thursday, Third Week of Easter

And the risen Jesus said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the Scriptures. (Lk 24:25-27)

As near as scholars can tell, Luke wrote his Gospel 40 or 50 years after the death and resurrection of Christ, for people who had never met Jesus.

One reason why this story of Jesus on the road to Emmaus was specially cherished by the early Christian community and incorporated into the Gospels is because this story portrays what we do each Sunday at the Eucharist.

The passage begins with the gathering rite when the disciples come together with Jesus. Then there is the Liturgy of the Word where there is conversation about the great issues of life and the Scripture is used to help understand those issues.

The conversation is followed by the Liturgy of the Eucharist and the breaking of bread. Finally, there is the dismissal rite when all this is done and we go out to tell the good news to other people by the way we live and by the things we say.

Just like the disciples who walked with Jesus on the way to Emmaus.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

May 1, 2020

Canada's first Catholic bishop

On this day in 1647, a 24-year-old seminarian who would become the first Roman Catholic bishop of Canada was ordained in France.

Born April 30, 1623, in France, the newly ordained Fr. Francois de Montmorency Laval went on to receive his degree in canon law at the Sorbonne, and then lived at the Ermitage of Caen. In 1658, the 35-year-old priest was named bishop of New France (Canada), and sailed to Quebec.

Bishop Laval soon butted heads with New France's governor over the lucrative sale of alcohol to Indians. The bishop left New France in 1662, but managed to have the governor later recalled to France. Bishop Laval returned to Quebec in 1663. He founded the Seminary of Quebec to train seminarians and to house retired priests (the seminary became Laval University in the 19th century.) But he again quarrelled with the new governor. A royal agent was sent to New France to clarify that civil government's authority overrode clergy authority.

In 1674, Bishop Laval became bishop of the newly-created Diocese of Quebec (which included all French territory in North America). Despite great distances, he visited as many of his parishes as he could. He promoted the spread of the faith among the Indians and baptized the Iroquois chief. He fostered vocations and started Canada's Catholic school system.

Bishop Laval died in 1708 in Quebec. His cause for canonization was introduced in 1878; he was canonized in 2014.



Today is the feast
of St. Joseph the Worker.

Friday, Third Week of Easter

As the disciples approached the village to which they were going, Jesus gave the impression that he was going on farther. But they urged him, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them. And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight. (Lk 24:28-31)

Those two disciples had walked that road from Jerusalem to Emmaus before. They had read the Scriptures before. They had shared meals before. But not like this. This meal was different because it was presided over by the risen Christ.

In this week’s scriptural text, Luke is answering the question that must have been asked back then and has been asked ever since: “Why should I go to Mass? I can read the Scriptures, I can pray, why go to Mass?”

I *can* read the Scriptures, and I should. I *can* pray and I should. But there is something different, something unique, in the liturgy, and that something is the presence of the risen Christ.

There are different levels of presence. God is everywhere and God was everywhere for those two disciples. But there was a distinctive, more intense, more active presence of Jesus when they sat down to break bread that day. And we believe that when a sacrament is celebrated, especially the Eucharist, that is the kind of presence we experience.

The risen Lord is with me in a distinctive way at the Eucharist. His presence had a powerful effect on the two disciples when he broke bread with them that day. His presence in the Eucharist can have a powerful effect on me.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

May 2, 2020

St. Catherine Laboure

Zoe Laboure (better known by her religious name, “Catherine”) was born on this day in 1806 in the Burgundy region of France.

When she was nine, her mother died. Kneeling before a picture of the Blessed Mother, the grief-stricken little girl prayed, “Now, dear Blessed Mother, now you will be my mother.”

At 24, Catherine decided to join the Daughters of Charity and work with the sick. As a young novice in Paris, she began to experience visions of the Blessed Mother. In one of these, Mary asked her to have a medal made – showing Mary’s picture and the words, “O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee.”

Catherine kept this vision to herself, telling only her spiritual director. It was through him that devotion to what became known as the “Miraculous Medal” quickly spread.

Through all this, Catherine stayed in the background. Only when she was near death in 1876, did Catherine reveal her 45-year secret and confide to her superior the role she had in bringing into existence the Miraculous Medal.



* * *

Like St. Catherine Laboure, St. Teresa of Avila also made the same choice of Mary for her mother. She did this while praying before a statue of Mary shortly after her own mother’s death.

Saturday, Third Week of Easter

Then the two disciples said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the Scriptures to us?” So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem, where they found gathered together the eleven and those with them who were saying, “The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!” Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread. (Lk 24:32-35)

Have I ever noticed how many of the seven resurrection appearances of Jesus involve food?

Four of them.

Jesus ate with the disciples the night before he died, and he continues to do the same thing after he rose from the dead. That’s because he wanted to teach the disciples that he continues to be present with them.

A certain kind of connection happens when people share a meal together. The risen Christ came to his disciples not just so they could see that he was alive. He came to engage the disciples, to connect with them in a personal way and he did this by sharing meals with them.

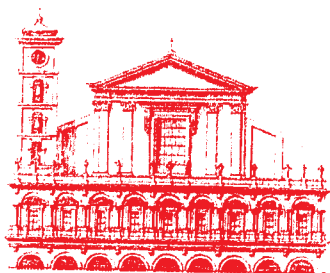
The risen Christ comes among us today in order to *engage* us, to *connect* with us, and to draw us into his living and dying and passing through death to life. He still does this by sharing a meal with us in the Eucharist.

When I go to the Eucharist, am I ready for this kind of connection with him?



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

May 3, 2020



James the Lesser

Today's feast of SS. Philip and James honors James, son of Alphaeus, who is listed four times in the New Testament as one of the Twelve.

James is often called "the Lesser" to distinguish him from James, son of Zebedee, "the Greater." Perhaps James is called "Lesser" because he was the younger (or the shorter) of the two James, or because he was called by Jesus to become a disciple after the call of James the Greater.

James the Lesser was a key figure in the early Church. He was one of the first apostles to see the risen Christ, and is thought to be the James mentioned as head of the Church in Jerusalem. Tradition says St. James the Lesser was clubbed to death in the spring of 62 A.D. for refusing to renounce his faith. Josephus says he was stoned to death a year earlier.

St. James the Lesser is the patron saint of pharmacists and Spain.

* * *

The Basilica of the Holy Apostles in Rome has the relics of St. James and St. Philip under the main altar, and that is why they are honored together in today's feast.

'Imperfect' apostles offer hope



The disciples were anything but perfect, and the Gospels tell me more about their faults than their virtues.

I know that they bickered, and they fought over who was first and who was last. They were dense. They frustrated Jesus. They doubted. They wanted power. Peter denied Jesus. They deserted him. They didn't even come to his funeral. They were full of problems, and they were the same until the day they died.

They weren't famous either. I don't hear anything more about them after Pentecost. Oh, I hear a little about one or two (Peter, of course), but mostly all I have are legends about the apostles. Most of the apostles are never spoken of again in the rest of the Scriptures.

Jesus doesn't expect me to go and be perfect, or to be famous. But Jesus does expect me to be great, and he put greatness within my reach.

I can't walk on water, but I can be a foot-washer, and Jesus said that's what greatness is. He never said to walk on water like he did. He just told me to wash feet like he did.

That is greatness.

After he breathed forth the breath of God over the disciples, Jesus commissioned them to go out and be the greatest forgivers in the world. That wouldn't make them famous. It wouldn't make them perfect. But it would make them great.

I'm still a sinner, I'm still going to be whatever I am, a person who may be impetuous, get angry, etc.

But the breath of God that is within me calls me to greatness.

Disciple, apostle, the Twelve

What is the difference, if any, among the terms: “Disciple,” “the Twelve,” and “Apostle?”

Disciple: This is from a Latin word that means “one who is taught, a learner, the follower of a master.” In the Gospels, the word designates those called specifically by Jesus to follow him, and who actually traveled with him. Some of them were women. It’s not known how many disciples there were. Luke, in his Gospel, speaks of Jesus sending 70 disciples to preach, but it is assumed there were more than this.

Luke, in the Acts of the Apostles, is also the first to extend the term “disciple” to refer to Christians who were not with Jesus during his ministry, but who were baptized after his death and resurrection. Today the term is used for all the baptized.



The Twelve: From among the “disciples,” Jesus chose a distinct group to become “the Twelve” – symbolizing

the 12 tribes of Israel in the new covenant. Their names are listed in three of the Gospels and in the Acts of the Apostles, although there are some variations in the lists.

Apostle: This is from a Greek word that means “one who is sent officially” as, for example, an ambassador. In the New Testament, the term does not apply to all the disciples. It does apply to the Twelve, but goes beyond the Twelve – apparently designating those specially “sent.” Paul, for example, calls himself an apostle. In his letter to the Romans, he also refers to a woman as an apostle: “Greet Andronicus and *Junia* . . . they are prominent among the apostles.”

Monday, Fourth Week of Easter

Jesus said: “Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever does not enter a sheepfold through the gate but climbs over elsewhere is a thief and a robber. But whoever enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep.” (Jn 10:1-2)

This chapter of John’s Gospel uses the image everyone loves – Jesus as the Shepherd, going out to the lost sheep and putting it on his shoulders . . . the shepherd who gives his life for the sheep . . . the sheep who know him and he knows them.

The passage for today refers to the gate or door of the sheepfold. The only one who can open the gate and enter the sheepfold is the shepherd.

Everyone has closed doors in their lives. Places inside ourselves where we do not want to go because we are afraid. Behind those doors are things like old hurts, addictions, health concerns, hatred, fears.

Jesus is telling me that he can lead me, one of his flock, through the closed doors in my life to those places where there is trouble so I can deal with it. And then he can lead me out again.

Jesus, my shepherd, is telling me: “Don’t be afraid.”



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

May 5, 2020

Cinco De Mayo

Cinco de Mayo (Spanish for “Fifth of May”) is a holiday in Mexico, and popular among Mexican-Americans in the United States. It commemorates a military victory at Puebla, Mexico, in 1862. In itself, and from a strategic point of view, the battle was not that important. But symbolically, it meant a great deal.

Mexico had gained independence from Spain in 1810. This was followed by internal political wars, then the Mexican-American War, and finally the Mexican Civil War of 1858. These were now behind them, but the economy was in ruins.

France, using as an excuse Mexico’s failure to pay its debt, sent an invading army to take over Mexico City and install Napoleon’s relative, Maximilian of Austria, as ruler. The French army was moving toward Mexico City when, on May 5, 1862, a small and poorly armed detachment of Mexican soldiers defeated them.

France eventually sent a much larger army that managed to take over Mexico City in 1864, but the success was short-lived, lasting only three years.

Cinco de Mayo honors the spirit of the outnumbered militia that bravely withstood the powerful French army. It stands as a symbol of courage in Mexico’s struggle for independence.

* * *

Today, about a third of U.S. Catholics are Hispanic.

Today is Cinco de Mayo.

Tuesday, Fourth Week of Easter

Jesus said: “The gatekeeper opens it for him, and the sheep hear his voice, as he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has driven out all his own, he walks ahead of them, and the sheep follow him, because they recognize his voice.” (Jn 10:3-4)

As a Christian, I believe that in following Jesus, his values, his example, I will find life – life to the full.

But the example of Jesus, the values of Jesus are not easy to live. I am a sinful person. I make mistakes. Sometimes my instincts are wrong.

I need a shepherd. I need to be shepherded.

I need the support, the correction, the challenge, the reminders of others in the Christian community, the traditions of the Church, spiritual leaders, prayer, the Scriptures . . .

I can't do it alone.

I don't *have* to do it alone.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

May 6, 2020



‘Apostle of the Alleghenies’

Demetrius Gallitzin was born December 22, 1770, in the Netherlands, into one of Russia’s oldest and wealthiest families.

His father was a prince who served as Russian ambassador to Holland. His mother was an Austrian baroness who had fallen away from Catholicism as a child. Demetrius was raised in the Russian Orthodox Church, but at age 17 became a Catholic to please his mother who had returned to the Church.

After finishing his education, he was named as an aide to a military general, but his parents decided Demetrius should first spend a couple of years visiting the United States, the West Indies, and other countries. In 1792, Demetrius landed in Baltimore, Maryland, accompanied by his priest tutor, and with letters of introduction to Bishop John Carroll. To avoid traveling as a Russian prince, Demetrius adopted the name Augustine Smith. Moved by the needs of the people he met, Demetrius decided to enter St. Mary’s Seminary in Baltimore.

During a visit to the Alleghenies, Fr. Gallitzin decided to form a Catholic settlement there. Today, the Allegheny territory where Fr. Gallitzin served constitutes the dioceses of Pittsburgh, Erie, and part of Harrisburg in western Pennsylvania.

At his own expense, he built sawmills, tanneries, and other businesses to employ the people. Because he had converted to Catholicism, Russia had confiscated most of the family fortune, so Fr. Gallitzin accumulated a large personal debt. Among those helping him pay off the debt were Charles Carroll and Cardinal Bartolomeo Cappellari (the future Pope Gregory XVI).

Fr. Gallitzin died May 6, 1840, in Loretto, Pennsylvania.

**Today is the halfway point
of the 50-day Easter season.**

Wednesday, Fourth Week of Easter

Jesus said: “But the sheep will not follow a stranger; they will run away from him, because they do not recognize the voice of strangers.”

(Jn 10:5)

We've all experienced coming into a group where we didn't know anyone.

Perhaps we are at a party, or a wedding, or a funeral. We look for a familiar face, listen for a familiar voice.

Jesus came as someone who would be with us at every step in our lives, even when we feel alone, or lost, or confused.

He wants to be a familiar presence, a voice that I know well.

I need to allow Jesus to get that close to me.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

May 7, 2020

'We are not called by God
to do extraordinary things,
but to do ordinary things
with extraordinary love.'

– Jean Vanier

Jean Vanier

Born September 10, 1928, in Geneva, Switzerland, Jean Vanier was the son of the former governor general of Canada.

Vanier served in the navy for Great Britain and Canada. He considered joining the priesthood, and lived for a while in a Trappist monastery in France. Instead, he received his doctorate and taught philosophy at the University of St. Michael's College at the University of Toronto.

After a visit to France to see his Dominican spiritual director, Vanier was impressed by the priest's work with developmentally disabled people. Vanier began visiting asylums where he was appalled by the patients' living conditions. Inspired by the Gospels and the work of Dorothy Day, Vanier decided to establish a community where disabled people could live together and equally with non-disabled people. With financial aid from family and friends, he purchased a home outside Paris, France, in 1964.

The community became known as L'Arche International, named after the ark which saved Noah, his family, and the animals. Today, there are more than 154 L'Arche communities in 38 countries.

Vanier, who also founded Faith and Light, a network of support groups for mentally disabled people and their families, died on this day in 2019 at the age of 90.

Thursday, Fourth Week of Easter

Although Jesus used this figure of speech, the disciples did not realize what he was trying to tell them. So Jesus said again, “Amen, amen, I say to you, I am the gate for the sheep.” (Jn 10:6-7)

The full power of the shepherd image came through easily to people whose ancestors were Bedouin shepherds and who lived in a country where shepherds were a familiar sight.

The sheep were part of the Bedouin family. They traveled with the family. New lambs were born into the group, and the sights and sounds and smells of the family were familiar to these lambs from the time they were born.

When Jesus used the image of the sheep and the shepherds, the people immediately understood the closeness he was talking about.

God is like that for me.

From the very beginning of my life, I had an experience and knowledge of God. As I grew up, people “from the outside” helped me to interpret this experience and helped enhance the truths I held within.

This Easter season is a good time to reconnect with the familiar God that I have known for so long.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

May 8, 2020



What happened to Mary after Jesus' death?

The four Gospels tell very little about Mary following the death of her son. The Gospel of John says that from the time of the Crucifixion on, the disciple whom Jesus loved took Mary into his care.

The only additional mention of Mary after Jesus' death is in the Acts of the Apostles: "Together they devoted themselves to constant prayer. There were some women in their company, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers" (Acts 1:14).

* * *

Ancient tradition has suggested that Mary moved with the Apostle John to Ephesus (in modern-day Turkey) where she lived out her final days. Today, travelers to Ephesus can visit "the house of the Virgin Mary," which is located on a mountain near Ephesus. In the 1960s, Pope Paul VI became the first pope to visit Mary's home in Ephesus.

Another tradition suggests that she stayed in Jerusalem since her family lived there. Catholics believe that, after her earthly life, she was assumed body and soul into heaven.

Friday, Fourth Week of Easter

Jesus said: “All who came [before me] are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. (Jn 10:8-9)

What is the chemistry between me and Jesus?

Do I see him as he describes himself in the Gospel passage I read this week – a gate opening up to wide and enjoyable pastures? Someone with whom I can feel safe? Someone with whom I can rest easy? Someone whose voice I recognize and with whom I feel secure?

What if I “abandoned” myself to him: “Lord, do with me what you will.”

Probably, like most people, I would brace myself for some suffering. In the back of my mind, perhaps I think that the more I give myself to the Lord, the more suffering I can expect from him.

But nowhere in this whole chapter of John’s Gospel does Jesus come across as someone who intentionally sends me hardship, a rough road. He did say that these kinds of things happen in life, but he also said that he wanted to be there with me when they did.

There is a great difference between seeing Jesus as the one who sends suffering and seeing Jesus as my shepherd.

When I give myself to Jesus, I receive a good shepherd who will walk with me through every rough spot.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

May 9, 2020

'About that time King Herod laid hands upon some members of the church to harm them. He had James, the brother of John, killed by the sword.'

– Acts 12:1-2

How did the apostles die?

Tradition says that the apostles were martyred for their faith.

Except for St. John. Despite attempts to poison him and immerse him in boiling oil, John died of old age.

The cause of death for the other apostles was reported by witnesses or is the result of legends that have developed over the years:

- James the Greater was the first apostle to be killed, and his is the only death of an apostle described in the New Testament. Legend adds that James' body was placed in a boat and set adrift, and it came ashore in Spain.
- Peter was crucified in Rome.
- Andrew was crucified in Greece in the year 70. A tradition originated in the Middle Ages that he wished to be crucified on an X-shaped cross.
- Philip was martyred in Phrygia (an area that today is part of Turkey).
- Bartholomew/Nathanael was flayed alive in Armenia.
- Matthew was beheaded in Ethiopia.
- The historian Josephus says James the Lesser was stoned to death in Jerusalem.
- Jude (Thaddeus) was martyred in Armenia.
- Thomas was stabbed by a spear in India.
- Simon was sawed into pieces in Persia.
- Matthias was martyred in Turkey or in Jerusalem.

Saturday, Fourth Week of Easter

Jesus said: “A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy; I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly.” (Jn 10:10)

I came so that they might have life . . .

Sometimes I may get the impression that to join the Church is just the opposite of what Jesus said in the Gospel. Instead of coming out of the confinement of the sheepfold and into the wide open pasture, a person who joins the Church seems to be going into the confinement of the sheepfold.

Maybe I feel confined because there are things I can't do. Maybe I feel my thinking has to be stifled.

But Jesus' words *are* true.

I may expect that belonging to the Church community means I give up some freedom to think what I want to think. In reality, the security I can find in the Church allows me to dream and explore and ask questions I couldn't ask before.

By belonging to a community of the Lord's disciples, I can dream great dreams and experience a great destiny no matter who I am.

Jesus has come so that I might have life.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

May 10, 2020

'When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go and anoint him. Very early when the sun had risen, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb.'

– Mark 16:1-2

Mother of James and John

Very little is known about the mothers of the apostles, except for Salome (the mother of two apostles) and Mary (the mother of James). Even then, much of the information comes from legends or apocryphal gospels.

Salome is described as the mother of the apostles, James and John, or, as the Evangelist Mark puts it, “the mother of Zebedee’s children.” Her family background is unknown, outside of the fact that she is the wife of Zebedee, a wealthy fisherman living in Capernaum.

Salome is believed to have become a follower of Jesus, and supported her sons’ decision to become disciples of Jesus. St. Matthew also writes of her request to Jesus that her sons be seated beside him. St. Mark says she was present at the Crucifixion, and accompanied Mary Magdalene to Jesus’ tomb on Easter morning.

After Pentecost, legend says Salome settled in Veroli, in central Italy. She is sometimes called St. Mary Salome, whose feast is celebrated October 22. She is the patron saint of Veroli, whose Basilica of St. Mary Salome is said to contain her remains.



Today is Mother's Day.



Called to be a disciple

I don't know much about Matthias but I wonder what kind of a person he was, and what he was thinking when he was selected to be one of the apostles.

He wasn't chosen when Jesus picked the original Twelve. Then Jesus died, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven, and Matthias found himself in the same situation that, actually, I am in today – serving a God who isn't physically present.

Here Matthias is, by some strange circumstances, as the apostles try to choose somebody to replace Judas. And they are going to do it by chance. They are going to draw lots. And Matthias is chosen to be one of the Twelve.

Well, it may seem like Matthias' selection was by chance, but it wasn't. The apostles had prayed. They believed that God works in so many mysterious ways that sometimes it seems like chance. It's like wondering how I got to be who I am, how I even got the gift of life, and how I became Catholic, when most of the world isn't. There are about 7.5 billion people in the world, and only 15 percent are Catholic.

But my being Catholic wasn't by chance any more than Matthias being chosen to be an apostle was by chance.

I was called by name by God to be a disciple in a way that seems mysterious and almost by chance. And the more I believe that I was handpicked by God and sent into this world, the more I feel called to sometimes stand against the world and be who I am called to be, God's disciple.

**'A dead thing can go with the stream,
but only a living thing can go against it.'**

– G.K. Chesterton

May 11, 2020



Philip the Apostle

In John's Gospel, Philip is among the first disciples called by Jesus. Twice he provides an opportunity for Jesus to give a teaching:

- Jesus, wanting to feed the multitude, asks Philip, "Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?" Philip replies that even 200 days' wages wouldn't be enough to feed all of the people. Jesus then miraculously feeds the people.

- At the Last Supper, Jesus says that if the apostles know him, they also know the Father. Philip says, "Master, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us." Jesus replies, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."

* * *

Philip was a Galilean from Bethsaida, and is credited with introducing the future apostle, Nathanael/Bartholomew, to Jesus. Following Pentecost, he preached in Phrygia (modern-day Turkey), Greece, and Asia Minor. He was martyred about 80 A.D. in Phrygia. Philip was said to be married, and is buried with his daughters. He is the patron saint of pastry chefs.

At one time, today was the feast of St. Philip the Apostle. But now he shares his feast day with St. James the Lesser on May 3.

Monday, Fifth Week of Easter

Jesus said: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be. Where I am going you know the way.” (Jn 14:1-3)

The setting for this week’s Gospel is the Last Supper. This is the last meal that Jesus will have with his disciples. Within 24 hours, he will be dead.

He is concerned about the problems his departure will cause for the disciples left behind. He tells them not to be troubled, and tries to reassure them.

Jesus has talked about “my Father’s house” before – at the cleansing of the Temple. Then, “my Father’s house” was the Temple.

Now Jesus is telling them that *he* is the new Temple, and there is room in his heart for every one of them. In his Father’s house there are many dwelling places, and he is going to prepare a dwelling place for the disciples.

He could have spoken in abstract concepts, saying that in the Kingdom they would experience eschatological wholeness and bliss. But he spoke in very personal terms instead.

When I am troubled, the risen Lord reassures me in the same way. There is room in his heart for me too.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

May 12, 2020

Roger Schutz

Roger Schutz was the founder and prior of Taizé, the first ecumenical community in Europe.

Born on this day in Switzerland in 1915, Roger was ordained a minister in the Swiss Reformed Church. In 1940, as World War II loomed over Europe, the 25-year-old minister left Switzerland and traveled to the village of Taizé, in the region of Burgundy, close to the demarcation line which separated German-occupied France from free France. Soon Brother Roger and the Taizé community were sheltering Jewish refugees fleeing the Nazis. After the war, they cared for orphaned children, as well as the German prisoners of war interned near Taizé.



On Easter Sunday, 1949, Brother Roger and six other men formally made a commitment to live a life of community, celibacy, and simplicity, devoted to peace and justice, in the monastic community of Taizé.

* * *

When he first arrived in Taizé, Brother Roger sought the local Catholic bishop's permission to use the village church.

The bishop referred him to the papal nuncio in Paris, Archbishop Angelo Roncalli. The two men became friends. When the archbishop became Pope John XXIII, he invited Brother Roger and his community to attend the Second Vatican Council.

In 1986, another pope, John Paul II, visited Taizé. In 2005, Pope Benedict XVI invited Brother Roger to attend the World Youth Day in Cologne, Germany, but the 90-year-old monk declined for health reasons.

Shortly thereafter, on August 16, Brother Roger was fatally stabbed by a Romanian woman attending a Taizé evening prayer at its headquarters in eastern France.

Tuesday, Fifth Week of Easter

Thomas said to Jesus, “Master, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way and the truth and the life.” (Jn 14:4-5)

Thomas wants to know *the way*.

Three times in this short passage, *the way* is used. In the Acts of the Apostles, it will be used eight times. Before Christianity was ever called Christianity, it was called, *The Way*.

It was a certain way of life.

I'm familiar with some ways of life. A vegetarian. That's a way of eating. A vegetarian could explain that if you want to be one of these people, then this is what you do and don't do. Clear, simple focus.

A person in Weight Watchers could tell me how to eat and live as a Weight Watcher. A person in Alcoholics Anonymous could explain their way of life as an AA member. They all would probably refer me to systems, or books, or principles, or teachings.

There were two things anyone who was going to be a member in this community that was called *The Way* had to do:

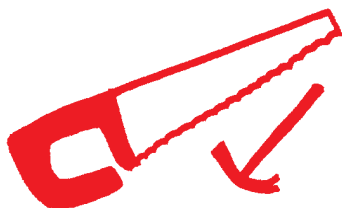
- They had to know The Way so they could help other people live it.
- They had to really live The Way.

How am I doing? Do I really know The Way . . . and am I living it?



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

May 13, 2020



Simon the Apostle

Very little is known about Simon.

Simon is sometimes called the Zealot, which means he was a member of the Zealot party, a group of Jews committed to a violent overthrow of Roman rule. He is said to have come from the village of Cana. After Pentecost, he is believed to have preached in Egypt, and, along with Jude, in Persia. Although there is no historical data regarding his death, various traditions say that Simon was martyred by crucifixion or by being sawed into pieces, likely in Persia.

Simon and Jude share the same feast day of October 28.

Wednesday, Fifth Week of Easter

Jesus said to Thomas: “. . . No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, then you will also know my Father. From now on you do know him and have seen him.” (Jn 14:6-7)

The old Catholic catechism described God as “the Supreme Being, above all creatures, the self-existing and infinitely perfect spirit.”

Not quite as graphic as Jesus describing his Father.

Some of the attributes and perfections of God – God is eternal, all-knowing, all-present, and almighty – may seem very philosophical.

But Jesus invites me as he invited Thomas: “If you want to know what God is like? Look at me.”

I could reply, “Well, I guess God cries, and God laughs, and God embraces little children, and God touches the lepers.”

And Jesus, of course, would say, “That’s true.”

The Gospels of the Easter season tell me how wonderfully close God is to me.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

May 14, 2020



The 13th apostle

Shortly after the ascension of Jesus, the small Christian community (Luke says there were about 120 of them) gathered and decided there should be a replacement for Judas as one of the Twelve. They cast lots, and Matthias was chosen.

The practice of casting lots went back to ancient Jewish tradition. People sometimes turned to their priests to determine God's will. The priest would cast sacred lots, called the "Urim and Thummim." It's not known exactly what these pieces looked like – they may have been precious stones with some type of characters on them. Magic and superstition were forbidden to Israelites, but casting lots was not considered superstitious.

By using this method to choose Judas' replacement, the early Christians showed their Jewish roots.

Matthias is never mentioned in the New Testament after his election. Although there are legends, little is known about him.

Today is the feast of St. Matthias.

Thursday, Feast of St. Matthias

Philip said to Jesus, “Master, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you for so long a time and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” (Jn 14:8-9)

Philip and the other disciples were feeling left behind.

Jesus was going to his glory, and they were being left out.

Everyone has experienced that feeling of being “left out.” There are only so many places on a team, and sometimes you don’t make the team. There are only so many places at a dinner party, and sometimes you don’t get invited.

It’s hard, especially when people who are close to you get invited. You want to be with them, but you don’t get to go.

That’s how the disciples felt. Confused. Lost. Not worthwhile. They wanted to be with Jesus, but they didn’t get to come along.

Jesus assures them: Do not let your hearts be troubled. Where I am, you also will be.

He reassures me as well: Do not let your heart be troubled. Where I am, you also will be.

He will not leave me behind.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

May 15, 2020

Diocese of Charleston

This year marks the 200th anniversary of the founding of the Catholic Diocese of Charleston, South Carolina.

The diocese was established on July 11, 1820, and originally included the states of Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. Today it is comprised of the entire state of South Carolina, and is the seventh-oldest Roman Catholic Diocese in the United States.

* * *

The first bishop of Charleston was John England (September 23, 1786, in Cork, Ireland-April 11, 1842, in South Carolina), who also founded the first Roman Catholic newspaper in the United States, the *United States Catholic Miscellany*, which published until 1861. He also founded the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, and he organized the Brotherhood of San Marino to assist immigrants and the working class. In 1833, he was also named apostolic delegate to Haiti.

* * *

The Charleston Diocese's cathedral is the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist. It was originally consecrated on April 6, 1854, but the church was destroyed during a massive fire that ravaged Charleston in 1861. The current cathedral was built on the foundation of its ruins.

Friday, Fifth Week of Easter

Jesus said: “Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on my own. The Father who dwells in me is doing his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else, believe because of the works themselves.” (Jn 14:10-11)

I can't always put my personal experience of God into words as I struggle to understand it and express my experience to others.

One way I can talk about God is through images and symbols. I might say God is like a shepherd, or a rock, or thunder, or a mountain, or a cloud, and so forth.

None of these images captures all that God is – God is beyond all images and symbols. And yet a symbol can express something of who God is and how I have experienced God.

What is my favorite image of God?

Maybe I should spend a little time thinking about that.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

May 16, 2020



Where are the apostles buried?

No one knows for sure where all the apostles are buried, but tradition, unsubstantiated legend, and archaeological discoveries provide some suggestions.

The original St. Peter's Basilica was built in 319 A.D. over what was believed to be Peter's tomb. In 1939, while preparing Pope Pius XI's tomb, workers discovered what was thought to be Peter's actual tomb. Rather than raise false hopes, Pope Pius XII didn't announce the discovery until 1950. In 1968, Pope Paul VI confirmed that Peter's remains had been found.

John the Apostle is said to be buried in Ephesus, Turkey.

Andrew's head is venerated at St. Andrew's Church in Patras, Greece; his relics are also in the cathedral in Amalfi, Italy, where they were brought from Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade.

The Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in Galicia, Spain, is said to house the bones of James the Greater.

Thomas is reportedly buried in the San Thome Basilica in Mylapore, a suburb of Madras, India.

The relics of James the Lesser and Philip are under the main altar of the Basilica of the Holy Apostles in Rome. In 2011, researchers reported finding the tomb that once held the bones of St. Philip amid the ruins of a fourth- or fifth-century church at Hierapolis, Turkey.

Several cities claim to have Matthew's remains. One is a village in Kyrgyzstan, where Armenian monks brought the saint's remains.

St. Helena is said to have carried Matthias' relics from Jerusalem and given them to an abbey in Trier, Germany.

Bartholomew's bones were assumed lost at sea . . . until they washed ashore in southern Italy.

Saturday, Fifth Week of Easter

Jesus said: “Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater ones than these, because I am going to the Father.” (Jn 14:12)

John’s Gospel is a very elevated Gospel. He speaks of the Word of God existing before all things came to be. That is why John’s symbol is the eagle. The Gospel talks about Christ in the highest way. Christ is always in complete command, knows all things, and is such a high and exalted figure.

My mind can’t comprehend all the philosophical and theological questions about God. Even St. Thomas Aquinas, one of the greatest theologians in the history of the Church, is said to have remarked as he was close to death that everything he had written was like “straw.” Worthless when compared to the great mystery of God.

So where does that leave me? How can I even think about God?

I can look to Jesus and the way he was revealed in the Gospels. Even in the Gospel of John, whenever the exalted Christ comes to the disciples in their struggles, he is merciful, compassionate, and loving.

I know that is how God is.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

Mysterious 'Beloved Disciple'

In John's Gospel, there is a nameless disciple who is very close to Jesus, but somehow isn't "seen" by the other Gospel writers (at least they don't mention him). John refers to him as the other disciple or the disciple Jesus loved. This disciple appears four times in John's Gospel:

- He is next to Jesus at the Last Supper table, and Peter tells him to ask Jesus which disciple is the betrayer. [The other evangelists make no mention of this.]

- When Jesus is arrested, Peter follows him to the high priest's house, and the other disciple gets Peter into the courtyard. [The other evangelists don't say how Peter managed to get in.]

- As Jesus is dying, the disciple whom Jesus loved is at the foot of the cross with the mother of Jesus. [No other evangelist mentions any disciple at the foot of the cross.]

- On Easter morning, when the women come back with news of the empty tomb, Peter and the other disciple run side by side to the tomb. [The discovery of the empty tomb is described in the other Gospels, but there is no mention of this other disciple.]

No one knows who this beloved disciple is. Originally he was assumed to be John himself. However, in recent years, most scholars think otherwise. It is thought that he was someone in the early Christian community who had been very close to Jesus, but not famous during Jesus' lifetime. Later, people remembered that he was a holy person, close to Jesus – but they didn't remember his name.

Hindsight is 20/20



We all know people for whom our attention and approval would have meant a great deal, but we didn't realize it at the time. So often, it's only after they've gone from our lives that we realize a lot of things about someone, and maybe wish we had done or said something differently.

This is how it often was for the apostles. There was so much about Jesus that they didn't understand. It was only later, 20 or 30 years afterward, in many instances, that they realized what had taken place.

Maybe my first thought is about how dumb those fishermen were. Why didn't they understand? But often I do the same thing. I am so close to what is going on that I miss underlying meanings and see only the routine happenings. It is only in hindsight that I appreciate many things, many people.

I wonder how often I do the same thing to Jesus in my life. He is part of my life today. How many overtures has he made to me that I have missed? I can think about the times when I never realized how much he cared, how much my caring meant to him. I can think about the day's events, and about how much he is present in all of them.

That's why I have to pray. Prayer helps me to step back a bit and appreciate Jesus' presence in my life every minute of the day.

**'But they understood nothing of this;
the word remained hidden from them
and they failed to comprehend what he said.'**

– Luke 18:34

May 18, 2020



Pope John Paul II

Today would have been Pope John Paul II's 100th birthday. He was born Karol Wojtyla on this day in 1920 in Wadowice, Poland.

* * *

Before becoming a priest, Karol Wojtyla worked as a boiler cleaner at a chemical plant, a member of an experimental theater group, a stonecutter, and a published poet. He also helped smuggle Jews to safety during the Holocaust.

* * *

In 1958, Karol Wojtyla was on a kayaking trip when he learned he was named a bishop, the youngest bishop in Poland's history. In 1967, at age 47, he became one of the youngest cardinals in modern times.

* * *

On October 16, 1978, at age 58, he was elected pope and took the name John Paul II. He became the first Polish pope in the history of the Catholic Church, and the first non-Italian pope in 456 years.

Monday, Sixth Week of Easter

Jesus said: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” (Jn 14:15)

During the Easter season, we celebrate the gift of the Spirit.

It is a gift that changes everything.

The reading for today suggests that there should be a *difference* between someone who has received the gift of the Spirit and someone who has not. How can you tell the difference?

You can't tell whether an egg is raw or hard-boiled just by looking at it. They all look the same. But if you spin an egg on a table, the raw egg will spin slowly and stop quickly. The hard-boiled egg will spin fast and keep on spinning.

We all look the same from the outside. But just as there is a difference in the way the hard-boiled egg and the raw egg spin, there should be a way to tell the difference between the Christian who has received the gift of the Spirit and the non-Christian.

Could anyone tell the difference in me?



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

Apostle who betrayed Jesus

When it comes to name recognition, Judas Iscariot ranks extremely high. He will forever be known as the disciple who betrayed Jesus. His name is mentioned 22 times in the New Testament (second only to Peter).

* * *

The name “Judas” was common at that time, but the meaning of “Iscariot” is uncertain. It is an obscure word and could have been his family name or his town of origin. It could also have designated his trade, physical appearance, or even political allegiance.

* * *

Few biographical details are known about Judas (which is true of most of the 12 apostles). Apart from Jesus, he has been the subject of perhaps more speculation than any of the personalities in the passion narrative (Why did he betray Jesus? Did he participate in the Eucharist? Did the words “deeply regretted what he had done” signify true repentance?).



* * *

Later, non-scholarly speculation has made him out to be the older brother of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, or the beloved disciple in John’s Gospel, or a Jewish priest. There is no evidence to support such theories.

Tuesday, Sixth Week of Easter

Jesus said: “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot accept, because it neither sees nor knows it.”

(Jn 14:16-17)

Jesus is gathered with his close friends and he is talking to them at a difficult moment. In about 18 hours, he will be dead.

They have become very, very close. They depend upon him. They follow him wherever he goes. He decides where they are to go and what they are to do, and he is the one who handles difficult moments with the crowds. He has been their advocate.

And Jesus promises that he’s going to send them another advocate, a *paraclete*.

A *paraclete* is a person alongside you (the Greek word *para* means “alongside” or “next to”), someone who is with you to help.

Jesus has sent the same advocate to be with me – always. Someone who says, “Don’t worry. I’ll be there to help you.”

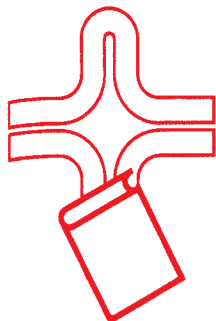
It’s his very Spirit.

Have I called on my advocate recently to help me in difficult moments?



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

May 20, 2020



Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed

The Apostles' Creed: Various creeds were used for catechetical instruction as early as the second century. Gradually one fixed form developed from the ancient baptismal profession of faith used in Rome. It is called the "Apostles' Creed" because it is considered to be a faithful summary of what the apostles believed.

* * *

The Nicene Creed (officially, the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed): The Council of Nicea convened in the early fourth century to deal with questions about the divinity of Christ, and issued a summary of faith known as the "Nicene Creed." Several additions regarding the Holy Spirit were added to the creed at the First Council of Constantinople in 381. The Nicene Creed is the creed commonly used at Mass.

* * *

The First Council of Nicea (which was the first ecumenical council of the Christian Church) opened on this day in 325 A.D.

Wednesday, Sixth Week of Easter

Jesus said: “But you know it, because it remains with you, and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.” (Jn 14:17-18)

Jesus has just promised his disciples a special gift. Jesus will not leave them. He will give them another paraclete/advocate . . . namely, his Spirit.

Jesus made the same promise to me. I don't always expect God to do that, to be *right there* for me. That's a role people often grow up assigning to their guardian angels.

But, to tell the truth, a lot of what folks thought was the role of guardian angels actually belongs to the Spirit. And the Spirit is not just a messenger from God – the Spirit *is* God.

The Spirit is always with me, protecting, helping, strengthening, supporting.

I have received that gift of the Spirit. It's a gift that I have received through my baptism and confirmation. It's a gift I celebrate in this Easter season. It's a gift I celebrate throughout the year. It's one of the reasons why we gather at the Eucharistic table – not only to celebrate the presence of the risen Christ in the Eucharist, but also his ongoing presence with us every step of the way through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

“I will not leave you orphans. I will come to you.”

Imagine how much that meant to the disciples.

Imagine how much it should mean to me.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

May 21, 2020

Feast of the Ascension

Today the Church celebrates the feast of the Ascension of the Lord.

In Jerusalem, several churches commemorate the ascension of Jesus into heaven, as witnessed by his apostles. One of the most popular is the Chapel of the Ascension, located on top of the Mount of Olives.

A Byzantine church in honor of the Ascension was constructed on this site about 390 A.D. by a Christian woman named Poimenia. The open-air church was said to contain a stone with the imprint of the footprint of Jesus.



The Persians destroyed the church about 614 A.D., but it was later restored by St. Modestus of Jerusalem. Crusaders rebuilt the church about 1150. But by the end of the 12th century, the Muslim general, Saladin, had captured the church and converted it into a mosque.

The chapel remains a holy site for Christians and for Muslims who also acknowledge the ascension of Jesus, and who continue to occupy the site.

* * *

The walls in the courtyard of the Chapel of the Ascension are lined with hooks. Pilgrims would use the hooks to stretch tents when they came to celebrate the feast of the Ascension.

In the United States, most dioceses transfer the celebration of the feast of the Ascension to the following Sunday.

Ascension of the Lord/Thursday, Sixth Week of Easter

Jesus said: “In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me, because I live and you will live.” (Jn 14:19)

Everybody feels alone at some time.

The first time you're homesick is one of the loneliest experiences in life.

Or when you're a parent and your children leave home.

Or the first time you're alone in the dark in the woods.

Or when you spend the night at the hospital. Even though the hospital staff takes good care of you, it is a lonely moment. You'd like a friend or family member there, to talk to, to be with you.

Today Jesus tells me that he doesn't ever want me to be alone. Picture him saying:

“I'm going to be with you. Even more closely than I have been before. So don't feel alone.

“I'm going to ask the Father to send me in a new way through the Spirit. This Spirit will breathe in you and will envelop you like the aroma of perfume.

“The Spirit will be above you and below you and next to you. It will be with you in the loneliest hours of the night or in the thick of the crowd.

“I will be there if you are a sinner and I will be there if you are a saint. I will be there in good times and in bad. I will embrace you. Always.”

No exceptions. No fine print. He'll be there.

I can count on it.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

May 22, 2020

John the Apostle

John and his brother James were partners in a fishing business with two other brothers – Peter and Andrew. In Matthew, they are the first four disciples called by Jesus.

John was said to be a young man when he was called to be a disciple, and he lived to an old age.

* * *



St. John the Apostle is mentioned 20 times in the Gospels (though never in the Gospel that bears his name). The threesome of Peter, James, and John had an especially close relationship to the Lord (sometimes along with Andrew). For example, Jesus brought only them to witness the Transfiguration.

* * *

John and other disciples attended the Apostolic Council held in 49 A.D. in Jerusalem (the first “church” council). St. Paul also attended the council (along with Barnabas) where he recognized John as a “pillar of the Church.”

* * *

Since the sixth century, the feast of John the Apostle and Evangelist has been celebrated on December 27.

Friday, Sixth Week of Easter

Jesus said: “On that day you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me and I in you.”

(Jn 14:20)

If the risen Lord announced that he was going to appear in my town next Wednesday, traffic would pick up right away.

Actually, you wouldn't be able to get near the place where he was going to appear. There'd be helicopters and media from around the world.

We human beings place great value on something we can see.

This was true of the disciples. As Jesus' death approached, they felt that if he were no longer with them in the same way he had been, they would be without him. And they wanted to cling to his human, *visual* presence.

But Jesus tells them that it is quite the contrary. When the Spirit comes upon them, he will be *closer* to them. Seeing him in a vision (as they would do after the Resurrection) couldn't hold a candle to receiving the Holy Spirit . . . which unites with our spirit . . . and God is within.

Imagine. God united with me. God there for me, on my side, loving me, accepting me, enlivening me, giving me courage, vision, sureness of purpose, peace, joy, life.

God within me always.

If I believe that, it changes everything.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

May 23, 2020



*A legend or a fable is a story
that doesn't pretend
to be historical,
but simply teaches a lesson.
The events surrounding
the resurrection of Christ
gave rise to many legends.*

Legend of the elder tree

From which tree did Judas hang himself?

No one knows for sure but tradition suggests that it was the elder tree. It is also claimed that the wood for Jesus' cross came from an elder tree, although others dismiss this theory saying that Jesus would not have struggled with the lightweight wood of the elder along the Way of the Cross.

The elder tree was considered to be a protective tree, often planted by a back door to keep evil spirits away. Its fragrant white blossoms also kept away flies. Elderberry wine has medicinal purposes for combating colds and flu.

The small tree features soft fungal growths which look like mushrooms and are dubbed "Judas' ears."

**The feast of the Ascension is celebrated
in many dioceses this weekend.**

Saturday, Sixth Week of Easter

Jesus said: “Whoever has my commandments and observes them is the one who loves me. And whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him.” (Jn 14:21)

There are seven weeks to this Easter season, and as the weeks progress, the passages in the Gospel invite me to focus less and less on the tangible, bodily presence of the risen Lord, and more and more on an even deeper presence of the Lord that cannot be seen.

The tangible, bodily presence of Christ that could be seen and touched was a miraculous kind of presence, but one that was temporary (as all miracles are).

A deeper, more enduring presence of the risen Christ comes to me in the giving of the Spirit as he promised.

I need to be attentive to this gift of the Spirit that has been given me.

When I believe what Jesus said about his presence in my life through the gift of the Spirit, it has a profound effect on my life.

Then I don't need alcohol to give me courage.

Then I don't need everyone's approval to give me confidence.

Then I don't need to win all the time to feel like I am worthwhile.

Then I don't have to seem important to others to feel important.

Jesus, risen . . . giving me his Spirit.

Imagine.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

May 24, 2020

Academy of the Sacred Heart

Madeleine Sophie Barat, founder of the Society of the Sacred Heart (which operates the Academies of the Sacred Heart) was born December 12, 1779, in France.

During the French Revolution (1789-99), many Christian schools were closed. Education – particularly for young girls – was almost non-existent. Madeleine’s older brother, Louis, became her first teacher. At 16, she went with him to study in Paris, where she learned about plans for a new religious congregation specializing in education. In 1800, Madeleine and three others consecrated their lives to the Sacred Heart. They took over a small girls’ school in Amiens, France, and quickly expanded their ministry.

In 1805, Society of the Sacred Heart drafted a plan of studies to ensure high standards in all of their schools. Their goal was to educate the “whole person” – a relatively unique concept at the time. In 1806, Mother Barat was elected superior general of the Society of the Sacred Heart – a position she held for 63 years. Under her guidance, the society spread throughout France and Switzerland. In 1865, she was stricken with paralysis and died on May 24, the feast of the Ascension. She was canonized on this day in 1925; her feast is May 25.

Today more than 150 Academies of the Sacred Heart are in 41 countries worldwide.

St. Rose Philippine Duchesne started the first Academy of the Sacred Heart in the United States. In 1818, Mother Barat sent her as a missionary to the Louisiana Territory. In Missouri, she established the first “free school” in a log cabin west of the Mississippi. She soon added six more schools, but the task was not easy for her. Her French teaching style was unfamiliar, and her English was terrible. She died in 1852, thinking her life was a failure.

Rose Philippine Duchesne was canonized July 3, 1988.

Witnesses to the Ascension



Eleven apostles went to Galilee to the mountain to which Jesus had summoned them. Among the 11 were Matthew and John. Interestingly, neither Matthew nor John provide an account of a visible Ascension in the Gospels.

After the resurrection, Jesus appeared visibly to his disciples. It's not as though Jesus settled in with them for days at a time. These were sporadic manifestations which the disciples were privileged to receive. His "home" was at the right hand of God, and it was from there that he appeared.

These appearances came to an end, as is dramatized by a visible ascension of Jesus rising to the sky and no longer returning to the disciples in this way. This is his last appearance when he takes leave of his followers in visible form. It's this image that usually comes to mind when I hear that word "ascension."

Theologian Karl Rahner called the Ascension the "feast of the future of creation" since, because of the ascension of Christ, we are "the most sublime of materialists." We can no longer picture a future without matter. Flesh has been redeemed and glorified, which means that matter will last forever and be glorified forever. Thus, Rahner says, the Ascension is the beginning of the transformation of all creation.

The ascension of Jesus in his humanity is a sign of things to come for all of us and for all creation because Christ has brought part of this earth to God.

It is the beginning of what is to come, a cause for hope in a world that all too often is gloomy about its own future.

May 25, 2020

Fr. Emil Kapaun

In 1953, shortly after the Communists released prisoners of war from the Korean War, stories began to circulate about a courageous Catholic chaplain.



The prisoners told of how the priest had risked his life rescuing wounded soldiers, saving men from the Death March, and caring for his fellow prisoners.

The army chaplain was Fr. Emil Kapaun from Wichita, Kansas. He had entered the U.S. Army Chaplain Corps in 1944 and served in India and Burma. After World War II, he returned to the United States for graduate work, but rejoined the chaplain service in 1948. In July 1950, shortly after North Korea invaded South Korea, Fr. Kapaun was assigned to the army's Eighth Cavalry regiment in North Korea.

When the Chinese Communists attacked and overran the regiment on November 1, 1950, Fr. Kapaun stayed on the battlefield, ministering to the dead and dying, caring for the wounded, baptizing, and hearing confessions.

Fr. Kapaun was captured the next day. As a POW, he risked his own death by preventing executions of wounded Americans too injured to walk. He nursed the sick and dying. American soldiers claim the North Korean prison camp guards deliberately starved the priest in order to stop the religious services he conducted in defiance of camp rules.

The 35-year-old priest died of pneumonia in a POW camp on May 23, 1951.

In 2008, the cause for Fr. Kapaun's canonization was formally opened.

Today is Memorial Day.

Monday, Seventh Week of Easter

The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them.

(Mt 28:16)

The setting for the Gospel passages this week is on a mountain.

Jesus has been up and down a few mountains in Matthew's Gospel (Matthew likes mountains). There was the great Sermon on the Mount, then the mountainside where he fed the multitude, and the mountain where Jesus was transfigured.

But the mountain that I should keep in mind in order to appreciate this final scene in Matthew's Gospel is the mountain where Satan took Jesus at the very beginning of his public ministry. Jesus could have had all the kingdoms of the world for what seemed to be a cheap price: One bow to Satan.

Of course, that was a scam.

Now, here at the end, on another mountain, all power and glory will be given to Jesus.

The price was high – it was crucifixion and death.

But it was worth it. A whole new age has begun and it is our age. This is the part of the Gospel that steps into our time. What Jesus is going to say to the 11 disciples in this Gospel is a message that is also addressed to me today.

Am I ready to listen?



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

May 26, 2020

'Jesus appointed twelve [whom he also named apostles] that they might be with him and he might send them forth to preach and to have authority to drive out demons: [he appointed the twelve:] Simon, whom he named Peter; James, son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James, whom he named Boanerges, that is, sons of thunder. . .'

– Mark 3:14-17



'Sons of Thunder'

Why did Jesus refer to James the Greater and his brother John as “sons of thunder?”

There is no explanation in the New Testament, but that hasn't kept scholars from speculating. Most point to the brothers' explosive tempers (especially James), and their automatic reaction of responding to violence with violence. That was evident in Luke's ninth chapter when Jesus and the disciples had problems finding a place to spend the night in Samaria because of the tense relationship between the Jews and the Samaritans: “When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, ‘Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?’” (Lk 9:54).

Tuesday, Seventh Week of Easter

When the disciples saw the risen Lord, they worshiped, but they doubted. (Mt 28:17)

They doubted . . .

Why did Matthew have to throw that in?

Matthew is telling me that disciples will struggle with doubt (hesitation, practical wavering) until the end of time.

It's easier to believe when you're worshipping God. But then you go out into the world, and the doubt creeps in.

Oh, I don't necessarily doubt that there's a God. But I may begin to wonder whether or not God connects with this world, with my life.

The disciple is the person who is able to wrestle with that constant nagging doubt and say, "Yes . . . yes . . . yes, I believe."

What does it take to be a disciple?

It's as clear as clear could be in Matthew's Gospel. It is three things:

To hear God's word.

To take up your cross.

To go out into the world and live in a way that proclaims Jesus Christ as the Lord of all.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

May 27, 2020

'After that the risen Christ appeared
to James, then to all the apostles.'

– 1Corinthians 15:7

'He appeared to James'

Two of the 12 apostles were named James: James, the son of Zebedee, and a partner with Peter in a fishing business; and James, son of Alphaeus, about whom little is known.

But Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, refers to a third James whom the Gospels listed as one of the “brothers” (close relatives) of Jesus.

Indications are that these close relatives didn't put much faith in Jesus during his life. When his relatives heard [what Jesus was doing] they set out to seize him, for they said, “He is out of his mind” (Mk 3:21). His brothers did not believe in him (John 7:5).

Yet, in the Church's early years, this “brother of the Lord” emerges as head of the Church of Jerusalem. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul talks about one of his visits to Jerusalem. He says, “James, Kephas, (i.e. Peter) and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas their right hands in partnership.” It is noteworthy that he mentions James first, ahead of Peter and John (members of the Twelve).

James is prominent in Acts. When Peter miraculously escapes from prison, he tells the disciples: “Go and report this to James.”

How did James, one of the “brothers” who earlier didn't believe in Jesus, make such a turnaround? In this passage from Corinthians, Paul gives a clue: His “brother” appeared to him.

Wednesday, Seventh Week of Easter

Then Jesus approached and said to the disciples, “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” (Mt 28:18)

Note that Jesus came to the disciples (“approached”). Only one other recorded time – at the end of the Transfiguration – does he “approach” the three disciples.

In both instances, Jesus is in glory.

Before the glorified Lord, we humans can only bow low and keep our distance. Jesus bridges that distance by drawing near and speaking his words of comfort and compassion.

Sometimes, I may think of Jesus ascending into heaven as though he left us – sort of like going into retirement.

But Jesus promised the disciples at the Last Supper, “I’m going away and I’m coming back to you.”

He wasn’t talking about coming back at the end of the world. He was talking about coming back after he had gone through death to the other side, rose from the dead, ascended to heaven, and sent his own Spirit to be with us and within us.

That is a beautiful teaching.

Jesus is able to approach us and be within us, closer than he could be with the disciples as they traveled together during his ministry.

Jesus is definitely not “retired.”



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

May 28, 2020

'Judas, not the Iscariot, said to him, "Master, [then] what happened that you will reveal yourself to us and not to the world?"

Jesus answered and said to him, "Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; yet the word you hear is not mine but that of the Father who sent me."

– Jn 14:22-24

Jude the Apostle

Jude (also known as Thaddeus) was thought to be a cousin of Jesus.

His father was said to be the martyr Cleophas, a brother of St. Joseph. His mother Mary stood at the foot of the cross when Jesus died. His brothers were thought to be St. Simon and St. James the Lesser, and all three brothers were among the 12 apostles.

After the death and resurrection of Jesus, Jude is said to have preached in Samaria, Syria, Mesopotamia, and Libya. He is credited with writing an epistle to the Churches of the East, intended specifically for Jewish converts who were confronted by ongoing heresies. The letter encourages them to persevere in their new faith despite the difficult circumstances they were facing. Jude is said to have been martyred in Armenia.

The feast of St. Jude is October 28, and he is the patron saint of hopeless causes. Why is St. Jude the patron of desperate situations? One explanation is that his letter speaks of perseverance in the face of difficulties. Another possibility is that Jude was often confused with Judas Iscariot, therefore, praying to Jude was considered a "lost cause," and one prayed to St. Jude only as the last resort.

Thursday, Seventh Week of Easter

Jesus said: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit . . .”

(Mt 28:19)

Today’s Gospel text is the passage where we find the words for the Sign of the Cross.

So every time I use this symbolic prayer, I am signing myself with words from the Gospel.

But there is much more to being a disciple of Jesus than just making the Sign of the Cross several times a day.

The defining difference for a disciple of Jesus, a Christian, is the conviction that history has been drastically changed by Jesus Christ – in his incarnation, life, death, resurrection.

It is the conviction that the world is different, that this is a new age, and that there is a different way for people to live.

It’s not simply a moral conviction, a principle that I hold. It’s having the eyes of faith to see the difference in the world and to experience it. It’s recognizing the small indicators all around us that the reign of God has begun.

The defining difference for a disciple of Jesus is to go into the world and experience within yourself and within other people the living presence of the risen Jesus Christ, to feel the whole Spirit’s strength and peace.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

May 29, 2020

'As once at Caesarea Philippi the apostle Peter spoke on behalf of the twelve to make a true confession, beyond human opinions, of Christ as Son of the living God, so today his humble successor, pastor of the Universal Church, raises his voice to give, on behalf of all the People of God, a firm witness to the divine Truth entrusted to the Church to be announced to all nations.'

– Paul VI, at the conclusion of the Year of Faith,
St. Peter's Square, June 30, 1968

Pope Paul VI

Today is the feast day of Pope Paul VI, who was canonized October 14, 2018.

When he was elected pope in 1963, Paul VI continued the council reforms begun by his predecessor, Pope John XXIII. The new pope had enthusiastically supported the Second Vatican Council and it now fell to him to continue its work. Among the reforms Paul VI implemented were the vernacularization of the liturgy, relaxation of the rules on fasting and abstinence, and the establishment of a commission to revise the Code of Canon Law.

In 1964, Paul VI made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, becoming the first pope to leave Italy in over 150 years. He also was the first pope to visit the United States, speaking before the United Nations in 1965.

On the 1,900th anniversary of St. Peter's martyrdom in 1967, Paul VI declared a Year of Faith, beginning on the feast of SS. Peter and Paul, June 29, 1967. When the Year of Faith ended on the same feast in 1968, Paul issued a profession of faith, the "Creed of the People of God."

Before he died on August 6, 1978, Pope Paul asked for a simple funeral with no monument placed over his grave.

Friday, Seventh Week of Easter

Jesus said: “. . . teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” (Mt 28:20)

How is it that I'm supposed to go out and make disciples of all people?

Am I supposed to go and preach on a street corner?

Go to the mall and start giving personal witness about my faith in Christ?

Stop people in the hall and say, “Let me tell you about Jesus Christ”?

I can do all of those things but I make disciples of others primarily by letting my light shine through.

This doesn't mean taking a spotlight and shining it in someone's eyes. That only results in blinding the other person.

My light needs to be more like the running lights on a car. Daytime running lights are not there just so *I* can see, they're there so that people can see *me*.

My light is a deep-down goodness that can't be faked. Like a running light, the goodness just shines through and can be seen by other people.

I have the Spirit of the risen Christ within me. Are the running lights on in my life?



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

May 30, 2020



'It is impossible for us
not to speak about what we have
seen and heard.'

– St. Peter, Acts 4:20

Peter the Apostle

Of all the disciples, Peter is the one mentioned most often in the Gospels.

Peter, along with his brother Andrew, was part-owner of a fishing business. His name was Simon, but Jesus re-named him “Rock.” It was not a word used at that time as a name. Jesus coined it for him. (The Greek word for rock is “petros” – from which his name has passed into most other languages.)

After the Resurrection, Peter emerged as the leading figure in the Church at Jerusalem.

According to ancient tradition, he eventually went to Rome, became the leader of the Christians there, and was martyred during Nero’s persecution (64 or 65 A.D.). Early writers tell of his having been killed by crucifixion, and that he asked to be put on the cross upside down since he was not worthy to imitate so closely the death of Christ.

* * *

On the feast of SS. Peter and Paul in 2019, Pope Francis gave the Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew a reliquary containing nine of St. Peter’s bone fragments. They had been discovered during excavations under St. Peter’s Basilica in the 1940’s. The pope later said he gave the patriarch the bones as “a confirmation of the journey that our Churches have made in drawing closer to one another.”

Saturday, Seventh Week of Easter

Jesus said: “And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.” (Mt 28:20)

This is the wrap-up of Matthew’s Gospel – the longest of the four Gospels. Jesus has come a long way in this Gospel.

The author began by telling us that the child to be born would be called Emmanuel, “God with us.”

The Gospel ends with Jesus not going away from the disciples, but approaching them and promising, “I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

The last words of this Gospel remind me that Jesus is here to console me, to protect me, to help me, to heal me, to give me peace, comfort.

It’s great news.

Sometimes when I’m trying to lead a good life, I’m not sure what the best thing is to do. I’m like an airline pilot trying to navigate through fog and clouds.

Well, Jesus doesn’t take away all the fog or all the clouds. But here’s what Jesus does do.

Imagine flying an airplane with no radar, no radio. Jesus climbs into the plane and says, “I’ll ride next to you. I know it’s foggy and I know it’s cloudy. But I’ll ride next to you. I’ll show you which way to go.”

I can’t see the future but I believe Jesus is with me.

What I have to do is remember to ask the Lord: “What do you want me to do? In which direction do you want me to go?”

That’s what happens when I pray.



*Spend some quiet time
with the Lord*

May 31, 2020



St. Petronilla

Petronilla is the only apostle's child who is recognized by the Church as a saint.

Believed to be the daughter of St. Peter, little is known about her. Early writers say that she devoted her life to taking care of her father. Peter supposedly cured her of palsy, and when her beauty interfered with her spiritual life, Peter prayed that she be afflicted with a fever until her faith strengthened. Scholars disagree as to whether she died as a martyr.

Pope Siricius (384-399) built a basilica over her tomb, and in the eighth century her relics were removed from the Catacombs of Domitilla, and buried near St. Peter's Basilica in a Roman-era mausoleum that became known as the Church of St. Petronilla. That church was demolished when St. Peter's was rebuilt in the 16th century. Her relics were eventually placed under the altar dedicated to her in the new basilica.

St. Petronilla is the patron saint of mountain travelers. Her feast is May 31.

* * *

The altar of St. Petronilla can be found inside St. Peter's Basilica. Charlemagne and the other Roman emperors considered themselves adopted sons of Peter, so Petronilla was, to them, their sister. Their devotion to her was embraced by the French people, who still gather at St. Petronilla's altar on May 31 to venerate her.



Pentecost

I've been baptized and, like the disciples on that first Pentecost, I've been immersed in the Spirit.

I've been called to carry out in my life the Lord's work. It's a mission specific to me because, since the beginning of time, there has been no one exactly like me. And until the end of time, there will be no one exactly like me.

Now I could say, "Okay, I've been called by God to be a Christian . . . I've been baptized, and I'm a member of the Church, and I've got to try my best to be a faithful member of the Church. So I go to Mass each Sunday. I turn in my envelope. I observe Lent and don't eat meat on Fridays.

But that's too generic.

It's sort of a "beige Christianity" – bland, flat, ordinary, uninteresting, standard, predictable stuff. That wasn't the color of the response of the apostles or any of the other holy people whom I've read about this Easter season. Their response, their discipleship was in bright colors . . . very personal, striking.

I need to take my response to God's call to the next level, down deep inside of me where my truest self lives.

*'The risen Christ said to them,
"Go into the whole world
and proclaim the Gospel to every creature."*

– Mk 16:5

About the *Little Book* . . .

In 1999, Bishop Ken Untener of the Catholic Diocese of Saginaw, Michigan, decided to create a *Little Black Book*.

The purpose of the book, he said, would be simple: To encourage people to pray . . . even if only for six minutes a day.

To accomplish that, the *Little Black Book* would use the prayer tradition of *lectio divina* to help people pray the passion of the Lord.

The *Little Black Book* debuted in 2000 as a Lenten reflection book for the bishop's mid-Michigan diocese. Besides an English version of the book, there was also a Spanish edition, and a children's version (*Little Purple Book*). Soon word of the *Little Books* began to spread to parishes throughout Michigan and the Midwest, and the Saginaw Diocese was flooded with requests for copies.

The following liturgical year, Bishop Untener added a *Little Blue Book* for the Advent/Christmas season, and a *Little White Book* for the Easter season. Several years later, he introduced a *Little Burgundy Book*, an undated four-week reflection on stewardship in light of the Gospels. The first *Little Burgundy Book* was based on the Gospel of Luke; similar books based on the Gospels of Mark, Matthew and John were later added.

Bishop Untener died 16 years ago, on March 27, 2004, but his writings are the reflections on the right-hand side of *Little Books*.

Today, more than three million books are distributed annually worldwide.

Also available:

- *Little Burgundy Books* (available in English and Spanish)
 - Stewardship in light of the Gospel of Matthew
 - Stewardship in light of the Gospel of Mark
 - Stewardship in light of the Gospel of John
 - Stewardship in light of the Gospel of Luke
- *Little Blue Book* for the Advent/Christmas season
(available in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese)
 - *Little Black Book* for Lent
(available in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese)
- Little Purple Book* (Lenten book for children ages six to 12)

Little Books are available in digital format;
the English books are also available in large print.

“My Name is Ken and I will be your waiter for a long time”
a collection of writings by Bishop Ken Untener.
(available in hard- or soft-cover).

“Angel Fred”
a Christmas fable written by Bishop Ken Untener.

“Introductions to Sunday Readings: Cycles A, B, and C,”
(available in English and Spanish)

Please visit our website for more details:
www.littlebooks.org

