

Readings and reflection for Easter Monday

Monday 13th April

First reading

Acts 2:14,22-33

God raised this man Jesus to life, and all of us are witnesses to this

On the day of Pentecost Peter stood up with the Eleven and addressed the crowd in a loud voice: 'Men of Israel, listen to what I am going to say: Jesus the Nazarene was a man commended to you by God by the miracles and portents and signs that God worked through him when he was among you, as you all know. This man, who was put into your power by the deliberate intention and foreknowledge of God, you took and had crucified by men outside the Law. You killed him, but God raised him to life, freeing him from the pangs of Hades; for it was impossible for him to be held in its power since, as David says of him:

I saw the Lord before me always,
for with him at my right hand nothing can shake me.

So my heart was glad
and my tongue cried out with joy;
my body, too, will rest in the hope
that you will not abandon my soul to Hades
nor allow your holy one to experience corruption.

You have made known the way of life to me,
you will fill me with gladness through your presence.

'Brothers, no one can deny that the patriarch David himself is dead and buried: his tomb is still with us. But since he was a prophet, and knew that God had sworn him an oath to make one of his descendants succeed him on the throne, what he foresaw and spoke about was the resurrection of the Christ: he is the one who was not abandoned to Hades, and whose body did not experience corruption. God raised this man Jesus to life, and all of us are witnesses to that. Now raised to the heights by God's right hand, he has received from the Father the Holy Spirit, who was promised, and what you see and hear is the outpouring of that Spirit.'

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 15(16):1-2,5,7-11

Sequence

Victimae Paschali Laudes

Christians, to the Paschal Victim
offer sacrifice and praise.

The sheep are ransomed by the Lamb;
and Christ, the undefiled,
hath sinners to his Father reconciled.

Death with life contended:
combat strangely ended!

Life's own Champion, slain,
yet lives to reign.

Tell us, Mary:
say what thou didst see
upon the way.

The tomb the Living did enclose;
I saw Christ's glory as he rose!
The angels there attesting;
shroud with grave-clothes resting.

Christ, my hope, has risen:
he goes before you into Galilee.

That Christ is truly risen
from the dead we know.

Victorious king, thy mercy show!

Gospel Acclamation

Ps117:24

Alleluia, alleluia!

This day was made by the Lord:

we rejoice and are glad.

Alleluia!

Gospel

Matthew 28:8-15

Tell my brothers that they must leave for Galilee: they will see me there

Filled with awe and great joy the women came quickly away from the tomb and ran to tell the disciples.

And there, coming to meet them, was Jesus. 'Greetings' he said. And the women came up to him and, falling down before him, clasped his feet. Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers that they must leave for Galilee; they will see me there.'

While they were on their way, some of the guard went off into the city to tell the chief priests all that had happened. These held a meeting with the elders and, after some discussion, handed a considerable sum of money to the soldiers with these instructions, 'This is what you must say, "His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep." And should the governor come to hear of this, we undertake to put things right with him ourselves and to see that you do not get into trouble.' The soldiers took the money and carried out their instructions, and to this day that is the story among the Jews.

Fr Tim's Reflection

The church celebrates the feast of Easter by making every day for eight days a solemnity. In the past when Lent was a time of serious fasting, so Easter week became a week of serious feasting. It takes time for the magnitude of what we have celebrated to sink in.

The first reading each day this week, in fact, each day until Pentecost, is taken from the Acts of the Apostles. It relates how the first to believe in the resurrection of Jesus were governed and directed by the Holy Spirit. The unique experience of the first apostles of Jesus were that they had seen the risen Lord Jesus. They spoke to him, they ate with him, they experienced the power of his risen life changing the course of their own lives. Jesus was amongst them for 40 days, helping them accustom themselves to a different world – a world not dominated by sin, a world where death is not the end.

In the Gospel each day this week we have a different resurrection story so that we too can begin to come to terms with a world that is completely different. Today is Matthew's account of the first day of the week and the first appearance of Jesus to the women who had come to the tomb. They are given a mission – to tell the disciples when and where they will encounter the risen Lord.

Matthew's passion story ends with the chief priests asking Pontius Pilot for a guard of Roman soldiers to protect the tomb and make sure the disciples do not come and steal away the body of Jesus. Here Matthew informs us that the guards were bribed by the chief priests to falsify what in fact happened. Supposedly the guards were asleep when the disciples came. However, no amount of back handed deals can stop the power of the message. Jesus, the one who was dead, is now alive! He will begin to show himself. An unstoppable movement has begun.

During this week, let us allow the power of the words to take deeper root in our hearts. Jesus is our risen Lord. Let his Spirit direct our hearts and our actions.

Readings and reflection for Easter Tuesday

Tuesday 14th April

Acts 2:36-41

First reading

You must repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus

On the day of Pentecost, Peter spoke to the Jews: 'The whole House of Israel can be certain that God has made this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ.'

Hearing this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the apostles, 'What must we do, brothers?' 'You must repent,' Peter answered 'and every one of you must be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise that was made is for you and your children, and for all those who are far away, for all those whom the Lord our God will call to himself.' He spoke to them for a long time using many arguments, and he urged them, 'Save yourselves from this perverse generation.' They were convinced by his arguments, and they accepted what he said and were baptised. That very day about three thousand were added to their number.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 32(33):4-5,18-20,22

Sequence

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Gospel Acclamation

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we rejoice and are glad.

Alleluia!

Gospel**'I have seen the Lord and he has spoken to me'**

Mary stayed outside near the tomb, weeping. Then, still weeping, she stooped to look inside, and saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head, the other at the feet. They said, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' 'They have taken my Lord away' she replied 'and I don't know where they have put him.' As she said this she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, though she did not recognise him. Jesus said, 'Woman, why are you weeping? Who are you looking for?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and remove him.' Jesus said, 'Mary!' She knew him then and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbuni!' – which means Master. Jesus said to her, 'Do not cling to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go and find the brothers, and tell them: I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' So Mary of Magdala went and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord and that he had said these things to her.

Fr Tim's Reflection

The first reading today records the initial success of the preaching of the disciples on Pentecost Sunday. Filled with the Spirit they courageously tell the crowds, each in his own language, how the crucified Lord appeared to them as the risen Christ. It appears that on that first day alone, 3,000 people became believers and were baptised.

Each day this week we are invited to say the Sequence. It is an ancient Christian hymn, probably dating from the 11th Century, telling not just what happened when Jesus rose from the dead, but the theological implications of the resurrection. The sacrificial lamb that was slain lives, but for a purpose, to reign as king. By reciting this prayer each day during this week, we can begin to gain a deeper inner understanding of the events we are celebrating.

The Gospel today is John's account of that first morning when Jesus rose from the dead. Mary Magdalene had gone to the tomb, but found it empty. Encountering someone who she supposes to be the gardener, she becomes the first person to actually meet Jesus.

It seems it is quite common, when the risen Lord appears, to mistake him for someone else. The fact that Jesus is alive seems to be so incredible, that we do not trust our senses to believe what we are seeing.

When St Jerome translated this passage from Greek into Latin, a translation that would become the official text of the Catholic Church for more than 1,000 years, he mistranslated the words of Jesus to Mary. Jerome had Jesus say to her – *noli me tangere* - "do not touch me". Whereas, in today's translations, closer to the original, Jesus says to her – "do not cling to me". Instead of sounding distant and remote, not wanting Mary to touch him at all, Jesus is in fact telling her that she cannot keep on clinging to him. There is work to be done. She must go and tell the disciples and prepare them to understand what has happened.

As each day of the Octave of Easter unfolds, through the eye witness accounts that we receive in the Gospels, let us enter more deeply into the truths we celebrate. We can ask that this faith equip us to understand and interpret the extraordinary times we are living through. The one good thing about this enforced lockdown is that that we have more time for prayer and meditation. Let us use this time wisely.

Readings and reflection for Easter Wednesday

Wednesday 15th April

Acts 3:1-10

First reading

I will give you what I have: in the name of Jesus, walk!

Once, when Peter and John were going up to the Temple for the prayers at the ninth hour, it happened that there was a man being carried past. He was a cripple from birth; and they used to put him down every day near the Temple entrance called the Beautiful Gate so that he could beg from the people going in. When this man saw Peter and John on their way into the Temple he begged from them. Both Peter and John looked straight at him and said, 'Look at us.' He turned to them expectantly, hoping to get something from them, but Peter said, 'I have neither silver nor gold, but I will give you what I have: in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, walk!' Peter then took him by the hand and helped him to stand up. Instantly his feet and ankles became firm, he jumped up, stood, and began to walk, and he went with them into the Temple, walking and jumping and praising God. Everyone could see him walking and praising God, and they recognised him as the man who used to sit begging at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple. They were all astonished and unable to explain what had happened to him.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 104(105):1-4,6-9

Sequence

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combat strangely ended!

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Gospel Acclamation

Ps117:24

Alleluia, alleluia!

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Alleluia!

They recognised him at the breaking of bread

Two of the disciples of Jesus were on their way to a village called Emmaus, seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking together about all that had happened. Now as they talked this over, Jesus himself came up and walked by their side; but something prevented them from recognising him. He said to them, 'What matters are you discussing as you walk along?' They stopped short, their faces downcast.

Then one of them, called Cleopas, answered him, 'You must be the only person staying in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have been happening there these last few days.' 'What things?' he asked. 'All about Jesus of Nazareth' they answered 'who proved he was a great prophet by the things he said and did in the sight of God and of the whole people; and how our chief priests and our leaders handed him over to be sentenced to death, and had him crucified. Our own hope had been that he would be the one to set Israel free. And this is not all: two whole days have gone by since it all happened; and some women from our group have astounded us: they went to the tomb in the early morning, and when they did not find the body, they came back to tell us they had seen a vision of angels who declared he was alive. Some of our friends went to the tomb and found everything exactly as the women had reported, but of him they saw nothing.'

Then he said to them, 'You foolish men! So slow to believe the full message of the prophets! Was it not ordained that the Christ should suffer and so enter into his glory?' Then, starting with Moses and going through all the prophets, he explained to them the passages throughout the scriptures that were about himself.

When they drew near to the village to which they were going, he made as if to go on; but they pressed him to stay with them. 'It is nearly evening' they said 'and the day is almost over.' So he went in to stay with them. Now while he was with them at table, he took the bread and said the blessing; then he broke it and handed it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognised him; but he had vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?'

They set out that instant and returned to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven assembled together with their companions, who said to them, 'Yes, it is true. The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.' Then they told their story of what had happened on the road and how they had recognised him at the breaking of bread.

Fr Tim's Reflection

In the first reading today, Peter and John discover that by invoking the name of the risen Lord Jesus they have miraculous powers. The cripple gets up and walks and everyone is left amazed by what has happened.

Today in the Gospel we turn to Luke's account of the day of resurrection. Two disciples, Cleopas and his unnamed friend decide to leave Jerusalem. As yet they do not know that Jesus is risen. They know he has been executed and buried. They have heard a story about the empty tomb, but decide that the best thing to do is to run away. They head for the town of Emmaus, about 7 miles from Jerusalem.

A stranger comes up and walks by their side. Again there is a failure to recognise that this stranger is, in fact, Jesus. They enjoy it as the stranger explains the scriptures to them, preparing to receive the extraordinary truth they are about to discover.

It is only when they reach their destination and they press Jesus to stay with them, and it is only after the meal they witness the way in which this stranger breaks the bread, that at last the penny drops and they understand that the stranger is Jesus. Alas by then he has disappeared from their sight.

This Easter is perhaps the first one in your life where you have not been able to attend in person a "breaking of the bread" – what we now call the Mass. Yet, in a strange way, the physical separation of the Christian community can make us feel more united than ever, to each other and to the risen Lord. Let's continue to support each other through our prayers.

Readings and reflection for Easter Thursday

Thursday 16th April

First reading

Acts 3:11-26

You killed the prince of life: God, however, raised him from the dead

Everyone came running towards Peter and John in great excitement, to the Portico of Solomon, as it is called, where the man was still clinging to Peter and John. When Peter saw the people he addressed them, 'Why are you so surprised at this? Why are you staring at us as though we had made this man walk by our own power or holiness? You are Israelites, and it is *the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our ancestors, who has glorified his servant* Jesus, the same Jesus you handed over and then disowned in the presence of Pilate after Pilate had decided to release him. It was you who accused the Holy One, the Just One, you who demanded the reprieve of a murderer while you killed the prince of life. God, however, raised him from the dead, and to that fact we are the witnesses; and it is the name of Jesus which, through our faith in it, has brought back the strength of this man whom you see here and who is well known to you. It is faith in that name that has restored this man to health, as you can all see.

'Now I know, brothers, that neither you nor your leaders had any idea what you were really doing; this was the way God carried out what he had foretold, when he said through all his prophets that his Christ would suffer. Now you must repent and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, and so that the Lord may send the time of comfort. Then he will send you the Christ he has predestined, that is Jesus, whom heaven must keep till the universal restoration comes which God proclaimed, speaking through his holy prophets. Moses, for example, said: *The Lord God will raise up a prophet like myself for you, from among your own brothers; you must listen to whatever he tells you.* The man who does not listen to that prophet is to be cut off from the people. In fact, all the prophets that have ever spoken, from Samuel onwards, have predicted these days.

'You are the heirs of the prophets, the heirs of the covenant God made with our ancestors when he told Abraham: in your offspring all the families of the earth will be blessed. It was for you in the first place that God raised up his servant and sent him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways.'

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 8:2,5-9

Sequence

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Alleluia, alleluia!

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Alleluia!

Gospel**Luke 24:35-48****It is written that the Christ would suffer and on the third day rise from the dead**

The disciples told their story of what had happened on the road and how they had recognised Jesus at the breaking of bread.

They were still talking about all this when Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you!' In a state of alarm and fright, they thought they were seeing a ghost. But he said, 'Why are you so agitated, and why are these doubts rising in your hearts? Look at my hands and feet; yes, it is I indeed. Touch me and see for yourselves; a ghost has no flesh and bones as you can see I have.' And as he said this he showed them his hands and feet. Their joy was so great that they still could not believe it, and they stood there dumbfounded; so he said to them, 'Have you anything here to eat?' And they offered him a piece of grilled fish, which he took and ate before their eyes.

Then he told them, 'This is what I meant when I said, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, in the Prophets and in the Psalms has to be fulfilled.' He then opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, 'So you see how it is written that the Christ would suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that, in his name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be preached to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses to this.'

Fr Tim's Reflection

After the experience of performing a miracle, Peter and John capture the attention of the crowds in Jerusalem. They begin to see the resurrection as something which, though it took them completely and utterly by surprise, was, in fact, something that had an inner inevitability. It was the only logical conclusion to their own Jewish faith, that the messiah would come. It is only through this bold initiative of God that sins might be forgiven and that the name of God be made known throughout the world. Only understanding what God is doing by raising his Son Jesus back to life again can we profoundly change the direction of our lives.

The Gospel today is the second half of the account in Luke that began yesterday. Cleopas and his friend have finally recognised the stranger on the road as Jesus. The disclosure moment comes as he breaks the bread. Late as it is they head back the 7 miles to Jerusalem. Reunited with the other disciples, they tell the story of what happened to them on the road. They are still telling the story when Jesus walks into the sealed room and shows himself to them.

We can imagine their incredulity. They think they are seeing a ghost. But Jesus proves to them that it is really he. He allows them to touch him – he has a body made of flesh and bones. He eats something in their presence. But the final clincher that it is really Jesus are the trademark wounds on his body: he shows them his hands and his feet.

Today's Gospel story can help us understand what will happen to us when we too rise from the dead. Jesus is a pattern of what it is like to have a risen body. We will be able to converse with others. We will not be hungry, but we will be able to eat. Our bodies will be transformed, but still bear the marks of our human existence – the wounds we have suffered will be made clear for all to see. Yet our earthly wounds will be healed by the love and life of Jesus, and we like him, will never die again.

Readings and reflection for Easter Friday

Friday 17th April

First reading

Acts 4:1-12

The name of Jesus Christ is the only one by which we can be saved

While Peter and John were talking to the people the priests came up to them, accompanied by the captain of the Temple and the Sadducees. They were extremely annoyed at their teaching the people the doctrine of the resurrection from the dead by proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus. They arrested them, but as it was already late, they held them till the next day. But many of those who had listened to their message became believers, the total number of whom had now risen to something like five thousand.

The next day the rulers, elders and scribes had a meeting in Jerusalem with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, Jonathan, Alexander and all the members of the high-priestly families. They made the prisoners stand in the middle and began to interrogate them, 'By what power, and by whose name have you men done this?' Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, addressed them, 'Rulers of the people, and elders! If you are questioning us today about an act of kindness to a cripple, and asking us how he was healed, then I am glad to tell you all, and would indeed be glad to tell the whole people of Israel, that it was by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, the one you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by this name and by no other that this man is able to stand up perfectly healthy, here in your presence, today. This is the stone rejected by you the builders, but which has proved to be the keystone. For of all the names in the world given to men, this is the only one by which we can be saved.'

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 117(118):1-2,4,22-27

Sequence

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Gospel Acclamation

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Alleluia!

Gospel**John 21:1-14****Jesus stepped forward, took the bread and gave it to them, and the same with the fish**

Jesus showed himself again to the disciples. It was by the Sea of Tiberias, and it happened like this: Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee and two more of his disciples were together. Simon Peter said, 'I'm going fishing.' They replied, 'We'll come with you.' They went out and got into the boat but caught nothing that night.

It was light by now and there stood Jesus on the shore, though the disciples did not realise that it was Jesus. Jesus called out, 'Have you caught anything, friends?' And when they answered, 'No', he said, 'Throw the net out to starboard and you'll find something.' So they dropped the net, and there were so many fish that they could not haul it in. The disciple Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord.' At these words 'It is the Lord', Simon Peter, who had practically nothing on, wrapped his cloak round him and jumped into the water. The other disciples came on in the boat, towing the net and the fish; they were only about a hundred yards from land.

As soon as they came ashore they saw that there was some bread there, and a charcoal fire with fish cooking on it. Jesus said, 'Bring some of the fish you have just caught.' Simon Peter went aboard and dragged the net to the shore, full of big fish, one hundred and fifty-three of them; and in spite of there being so many the net was not broken. Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.' None of the disciples was bold enough to ask, 'Who are you?'; they knew quite well it was the Lord. Jesus then stepped forward, took the bread and gave it to them, and the same with the fish. This was the third time that Jesus showed himself to the disciples after rising from the dead.

Fr Tim's Reflection

The disciples encounter for the first time opposition to their mission. Peter and John are arrested and have to make an account to the religious authorities for their actions. Far from being afraid, and drawing on the strength of the Holy Spirit, they use this as an opportunity to witness to the resurrection of Jesus. The persecution of the Church has begun and in different forms continues to this day.

The story in the Gospel, this time from John, tells of a day when the disciples got bored. In these days of self-isolation we can identify with their frustration. Simon suggests a fishing trip. It seems they have lost the knack, as they were unable to catch any fish all night.

Again Jesus appears under the guise of a stranger and at first remains unrecognised. The story harkens back to the first calling of the disciples where there is a miraculous catch of fish and Jesus' promise to make them fishers of men. It is John who recognises Jesus, but it is Peter who acts. How does Jesus show them that he is the risen Lord of all creation – he cooks them breakfast. I'm sure it made the disciples remember how Jesus had washed their feet at the Last Supper. In performing the most humble of tasks we imitate our saviour.

As the stories of the resurrection unfold their inner meaning to each one of us, we can draw fresh strength from the Holy Spirit, who we first received at our confirmation. Who will be the stranger under whose guise we shall encounter Jesus today?