INTRODUCTIONS TO PENITENTIAL RITE AND READINGS, MODELS FOR GENERAL INTERCESSIONS

The INTRODUCTION TO PENITENTIAL RITE is a model which can also be adapted for use as an introduction to the liturgy itself. The INTRODUCTIONS TO THE READINGS, if read by priest or lector before the respective readings, are intended to focus the attention of the listeners. The MODELS FOR GENERAL INTERCESSIONS relate to the theme of the homily outline and may be used to supplement the usual petitions.

April 6, 2014 — 5th Sunday of Lent

INTRODUCTION TO PENITENTIAL RITE: The resurrection of Jesus is the heart of our faith. Yet at times we live as if this magnificent and life-changing event never happened.

• INTRODUCTION: In the first reading, a prophet has good news for a people who have lost hope. God will grant them new life.
• INTRODUCTION: In the second reading, Paul tells us that we are to live in the spirit, not in the flesh. The Spirit of Christ empowers us to live holy lives.
• INTRODUCTION: In the Gospel, Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead revealing that Jesus himself is the resurrection and the life.

GENERAL INTERCESSIONS
1) For our elect and candidates for full communion,
2) For those we have loved who have died,
3) For the gift of faith in Christ,
4) For the gift of spring rain,

April 13, 2014 — Passion (Palm) Sunday

INTRODUCTION TO PENITENTIAL RITE: We pray that this Holy Week will inspire us to seek ever more enthusiastically the God who became flesh and by his death and resurrection opened up to each of us an eternal life beyond this earthly life.

• INTRODUCTION: In the first reading, a loyal servant of God has a message of hope for a weary people. God is always there to help them.
• INTRODUCTION: In the second reading, we hear a hymn of praise to Jesus. His life of humble obedience is a model for all believers.
• INTRODUCTION: In the Gospel, Matthew’s passion narrative emphasizes Jesus as the Son of God and as a model of righteous behavior, and the Church as the beneficiary of the promises of Israel.

GENERAL INTERCESSIONS
1) That during this Holy Week, those in our families and parish who no longer practice the faith hear God’s call and return,
2) That the saving death of Jesus restore in us a deep reverence and respect for every human life,
3) That the sick be healed and the departed welcomed into the joy of everlasting life,

April 17, 2014 — Holy Thursday

INTRODUCTION TO PENITENTIAL RITE: As we gather tonight to celebrate the Lord’s Supper, let us ask God’s forgiveness for those times that we may have taken our Lord’s words and works for granted by asking for pardon and mercy.

• INTRODUCTION: In the first reading, the people of Israel prepare for their deliverance from Egypt. They begin by obeying God’s every word.
• INTRODUCTION: In the second reading, Paul hands on the tradition of the last supper. Jesus established the new covenant by his sacrifice on the cross and giving us his body to eat and his blood to drink.
• INTRODUCTION: In the Gospel, Jesus washes the feet of his disciples, symbolizing his self-giving service, which will be ultimately demonstrated on the cross.

GENERAL INTERCESSIONS
1) For the poor and dispossessed, that they may show us mercy,
2) For those who are disappointed in their situations in life, that they may find solace in the presence of Jesus,
3) For the lonely, tired, and depressed, that the presence of the Lord may bring light into their lives,

April 18, 2014 — Good Friday

• INTRODUCTION: In the first reading, we discover what God’s Servant accomplished. By his suffering and death he healed us.
1) For our pope, bishops, priests and all who serve as spiritual leaders, that they will remain open to God’s spirit to guide their words and actions,

2) For those who doubt the Resurrection, God’s love for them or even their own worth, that they may open themselves to an intimate relationship with God through his Holy Spirit,

3) For the poor, the hungry, the sick and dying that they may receive true riches, health and life through Jesus who conquered suffering and death,

4) For all who suffer because of the color of their skin, their economic state or lack of conformity to the norms of others, that they may recognize their own worth and live with a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment,

April 27, 2014 — 2nd Sunday of Easter

INTRODUCTION TO PENITENTIAL RITE: The Holy Father welcomes many pilgrims to Rome this Sunday to celebrate the lives of two outstanding popes. John XXIII and John Paul II were men of tremendous mercy. They were often described as “down to earth” and “of the people.” May God forgive us for the times we failed to be down-to-earth.

• INTRODUCTION: In the first reading, the Church inspires others by its devotion to prayer, generosity, and the teaching of the apostles.

• INTRODUCTION: In the second reading, Peter praises God whose great mercy gives new life to those who believe. They are able to put their hope in God’s goodness and joyfully look forward to the final coming of Christ.

• INTRODUCTION: In the Gospel, Jesus appears first to his ten disciples, granting them his peace and commissioning them to carry on his work, and then he appears to Thomas with the same confirming evidence of his resurrection.

GENERAL INTERCESSIONS

1) That Francis, our pope, and all Christian leaders be spirit-filled messengers of the gospel of salvation,

2) That those who have received Easter sacraments at this vigil have their faith deepen and grow in the years to come.

3) That those who have lost loved ones this past year take comfort in the Easter message of resurrection and eternal life.

April 19, 2014 — Easter Vigil

INTRODUCTION TO PENITENTIAL RITE: In the third reading, an enemy advances against God’s holy people. But the power of Egypt is no match for the power of God.

• INTRODUCTION: In the Epistle reading, Paul urges the Corinthian Christians to realize the grace of Baptism in their lives. They are to die to sin and live in Christ.

• INTRODUCTION: In the Gospel, the resurrection of Jesus sets off a cosmic reaction characterized by an earthquake and confirmed by Jesus appearing to the women and instructing them to go to Galilee and proclaim the good news.

GENERAL INTERCESSIONS

1) That the intercession of our new saints help the Church become the face of Christ’s mercy and compassion,

2) That those who have received Easter sacraments at this vigil have their faith deepen and grow in the years to come.

3) That those who have lost loved ones this past year take comfort in the Easter message of resurrection and eternal life.

April 20, 2014 — Easter Sunday

INTRODUCTION TO PENITENTIAL RITE: As believers in the Resurrection of Jesus, we are able to inherit the kingdom he opened for us. We ask now for God’s forgiveness and healing in every aspect of our lives.

• INTRODUCTION: In the first reading, the apostle Peter preaches for the first time to a Gentile audience. He knows the gospel is for every nation.

• INTRODUCTION: In the second reading, Paul tells us that we have been raised with Christ and must seek what is above. Faith must govern our thoughts and decisions.

• INTRODUCTION: In the Gospel, Mary Magdalene, the beloved disciple, and Peter experience that the tomb of Jesus is empty and his burial clothes have been left behind.

GENERAL INTERCESSIONS

1) That the intercession of our new saints help the Church become the face of Christ’s mercy and compassion,

2) For government leaders, that service to human lives and human dignity will remain their priority.

3) For those whose lives have been wounded by the sin of others,

4) For those who have made choices which have wounded the Body of Christ and made others doubt God’s mercy,
Exegesis of the 1st reading, Ez 37:12-14

God commissioned Ezekiel to preach to a nation of rebels. Surprisingly, it is God this time who describes Israel as rebels. By Ezekiel’s time, the kingdom of Judah was tottering on the edge of total collapse. Already thousands, including members of the royal family, had been exiled to Babylon. Those who remained in Jerusalem were expected to cooperate with Babylon in order to survive. According to prophets like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, this was God’s plan. The nation had to learn to abandon their ways and put God first.

1) Death. They chose to ignore their prophets and look for security in earthly resources. As a result, the kingdom collapsed. When news of this reached the exiles, they fell into despair. They believed all hope was lost. Like dry bones lying in a grave, there was no chance for new life (Ez 37:11).

2) Life. But God has good news for the people. God will open their graves and bring them back to life. God will also bring them back to their homeland. Just as God at creation breathed life into mere clay, so now God will revive the people of Israel by putting the divine spirit within their hearts of stone. Then they will know without a doubt that the Lord is God. Ezekiel had been telling them this all along.

Exegesis of the 2nd reading, 1 Pt 1:3-9

1) God’s mercy is the cause of all the good that takes place in the life of a Christian. The new life on earth and its destiny in heaven is due to the mercy revealed in Christ’s resurrection.

2) Faith, the gift of God’s mercy, is the means by which Christians enter into this new life. Christians can even rejoice in trials to be ready for the coming of Christ.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Jn 11:1-45

1) The final sign. The story of the raising of Lazarus is the final sign in John’s series of events aimed at manifesting how Jesus is the revelation of the Father. Here, Jesus is revealed not only as the one who gives life, but as the very highest form of life: resurrection life. In John’s Gospel, this event will be the direct motivation for the Jewish officials’ determination to kill Jesus. The story begins with the news that Lazarus, a person portrayed as close to Jesus, is seriously ill. Oddly enough, Jesus does not go immediately to Lazarus, but stays where he is two more days.

It is only Jesus’ hour and his relationship to God that determine his action—not human timelines and expectations. Notice how Jesus attempts to get his disciples to understand the deeper level of this event by making reference to the Son of God as being glorified through it, and also that the disciples may believe. On the surface level, Lazarus has died, but on the deeper level, he is only asleep.

2) Resurrection and life. The theological heart of the story takes place in vv 17-37. Jesus goes to Lazarus and finds him officially dead (four days). Jesus then engages in conversation with both Martha and Mary over the issue of death and resurrection. The two sisters repeat traditional Jewish belief in the resurrection of the body on the final day. Jesus attempts to get them to understand that he himself is the resurrection and the life.

Those who believe in Jesus will have access to that resurrection and life right now. It is a present reality—not something coming at the end of time. Neither sister grasps the real meaning of what Jesus tells them.

The weeping of Jesus is perhaps as much from frustration at not being understood as it is from sadness. This is not a sentimental moment for Jesus. He is worked up as he goes to the door of the tomb and demands the stone’s removal. He literally yells at Lazarus to come out of the tomb. Lazarus emerges from the tomb, still bound in his burial wrappings. He needs to be untied. Jesus has given Lazarus back his old life.

But that is not the real point of the story. The real point is that Jesus can give life because he himself is the fullness of life. He is the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in him will never die, but will share in his resurrection life.
PURPOSE: To celebrate Jesus, the resurrection and the life.

SUMMARY: The raising of Lazarus prefigures Jesus’ own.

A) ATTENTION-GETTER  The tradition in a college seminary was to hang a picture of the graduating class of each preceding year on the walls with a Scripture reference, chosen by the rector. The Scripture reference, on a small copper plaque below the photo, was meant to capture the personality and tone of the class. There was one particular class that had the reputation of being rather unconventional. The rector chose for this class John 11:35: “Jesus wept.”

In another story, one biblical fundamentalist preacher said that Jesus had to be careful to say the name of Lazarus when he called him out of the tomb. Otherwise, all the dead in the cemetery would have risen. This is absurd. Jesus knew whom he wanted.

B) APPLICATION How that particular seminary class turned out in priestly ministry is unknown. One can hope that, following ordination, they served the Lord well and dried his tears. After all, one might look at the original Twelve and at us and—apply the same Scripture.

1) When Abraham Lincoln was given notice of his father’s death, he chose not to go to the funeral because he and his father never got along, even into adulthood. That sort of thing still goes on today as all families have some dysfunction, and they find it hard to forgive past slights.
   a) Jesus waits to go to Bethany when he is given word that his dear friend Lazarus was ill. Bethany, just outside Jerusalem, was the site of the little family that Jesus held so close and could relax and enjoy the company of Mary, Martha, and their brother Lazarus.
   b) Perhaps, like the Lord, you have people close to you who are more family than your own family. Jesus found this in the little house in Bethany.
   c) Because the Jewish people believed that the soul resided in the body for three days, Lazarus lying in the tomb for four days emphasizes the fantastic greatness of this final sign of the Book of Signs in the Fourth Gospel. Lazarus is truly dead, no question about it.

2) Did Lazarus want to come back to life? This is a question that is rarely asked about Jesus’ greatest miracle.
   a) A homily delivered years ago captures this sentiment. In it, the homilist twists the story a bit and has Lazarus refuse to come out of the tomb.
   b) “I’m doing just fine,” says the dead man. “I’m resting in the bosom of Abraham and do not wish to leave this place for the pain and struggles of life.”
   c) Nicandor Parra wrote a rather extensive poem about this very thing. In part of its opening stanza, we read:
      “Lazarus
Don’t come forth from the grave
Resurrection won’t do a thing for you
A moment’s glory
and then
the same old routine
don’t do it, old friend, don’t do it . . . .”

3) But the raising of Lazarus shows Jesus as the resurrection and the life.
   a) This story, the seventh sign of John’s Book of Signs, prefigures Jesus’ own death and resurrection. Perhaps his love for Jesus prodded Lazarus to come out of the tomb.
   b) Unlike Jesus, however, Lazarus will die again. In fact, the enemies of Jesus wish to have Lazarus killed.

C) CONCLUSION
   1) This Sunday marks the third and final scrutiny in the rites of initiation.
      a) The elect are invited to silent prayer.
      b) Next are intercessions for the elect.
      c) There are exorcisms.
   2) Soon they will join us at the Table of the Eucharist. We long for that day as they go forth to continue to feast on the word of God.

D) TRANSITION TO LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST
Soon we shall approach the altar of the Eucharist and receive the Body and Blood of Christ Jesus, the resurrection and the life.

(Timothy J. Cronin)
Exegesis of the 1st reading, Is 50:4-7

The oracles in this portion of Is are addressed to a people much in need of encouragement. Years of exile from their homeland have had a profound effect on them. After so long a time, they are reconciled to the idea that Babylon is where they will stay. The promised land for many of them is only a distant memory. But God will bring them home. And so the task of God’s Servant is to rekindle the faith of the people. God has a plan for them.

1) Service. The Servant of God feels up to the task. In the oracles of Is, this Servant is probably the ideal Israel, wiser now because of the experience of the exile. The ideal Israel understands that service to the standards of heaven had always been the true purpose of God’s chosen people. And so the Servant does not resist this calling—as the Israel of old had done for so many years. Unlike the old Israel, this Servant is constantly attentive to the word of God. This Servant will not be intimidated by resistance or even physical injury, so focused is the Servant on doing the will of God.

2) Inspiration. The eloquence of this oracle is evidence of the “well-trained tongue” God gives the Servant. Powerful imagery and balanced lines carry the message forward. Such eloquence is necessary to rouse up a people who have grown spiritually tired in exile. They must overcome their doubts and trust that God is leading them to a brighter future.

Exegesis of the 2nd reading, Phil 2:6-11

1) Jesus’ example. Paul is encouraging the people to humility and mutual acceptance. Jesus’ earthly life is a perfect example.

2) Jesus’ reward. God the Father has exalted Jesus above every other creature. All creation worships him and confesses that he is Lord, and this redounds to his Father’s glory.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Mt 26:14—27:66

On Palm Sunday, the Church always proclaims the Passion Narrative from one of the Synoptic Gospels. This year we will focus on Matthew’s account. We take the time to proclaim the entire Passion Narrative because, from the very beginning of the Church until now, this story is considered to be the heart of the gospel message. It is the source from which springs a rich and vibrant Christian faith.

Matthew’s version of Jesus’ passion is based on the account found in Mark’s Gospel. However, Matthew freely edits Mark in order to accommodate it to his own situation and theological perspective.

1) Structure. The first thing to notice is how Matthew structures the content of his Passion Narrative. Staying close to his Markan source, Matthew unfolds the passion narrative in six parts. Beginning with a brief prelude about Judas as “selling out” Jesus, the story begins with the Passover supper wherein Jesus institutes the Eucharist (26:17-29). The second scene puts Jesus and his disciples at the Mount of Olives, where Peter’s denial is foretold and Jesus undergoes a stressful agony in view of his approaching death (26:30-56). The third scene is a complicated, so-called trial before the Jewish Sanhedrin (26:57-68).

The fourth scene moves Jesus to another trial situation before Pilate; Jesus will ultimately be condemned, and Judas commits suicide (27:1-26). The fifth scene is the crucifixion itself, where Jesus is mocked and hung on the cross to die (27:27-44). In the final scene, Jesus dies and is buried in a tomb provided by Joseph of Arimathea (27:45-66).

2) Three themes. A careful reading of the above content will highlight three important themes distinctive for Matthew’s theology. First is the emphasis on Christology. Jesus is the Son of God, and he is clearly the master of his own fate. This is shown in all six scenes listed above. Second is Matthew’s focus on ecclesiology. For Matthew, the Church (now consisting of Jews and gentiles) has inherited the promises of Israel. Third is Matthew’s emphasis on moral exhortation. Jesus is the model of righteous behavior throughout every part of the Passion Narrative.
PURPOSE: To remind us of Jesus’ triumphant entrance into Jerusalem.

SUMMARY: Today we begin Holy Week, the days during which we journey with Jesus on his way to the cross and anticipate his wondrous and glorious resurrection on Easter.

A) ATTENTION-GETTER The events of Jesus’ passion, death, and resurrection are called the Paschal Mystery. No amount of study will exhaust or explain the depth of the love that Jesus showed in offering himself in sacrifice for us. After we have examined and studied the stories we have received about these events, we are left with one final task—to meditate on these events and on the forgiveness that Jesus’ love and obedience have won for us.

B) APPLICATION There are many vantage points from which to engage in Jesus’ passion. In the characters of Matthew’s Gospel, we find reflections of ourselves and the many ways in which we sometimes respond to Jesus. Sometimes we are like Judas, who betrays Jesus and comes to regret it. At other times, we are like Peter, who denies him, or like the disciples, who fall asleep during Jesus’ darkest hour—only to act rashly and violently at his arrest. Often we are like Simon, who is pressed into service to help Jesus carry his cross. Sometimes we are like the leaders who fear Jesus or like Pontius Pilate, who washed his hands of the whole affair. Jesus dies so that our sins will be forgiven.

1) While the Gospels of Matthew and Mark have many parallels in their narrative of the passion, there are a few details worth noting that are unique to Matthew.
   a) Only Matthew indicates the price paid to Judas for betraying Jesus.
   b) The story of Judas’ death is also found only in Matthew.
   c) Only Matthew relates that Pilate’s wife received a warning in a dream and that Pilate washed his hands of Jesus’ death.
   d) Matthew’s Gospel alone mentions the earth-quakes and other phenomena that happened after Jesus’ death.

2) Today we reflect upon a paradox of triumph and tragedy. On the one hand, there is the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. On the other hand, there is the proclamation of the passion and death of Jesus.
   a) This is the most important week of the liturgical year. We focus on the dying and rising of Jesus Christ.
   b) We center on the journey of Jesus from this earthly life through the mystery of death into a transformative heavenly life.
   c) The word “paschal” [mystery] refers to the Hebrew Passover—the passing of the angel of death over the homes of the Hebrews in ancient Egypt.
   d) This passing is the sign that their firstborn child is spared from death.

3) We call this week Holy Week because it is when we find out as much as there is that we can know about who God is.
   a) God reveals his infinite love through his Son’s death and resurrection.
   b) Jesus tells us to take up our cross and follow him. Whenever we see a crucifix, we are reminded to be people of self-sacrifice, courage, and humility.
   c) Sometimes we think this is impossible, and yet we know that the opportunities for us to find our cross are all around us.

C) TRANSITION TO LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST As we retell the story of the passion of our Lord, this is our story as well because the Holy Spirit now dwells with us. In every Communion, Christ crucified and risen enters more deeply into our minds, our hearts, our very bodies. And so, as we enter into this week, the holiest week of the entire year, let us pray for the grace to have hearts open to all that the Lord teaches us this week. Let us pray for the grace to resist temptation and to live our lives in a holy way. Let us pray for the grace to know and believe that, by his death, Christ destroyed our death, and by his rising, he has restored our life. And let us be ready to greet him when he comes again in glory.

(Brian P. Maloney, OFM)
Exegesis of the 1st reading, Ex 12:1-8, 11-14

By this time, Pharaoh has dismissed nine dramatic signs—the plagues—that should have made him realize God is in charge. Now comes the tenth and final sign. Pharaoh is not the arbiter of life and death, even in his own kingdom. Since there is nothing to inherit in a world that does not recognize God, the firstborn in Egypt will be removed.

1) Preparations. Before this dramatic event, God directs Moses to get the people prepared for that journey. They are to eat a substantial meal to celebrate God’s saving work in their lives—and also to give them strength for the journey that lies ahead. The lamb they prepare must be in perfect condition. This is no ordinary meal. The close bond among God’s people is clear from the fact that a family too small to prepare an entire lamb should join another household for the meal.

2) For life. Obedience to God’s word is key. The blood at the doorway is a sign that those inside cherish the word of God and have obeyed it. Their lives will be secure even as they are surrounded by death on all sides. This night marks a new beginning for them; the month of Passover will stand at the head of their calendar. They will set out on a journey that will eventually take them to the promised land. Fittingly, they eat this meal as people ready to begin that journey. They are dressed for travel; they have sandals on their feet and a walking staff in hand.

Exegesis of the 2nd reading, 1 Cor 11:23-26

1) Tradition. Paul tells us that he received and then handed on the story of the Last Supper. This account is already a tradition when Paul writes around 56 AD.

2) New covenant. Jesus found a way for all his followers to experience his new covenant. We recall his sacrifice and partake of his body and blood in the Eucharist.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Jn 13:1-15

The context for understanding the action of Jesus’ washing of the feet of his disciples is the statement that Jesus knew that his “hour” had come. Reference to this hour appears earlier in the Gospel, but always with the proviso that it had not yet come. Now it is here. It is the moment when Jesus will depart from the sphere of everyday events. It is the moment of his death on the cross, which will be his supreme demonstration of his love for his disciples and all who believe in him.

By making known his love for his disciples, Jesus also makes God known. Jesus symbolizes this act of loving self-giving by washing the feet of his disciples.

1) Foot washing. Foot washing was part of the ritual of hospitality in the ancient Near East. In a way, Jesus plays the roles of both the host and the servant. The actual washing of the feet is described in great detail. It is made very clear that in this act Jesus becomes one with his disciples. Peter, however, does not understand what Jesus is doing or why he is doing it. Even Jesus indicates that the full meaning of this gesture will not be understood until later, meaning after his death and resurrection.

Jesus also informs Peter that this action of foot washing is essential for Peter to have an inheritance or a share with Jesus. What this really means is that in the midst of ignorance, misunderstanding, and threat of betrayal, Jesus indicates the depth of his love through this gesture of foot washing. It is a saving action and represents the salvation that Jesus will bring to his disciples and all believers through his ultimate gift of self in the crucifixion.

2) Love for one another. Having finished washing the disciples’ feet, Jesus asks them a key question: “Do you realize what I have done for you?” We know that they do not, but Jesus does not give them an opportunity to answer. Instead, he instructs them that, what he has done for them, they are to do for one another. They are to wash one another’s feet.

More than that, they are to love one another as he has loved them. They are to live their lives as self-gift for others unto death. This is the inheritance or share in Jesus’ life that he mentioned to Peter. Just as Jesus has loved us to the very end, so we are to love one another to the very end.
PURPOSE: To live our lives with an intimate sense of God’s abiding presence.

SUMMARY: The presence of Jesus at the Lord’s Supper inspires us to realize the presence of Christ in the world.

A) ATTENTION-GETTER Dorothy Day (1897-1980), founder of the Catholic Worker movement and known for her personal identification with the poor and dispossessed, lived her life with an intimate sense of God’s abiding presence. For her, this presence was truly “real” and manifested itself in countless ways, especially and foremost in the eucharistic liturgy. Through the Eucharist, she was able to see that the world was sacramental and, in the deepest sense, a sign of God’s presence.

B) APPLICATION
1) Exodus illustrates how people destined for slavery were freed through the blood of the lamb.
   a) In order to be spared from death, the Israelites were to kill a spotless lamb and to take its blood and smear it on the main doorframe of each home. In doing so, they not only did what God commanded of them, but they also came to understand that, in order to be spared from their deaths, an innocent life was sacrificed in their place.
   b) The Lord’s Supper is the remembrance of our new life and freedom from sin. When we are confronted with struggles and trials, remember how God has delivered us through his Son, and focus upon the promise of new life by being a presence to all, especially the poor and dispossessed!

2) Paul reminds the Corinthians of the purpose of the Lord’s Supper.
   a) In the early Church, the Lord’s Supper included a fellowship meal followed by the celebration of Communion. In the Church in Corinth, the fellowship meal had become a time when some ate and drank excessively while others went hungry. Paul condemns these actions and reminds the Church of the real purpose of the Lord’s Supper.
   b) The early Church remembered that Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper on the night of the Passover meal (Lk 22:13-20). Just as Passover celebrated deliverance from slavery in Egypt, so the Lord’s Supper celebrates deliverance from sin by Christ’s death.

3) John’s Gospel demonstrates the quality of love shown by Jesus to the disciples at the Last Supper.
   a) John portrays Jesus as a servant who shows love and concern for the disciples by washing their feet. This menial task was carried out by a household servant as the guests arrived at the home of their host. Jesus takes the role of the lowliest slave in order to demonstrate to them that discipleship is not about leadership, but of being of service to all.
   b) On this night, the Church gathers to celebrate the Lord’s Supper. It is within this context that Jesus took bread and wine at the Passover meal and consecrated these elements into his Body and Blood. In doing this, Jesus not only showed the disciples the importance of service, but he also shows us our continual need to show this presence to all people, especially the poor and dispossessed in our world today. It is this presence that motivated the life and thought of Dorothy Day.
   c) Her life was transformed by love in practice, by serving the poor and needy, seeing in them the countenance of Jesus Christ. It was through the Eucharist that she was able to know and feel the presence of our Lord in the poor, the sick, and the imprisoned.
   d) As we experience this liturgy of the Lord’s Supper, may we feel the Lord’s presence as well as move toward those who are poor and needy. Perhaps we can consider bringing a large pot of soup or chili to a local soup kitchen or drop-in center to experience Christ’s presence in those we serve. In this or other ways, we can witness to the real presence of Christ in the world as well as the intimate sense of God’s abiding presence within us!

C) TRANSITION TO LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST
As we bring our gifts of bread and wine to the supper table of the Lord, may we be aware of this special night! As we prepare to receive the Eucharist, may we grow spiritually in Jesus’ abiding presence, which calls us to be a real presence for others in the world.

(David Kohut, OFM)
**Sunday Homily Helps**

**Good Friday**

April 18, 2014

Annual readings

Lectionary #40

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**Exegesis of the 1st reading, Is 52:13—53:12**

This is the most dramatic and extended of Isaiah’s oracles announcing the achievements of the Suffering Servant of God. Earlier, such oracles described the Servant’s commitment to justice (Is 42), his outreach to the nations (Is 49), and his trust in God (Is 50). This oracle announces the Servant’s loyalty to God from birth to death and his final victory.

1) **Suffering.** The Servant seemed so unimportant. There was nothing about him that caused people to take notice of him. The established people of this world could not even bear to look at him. Ultimately, the world mistreated him and condemned him to a shameful death. Through it all, he was as silent as an innocent lamb, never raising his voice in protest or condemnation. But finally, the rulers of this world realized this Servant endured all of this for their good.

2) **Victory.** God declares the Servant will be held in high esteem. The transformation in the Servant’s status is a shock to so many. The rulers of this world once dismissed him. Now they stand speechless at his greatness. Even those who did not know of him recognize his achievements. The Servant restored many to a right relationship with God. Once surrounded by darkness, he stands before God bathed in light.

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**Exegesis of the 2nd reading, Heb 4:14-16; 5:7-9**

1) **Great high priest.** Jesus is called great in this context because he is now glorified. His mission on earth is complete, and he is the source of mercy and peace.

2) **Jesus on earth.** Because he was sorely tested in his earthly life and has endured indescribable suffering, the glorified Jesus continues to sympathize with us in our trials.

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**Exegesis of the Gospel, Jn 18:1—19:42**

1) **Jesus’ hour.** The Passion Narrative of John’s Gospel is always proclaimed on Good Friday. For John, the suffering and death of Jesus is the story of his “hour” toward which the whole Gospel has been moving. On the surface, it appears that John’s Passion Narrative is just like those found in the Synoptics. A closer look, however, shows that such is not the case at all. The events are somewhat the same: a) the arrest of Jesus (Jn 18:1-12); b) the interrogation of Jesus by Annas (18:13-27); c) the so-called trial before Pilate (18:28—19:6); d) the crucifixion and death (19:16-37); e) the burial (19:38-42).

Notice that these events do not fit as tightly together as they do in the Synoptics. There is a lot of movement, a great deal of going in and going out. Notice, further, how from beginning to end, Jesus is totally in control of everything. He is not portrayed as a helpless victim.

2) **Jesus and Pilate.** The centerpiece of the story for John is Jesus’ interaction with Pilate. It quickly becomes clear that Jesus is not on trial here. Pilate is on trial, and the world is on trial with him. Unlike the Synoptic Gospels, where Jesus hardly utters a word while being interrogated, in Jn, he is constantly talking. He carries his own cross and has no fear of death.

In fact, for Jn, the death of Jesus is his exaltation and glorification. In crucifixion, Jesus is lifted up to the Father, and his hour is complete. Death, resurrection, and ascension are included in Jesus’ hour. He is so totally in control that he does not die until everything is in order, and he is fully prepared. At that point, he declares, “It is finished.”

3) **Jesus’ glorification.** Once the reader becomes aware of all the things going on in this version of the Passion Narrative, it becomes clear why it is proclaimed every Good Friday. This is why it is called “Good.” It is more a story about victory than a victimized death.

Here, Jesus does not end up like the Suffering Servant proclaimed in the first reading of the Good Friday liturgy. Jesus is the exalted and glorified Christ. He is the king of the Jews. The cross is not a sign of defeat; it is a powerful sign of victory. All of this gives Jn’s story of Jesus’ passion a unique place among the Gospels.
PURPOSE: To celebrate the death of Jesus and to ponder his life and our relationship to Jesus.

SUMMARY: The Most Holy Triduum is one extended liturgy. It began as we made the sign of the cross yesterday at the Mass of the Lord’s Supper. There was no formal ending to yesterday’s liturgy, no formal beginning or ending to today’s service. Holy Thursday flows into Good Friday, and Good Friday flows seamlessly into the celebration of the Easter Vigil Mass. The Triduum concludes with the final solemn blessing of our Easter Sunday Mass. For now, on this Good Friday, we sit in a darkened church—no candles, an empty tabernacle, and we pray together, deepening our faith in Jesus’ resurrection.

A) ATTENTION-GETTER Sitting or lying down in the dark can be a frightening experience. When we are unable to see around us, our imaginations tend to run wild; fears can easily come to the surface. I remember babysitting for my nieces and nephew years ago. Bedtime came and time to say goodnight. They did not want me to leave because they were afraid of the dark. I sat with them, assuring them that there was nothing to fear. They understood me well, as long as I was sitting there. They wanted me to tell them a story. I slowly read the first five verses of Genesis; then I asked them a question: “Before there was light, where did God live”? “In the dark,” they said. “You are right,” I replied. “So, if God lived in darkness, then darkness is a good thing! Only our imaginations make darkness seem terrible. In darkness, God gently holds us as we slowly and peacefully fall asleep.” My nieces and nephews slept well that night. Before long, the fear of the dark was gone for good.

B) APPLICATION This afternoon, we sit in darkness. Good Friday is often called the darkest day of the Church’s calendar year. For only one day a year are the tabernacles of churches throughout the world empty. As we participate in this Good Friday service, we not only think of the passion and death of Jesus; we also think about the darkness in our own lives. Sometimes we may think that our lives and actions have been so dark that God does not even want to be near us. Nothing could be further from the truth. When our private world seems darkest, God is gently embracing us. The Holy Spirit whispers in our ears, “Let there be light.” On Good Friday, Jesus visits our darkness.

1) Mother Church encourages her faithful to participate as fully as they are able in this three-day celebration of the Most Holy Triduum. Our identity as Roman Catholics is expressed elegantly in these three days.

a) No one has time nowadays to attend long liturgies. We are called to make time for them.

b) If we are able to make time for these most holy days, we are at the same time deepening our faith lives and humanity.

c) By being present today, we bear subtle witness to those around us—our family, friends and associates. We become examples of Christian living.

2) Death and darkness are major themes on this Good Friday. The resurrection of Jesus is the light at the end of the tunnel.

a) We may ponder our own sinfulness; it is a good thing to remember that the Roman Catholic Church is the home base of second chances.

b) In his self-giving, Jesus has freed us from darkness and the bondage of sin. We only have to say yes in order to fully benefit from his graces.

c) It is always darkest before the dawn. We anticipate the Vigil Mass of the Resurrection tomorrow evening. Until then, we wait in quiet stillness with the Real Presence of Jesus within us—as we share communion with one another.

3) After hearing the Passion according to John, any other spoken words seem to be inadequate.

a) Spend some quiet time this evening reflecting on what you have seen and heard at this Good Friday service of the Passion of the Lord. This is time well spent, no matter how short or how long. It will have lasting good effects on you.

b) What events in your own life were the darkest? Don’t run away from them. Face them, knowing that Jesus has firm and loving hold of you.

c) Forgiveness and reconciliation are themes that are often overlooked by many on this day. It takes a strong and loving heart to forgive and to accept forgiveness. Do not be afraid, be loving.

d) Make an appointment with yourself for some peace and quiet on this Good Friday. Honor that appointment. The Holy Spirit waits for you.

C) TRANSITION TO LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST:

Before receiving Jesus in Communion, we come forward and reverence him on the cross. The crucified and glorified Jesus will lead us to new life.

(David Kobak, OFM)
Exegesis of the 3rd reading, Ex 14:15—15:1

This reading recounts the dramatic victory God has granted Israel over Egypt. It foreshadows the victory over sin and death we celebrate at Easter. As the reading begins, it seems even Moses is at a loss about what to do. He cries out to God for help. In God’s response to Moses, there is a hint of dismay at his lack of confidence.

1) Pride. The king of Egypt is confident his forces will win. His chariots and charioteers are featured over and over again in the account. Such overwhelming forces would seem to secure a victory for the Pharaoh.

2) Glory. Mighty pharaoh, with all the resources available to him, is no match for the God of all creation. The darkness, the wind, the dry land, and the waters of the sea all play a role in checking pharaoh’s pride. All the glory belongs to God. God receives glory in deeds that contribute to humanity’s salvation.

As the mediator between God and Israel, Moses likewise is granted a significant role in the reading. The people witness his outstretched hand as the sea opens up to allow them to cross; it later closes over pharaoh’s great army, already in retreat from the overwhelming power of God. This reading began with Israel crying out in fear; it ends with Israel singing a song of thanksgiving to God.

Exegesis of the Epistle reading, Rom 6:3-11

1) Are you unaware? Paul may be using these words to prod careless Christians to remember that by Baptism they were plunged into the death of Christ so that they might also share in his resurrection.

2) We know. Paul repeats these words—no doubt because many of the Corinthians were so hardheaded. He hopes that they will live up to their Baptism by dying to sin and living for God.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Mt 28:1-10

1) Matthew’s account of the resurrection is a radical retelling of Mk 16:1-8, which he used as his source. We notice immediately that Mt inserts an apocalyptic tone into his story through the presence of an earthquake. The resurrection of Jesus shook the whole world. The young man in Mk has now become an angel who has rolled the stone away from the tomb entryway. The guards in charge of watching over the tomb have become totally paralyzed with fear. It is in the midst of all this that the angel speaks to the women who have come to see the tomb.

2) Jesus’ appearance to the women. The women are instructed to not be afraid, and then the angel gives them the good news. Jesus has been raised. This is verified by the now empty place where he had been laid. What is important to grasp here is that the angel is not describing a resuscitation where a dead person is brought back to life. In those cases, the life is a continuation of the life present before death.

What happened to Jesus was a resurrection wherein he was given new life. Remember the Jewish mentality did not separate a person into a physical body and an immortal soul. They understood a human person to be an animated body, and at death everything died. That is why resurrection is such a miraculous event. Totally new life is given to the dead person, and this new life was understood as a gift from God.

3) The women are instructed to go to the disciples in Galilee and proclaim to them this good news. As they go on their way, they are confronted by a second miraculous event. They meet the risen Lord. This is called an appearance story, and it was the first way that the early Christians talked about the resurrection of Jesus. The appearance is quick and without detail. The women simply embraced Jesus’ feet and did him homage. Jesus repeats for them what the angel had told them about going to Galilee and telling the disciples that the risen Lord will meet them there.

These are stories of faith. They cannot prove that Jesus was raised from the dead. That actual event is nowhere described. We are given the empty tomb and reports of appearances, but no concrete descriptions. The reality of the resurrection of Jesus is something that can be affirmed only through the believers’ faith. We accept what the women in this story told us. It is the absolute core of the Good News.
PURPOSE: To highlight how the notion of resurrection shows God’s power to bring new life out of death.

SUMMARY: The resurrection we celebrate tonight is much more than a mere continuation of our present existence. It is something entirely, miraculously new.

A) ATTENTION GETTER The renowned Lutheran theologian Oscar Cullmann raised some eyebrows back in 1956 when he published an article expounding the notion of resurrection. To make his point, he contrasted the deaths of Socrates and Jesus, noting the obvious similarities: Both were unjustly condemned on trumped-up charges and sentenced to death. Socrates, however, was not executed immediately, and in the weeks before his death, he spoke with serenity about his impending fate. He assured his friends that death was a great friend and liberator, that only his body would be dying, and that his immortal soul would continue its existence in some other realm.

Jesus, on the other hand, suffered great anguish and anxiety in the face of death (as evidenced by his agony in Gethsemane and his cry from the cross of being “forsaken”). Cullmann spoke of the “natural fear of death” that Jesus experienced, and he emphasized that this was not cowardice but “distress at the prospect of being abandoned by God, an abandonment which will be the work of Death (God’s great enemy).”

Cullmann claimed that the original notion of resurrection, prevalent at the time of Jesus, implied total destruction of the self—body, mind, soul, psyche—whatever we believe constitutes a human person. Early Christianity, taking its cue from this Jewish notion, believed that the creator God could reconstitute us, body and soul, after death. Cullmann noted, at the end of his career, that this article generated the most critical responses he had ever endured.

B) APPLICATION The aspect of resurrection that seems most disquieting is the shocking discontinuation that death produces. It pains and frightens us to think that our existence could simply be gone—completely—leaving us to trust that God will give us a totally new form of life. It’s so much easier to believe that a part of us (the apparently detachable “soul”) will not be touched by death. In an odd way, that makes it easier (so to speak) on God, too, since only a portion of our human self needs to be “brought back.” Our readings tonight belie that watered-down notion of what God can do.

1) God’s power to control the forces of nature is emphasized in our vigil readings.
   a) If we conflate the Genesis account with the reading from Exodus, it is clear that this creator God has mastery over nature—a theme echoed later in the Gospel account of Jesus calming the sea.
   b) It is part of our Easter faith that this overwhelming power of God can certainly subdue death and bring new life out of seeming annihilation.

2) What happened to Jesus represents much more than a continuation or extension of his earthly life.
   a) Our belief is that God, the source of all life, will undertake in us after our deaths a new creation that recalls the original creative act.
   b) The new life awaiting us will not be some patched-together version of our former selves but rather a new and glorious life.

3) The empty tomb provides a kind of symbolic symmetry with this original notion of resurrection.
   Even if death truly is the annihilation of the total self, our faith leads us to believe that this “emptiness” brought by death can be transformed by God into the fullness of new life.
   a) It seems fitting that the proof we have of Jesus’ resurrection is the empty tomb. Had there been a 24-hour surveillance camera trained on that rocky cave, what would it have revealed? Would we have seen, in the poetic words of Frederick Buechner, “Jesus of Nazareth, staggering on broken feet out of the tomb toward the Resurrection, bearing on his body the proud insignia of the defeat which is victory”?  
   b) Clearly, it does not take faith to believe something that has actually been seen and recorded. The empty tomb is another matter. Like the agonizing and fearful plunge into death that Jesus undertook—and that we all must face—it does require a belief that God will seize our emptiness and fill it up with something new.
   c) Unlike the doctrine of the immortal soul, this notion of resurrection leaves us nothing to cling to but faith that God in Jesus brought new life out of death. It is a leap into the dark void, trusting that we will land in the arms of a loving God.

C) TRANSITION TO LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST: The God who promises us new life in the future sustains us in this present moment with the bread of life.

(James Johnston)
Exegesis of the 1st reading, Acts 10:34a, 37-43

The readings of Easter affirm God’s power to shatter earthly boundaries. Most dramatic is the victory over death. But this reading records the victory God granted Peter in moving him beyond boundaries he would have set for the proclamation of the gospel.

1) Jesus. By the power of God’s grace, Peter finds himself preaching the Good News in the home of a gentile, the Roman centurion Cornelius. Peter begins his testimony with a summary of the life of Jesus of Nazareth. John the Baptist prepared the way with his proclamation that Jesus was the one God anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power.

When Peter finishes, the Holy Spirit will come down on Cornelius and his household, too. Peter declares that Jesus went about in their homeland and in Jerusalem, doing good works and healing people in the grip of the devil. But people condemned him to death by crucifixion.

2) His apostle. Yet, Peter’s testimony does not end with death. He goes on to announce that he was among those privileged to see the risen Lord. This same Lord commanded them to preach the gospel and proclaim Jesus Christ as judge of the living and the dead. He fulfills the oracles of the prophets, who all looked forward to the day the bond between humanity and God would be restored.

Exegesis of the 2nd reading, Col 3:1-4

1) God the Father raised Jesus from the dead. Without mention of an ascension, Jesus is depicted as “seated at the right hand of God.”

2) Christians were “raised with Christ.” Therefore, they are to “seek what is above.” In other words, faith in God must permeate their thoughts and decisions.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Jn 20:1-9

1) The empty tomb. Jn’s Gospel has Mary Magdalene come to Jesus’ tomb alone. It was the first day of the week: morning, but still dark. The first thing she sees is that the stone has been removed from the tomb.

On that evidence alone, Mary concludes that someone has stolen Jesus’ body. The text does not say that she actually looked inside the tomb. Her conviction that the body of Jesus has been stolen adds great urgency to her response, and immediately she runs to Simon Peter and the beloved disciple, stating that Jesus’ body has been stolen; no one knows where it has been taken.

2) Peter and the beloved disciple. Upon hearing Mary’s report, both Peter and the beloved disciple also run to the tomb. There is much discussion over who this beloved disciple is and how he fits into the Gospel of Jn. Whatever the historical facts might be, his role in the Gospel takes on a symbolic function. He embodies the love and intimacy with Jesus that is the goal of all discipleship.

Many other theories have been proposed, but they tend to stretch the evidence beyond its capacity to convince. Nevertheless, the beloved disciple outran Peter, and got there first. He does not actually go into the tomb, but bends down so he can see the burial cloths, but no body of Jesus. When Peter arrives, he does, in fact, go into the tomb and sees the burial cloths and the head wrapping all rolled up.

The progression has been that Mary saw the stone rolled away, the beloved disciple saw the burial cloths, and Peter saw the burial cloths and the head wrapping.

All this evidence substantiates that the body of Jesus is no longer in the tomb.

When the beloved disciple enters the tomb, he sees everything there and believes the evidence. What he believes is that the tomb is empty, but all signs indicate that the body has not been stolen. It appears that the body has left on its own. The wrappings of death have been left behind—unlike the situation of Lazarus where he came out of the tomb still bound by the burial wrappings.

The faith of the beloved disciple is still not quite belief in the resurrection. The text indicates that they did not yet understand that Jesus had to rise from the dead. However, all the evidence indicates that Jesus has conquered death and vanished from the tomb.
PURPOSE: To celebrate and acknowledge our risen Lord and to open our hearts to accept the gifts of forgiveness and eternal life.

SUMMARY: The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus forever changed humankind’s view of death and life, giving all who believe the hope of following in Christ’s footsteps.

A) ATTENTION-GETTER Here’s a story straight from the headlines. An Ohio man last year asked a court of law to declare that he was alive. It seems, after Donald Miller had been missing for a number of years, his wife had her husband declared dead. She needed to do so in order for her children to receive Social Security benefits.

Nearly 20 years later, when Mr. Miller returned to his hometown of Findlay, he found out it was not easy to come back from the dead, in a legal sense. As a matter of fact, a judge told him it couldn’t be done, saying the state’s law doesn’t allow a declaration of death to be reversed after more than three years. The town’s newspaper described Mr. Miller as “the most famous dead man alive.”

B) APPLICATION The message of Easter is that, despite clear and definitive evidence of his death, one man did return to life. Although the Gospels report that the risen Lord was seen by numerous witnesses, the events of Jesus’s death and resurrection remain for us a matter of faith. It is only through faith that we can today declare, “He is risen.”

1) Peter boldly reports the story of Christ to gentiles as well as to his fellow Jews.
   a) Peter tells the story of Jesus’ ministry, as it started with the baptism by John.
   b) Jesus’ ministry involved not only teaching and preaching, but also good works of all kinds, including truly holistic healing.
   c) Peter states that he was an eyewitness to the events surrounding the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.
   d) Numerous followers of Jesus dined and drank with him following the resurrection.
   e) Jesus commissioned his followers to spread the word about his life, death, and resurrection—and about the forgiveness of sins available in his name.

2) Paul declared that those who follow Christ will share in eternal life.
   a) Since the risen Christ is now seated with God in heaven, Christians can make that their goal as well.
   b) Paul makes a distinction between “things above” and “things of the earth.”
   c) Those who have been baptized into Christ have essentially died to the things of this world and claimed a right to inherit a place in God’s eternal kingdom.

3) The Gospel of John reports that Mary Magdalen was the first to notice that the body of Jesus was missing from the tomb.
   a) Mary went to the tomb early in the morning on the first day of the week.
   b) After finding the tomb empty, Mary ran to Peter and the “beloved disciple,” telling them the body of Jesus had been stolen.
   c) The disciples returned to the tomb with Mary and likewise witnessed what she saw, as well as the discarded burial clothes and the head wrapping.
   d) The “beloved disciple” was the first to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead.

4) Despite the evidence available, acknowledging the resurrection remains a matter of faith
   a) The Gospel of John tells the story of the resurrection in the context of Jesus’ relationship with the so-called “beloved disciple.”
   b) This disciple who was so close to Jesus is a model for all believers, letting us know that faith is easier for those who are open to a close relationship with God.
   c) Such a close relationship with God opens us to genuine caring and intimacy in all our relationships.

C) TRANSITION TO LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST
Having heard the Gospel account and opened our hearts to belief in the resurrection, we gather at the Lord’s Table to acknowledge our closeness to God and each other.

(John E. Hingsbergen)
Exegesis of the 1st reading, Acts 2:42-47

Luke’s second book records the advance of the gospel from Jerusalem to the capital of the Roman Empire. Such was the dramatic success of the apostolic witness to the risen Lord. But Luke reminds his readers over and over again that all of this was achieved through the power of the Holy Spirit.

1) The Church. In this summary view of the life of the early Church, Luke emphasizes its ideal character. The apostles are the teachers. Their witness to Jesus and to his resurrection provides an invaluable link to the Incarnate Word. Further identifying characteristics of the early Church are devotion to communal life, the breaking of the bread at the Eucharist, and prayer. The signs and wonders worked by Jesus continue through the hands of his apostles. The faith community pooled its earthly resources to help those less fortunate. The breaking of the bread at the Eucharist, and prayer. The faith community pooled its earthly resources to help those less fortunate. The continuity between their Jewish faith and belief in Jesus is exhibited by the fact that each day they met in the temple area as well as in their homes, where they celebrated the Eucharist.

2) The Lord. All their energy was focused on service to the Lord and the kingdom he preached. They attributed their growth in numbers, not to their own efforts, but to the risen Lord. Others were inspired by the sincerity of their lives and their constant praise of God.

Exegesis of the 2nd reading, 1 Pt 1:3-9

1) God’s mercy is the cause of all the good that takes place in the life of a Christian. The new life on earth and its destiny in heaven are due to the mercy revealed in Christ and his resurrection.

2) Faith, a gift of God’s mercy, is the means by which Christians enter into new life. Christians can even rejoice when suffering the trials of life and be ready for the glorious coming of Jesus Christ.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Jn 20:19-31

1) Jesus appears. Immediately after the crucifixion of Jesus, his disciples went into hiding behind locked doors for fear that what happened to Jesus would also happen to them. To their great astonishment and without warning, Jesus appears in their midst. His very first words to them are, “Peace be with you.” He calms their fear by showing them his wounds, indicating that it is really Jesus, who a short time ago was hanging on a cross. He transforms the disciples’ fear into joy. They are now looking no longer at Jesus of Nazareth, but at the risen Lord.

2) A divine commission. Jesus confirms his gift of peace to the disciples, and he follows with a divine commissioning. He sends out his disciples as the Father had sent him. In other words, they are to do the work he did. This commissioning gets sealed by means of the Holy Spirit.

Just as God breathed new life into Adam at the beginning of creation, so Jesus, the risen Son of God, breathes new life into his disciples. This gift is accompanied by the authority to forgive sin. Many refer to this whole experience as the Johannine Pentecost.

3) Thomas’s confession. Thomas was not present when Jesus commissioned the other 10 disciples. They shared with him everything that happened when Jesus appeared in their midst and commissioned them. They even confess that they had seen the Lord. Thomas’s response to the disciples has long been categorized as doubt, indicating that he did not believe what the disciples told him. He is portrayed as wanting some kind of extra proof, expressed as seeing wounds and putting his finger in the nail marks. Without that, he will not believe.

What gets missed in all of this is that Thomas is asking for no more evidence than what the other ten disciples were granted when Jesus appeared to them. What he is actually saying is, “When I see what you saw, then I will believe.” A week later, Thomas gets his wish. Jesus repeats exactly what he had done earlier with the ten disciples. He goes through locked doors, grants everyone his peace, and then shows his wounds to Thomas.

Immediately, Thomas believes without touching Jesus and confesses him as “My Lord and my God.” Then Jesus observes that those who have not seen and even confess that they had seen the Lord. Thom as’s response to the disciples has long been categorized as doubt, indicating that he did not believe what the disciples told him. He is portrayed as wanting some kind of extra proof, expressed as seeing wounds and putting his finger in the nail marks. Without that, he will not believe.

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PURPOSE: To celebrate the “judgment of mercy” that Christ brings us in his rising from the dead.

SUMMARY: Mercy is charity with heart, giving when we expect no repayment. “As the Father has sent me,” Jesus said. He sends us to be the face of the Father’s compassion and mercy in the peace of the Holy Spirit.

A) ATTENTION-GETTER Pope John Paul II was concerned about the confessors at St. Peter’s Basilica. He was hearing from others that the priests who heard confessions from the many pilgrims could be pretty rough on the penitents. He called them together and reminded them that their duty is about the act of mercy. “Confession is an act of honesty and courage,” he said, “an act of entrusting ourselves, beyond sin, to the mercy of a loving and forgiving God.” He wanted confessors who would reflect that mercy.

B) APPLICATION Today we celebrate “Mercy” Sunday, but we do it on the day when 2 popes are being canonized by the Holy Father. Only 80 popes have been declared or considered “saints” (well, 82 by the time this homily may be happening). All told, 52 of the first 54 popes were. That means that for about 1800 years only another 26 were able to pass the “test.” It must be tough to be the pope, but being seen as a model for holiness (and John XXIII and John Paul II certainly are) is a rare nomination. They’re saints because they reflected the mercy of Christ in their lives.

1) Pope Francis sees these two popes as connected to the Second Vatican Council.
   a) What we do today, how we pray today, and how we understand our Church today are a direct result of the teachings of that Council.
   b) The central reform was not just changing a language in the Mass or changing where the priest faces at the altar.
   c) Lumen Gentium reminded us that Christ is the Light to the Nations: We cannot be the Church without reflecting the Christ who is our Light. Men and women need to see Christ through our loving actions and not just by our words.

2) The two men we celebrate today were both reflections of God’s mercy.
   a) John XXIII visited a local prison early in his pontificate and confessed that he, too, was a “prisoner” in the Vatican—he understood their plight! He wanted to bring the Church into the modern world. We did not always appear as an invitation to God’s love and mercy but as a private club with entrance fees.
   b) John Paul II flew to 129 countries and saw more of the world than any other pope, attempting to show the Church’s concern for every culture and the unique desire of its people to hear the gospel.

3) The purpose of the “Divine Mercy” devotion was to “obtain mercy, to trust in Christ’s mercy, and to show mercy to others.”
   a) Mercy is the expression of God’s charity—God’s love. Mercy pardons.
   b) “Divine Mercy” is not an end in itself: It seeks to soften our hearts in God’s tenderness. “His love is everlasting,” and “His mercy endures forever.”
   c) Mercy can’t be received and invested in a 401k. Mercy is not stored up for our eternal salvation. Mercy is meant to make our hearts grateful to a God of charity. “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

C) CONCLUSION Christ was merciful to Thomas in his doubt and appeared a second time to help affirm his faith. So many are in need of God’s mercy! Our children—do we hold their adolescent stumbling against them? Those who are married—do you bring up every past sin as a weapon against your spouse? Couples cry out for understanding of their less-than-perfect choices in a past marriage. Pastors need mercy for not always being the best administrator or communicator. The poor need the mercy of the comfortable in order to make a living wage. The sick need mercy because they feel like such a burden. The Church itself needs mercy because we more often reflect the face of the world in power and prestige rather than Christ’s charity and compassion.

D) TRANSITION TO LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST Mercy is at the center of Christ’s death and resurrection and the New Covenant in Christ’s blood “for the forgiveness of sins.” What do we think we are doing “in remembrance of” Jesus, if not to show the same mercy he showed us in dying for us? In Eucharist, the “communion” we share goes beyond the substance we consecrate; it affects the people we can become, in mercy and compassion, in a world hungry for the divine heart of God’s charity.

(John Petrikovic, OFM Cap.)