



Bringing Home the Word

Palm Sunday (A)
April 5, 2020

Noble and Humble

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord prepares us to leave behind Jesus' public ministry and enter into his suffering and death. From miracles, crowds, and praise we move to pain, silence, and humility. Only the strong and true lovers of Jesus will make it to the foot of the cross.

A painting in the Vatican Museum by Pseudo Domenico di Michelino, *The Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem*, depicts Jesus coming into Jerusalem sitting

nobly—on a donkey—in the center. The prophecy of Zechariah 9:9 sets the scene and marks its importance: “Exult greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout for joy, O daughter Jerusalem! Behold: your king is coming to you, a just savior is he, humble, and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” By riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, Jesus embraces the path of the Messiah that God mapped out through the prophets. He comes as a king and in peace and obedience. Jesus wins with meekness and love.

Returning to the painting, we see little children laying down their coats before Jesus. These simple souls recognize his divine humility and honor him with their gestures while the crowd acclaim his kingship. The reign of Jesus incites praise, fidelity, and allegiance. The people wave olive branches and throw them on the ground before him.

Counting the followers in the painting, eleven process with golden halos around their heads. These symbols of holiness highlight the fact that to love Jesus is to follow him to the end, as do almost all of the twelve disciples Jesus selected to join him in his ministry. One follower, however, is surrounded in shadow. Unlike the others, he looks away. His heart is set on another plan. +

A Word from Pope Francis

Jesus enters Jerusalem. The liturgy...somehow expresses the contradictory feelings that we too, the men and women of today, experience: the capacity for great love, but also for great hatred; the capacity for courageous self-sacrifice, but also the ability to “wash our hands” at the right moment.

—Palm Sunday homily, March 25, 2018



Sunday Readings

Matthew 21:1–11

The very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and strewed them on the road.

Isaiah 50:4–7

The Lord God is my help, / therefore I am not disgraced.

Philippians 2:6–11

He emptied himself, taking the form of a slave [and]...humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

Matthew 26:14–27:66 or 27:11–54

Jesus cried out again in a loud voice, and gave up his spirit.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- How do I respond to Jesus' invitation to join him in his passion? do my actions show where my heart really is?
- Would I be shrouded in shadow or surrounded by Jesus' glory?

Jesus Christ, Our Starting Point

By Fr. Thomas Richstatter, OFM

Being Catholic starts with Jesus Christ. In fact, everything begins with Christ. He is “the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (Revelation 22:13). He is “the firstborn of all creation” (Colossians 1:15).

I wasn’t around before the creation, of course, but from my perspective I can imagine things happening something like this: God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—was sitting at breakfast when God the Father said, “Being God is wonderful, but eternity can sure get boring.” “So let’s do something different,” the Son replied. “Let’s create something out of nothing!” The Father asked, “Can we do that?” “Sure,” said the Spirit, “we’re God, aren’t we?” The Father said, “OK, what shall we make?”

And (this is the crucial point) what did God make? Jesus Christ—the firstborn of creation, the Word through whom God made everything else that exists.

If you are not accustomed to thinking of Jesus in this way, an analogy may help. Years ago when I was teaching at a seminary, one popular hobby among the students was making model airplanes. On winter evenings the hobby shop would be crowded with boys gluing together various shapes of balsa wood pinned to diagrams on a table.



When asked, “What are you making?” the seminarians never said, “I am gluing piece A7 to H5.” One might respond, “I am making a P-51 Mustang.” From the beginning, their minds were on the finished project. Similarly, if you asked God at the creation, “What are you making?” he would have responded: “We’re making Jesus Christ.”

God’s Masterpiece

Jesus is God’s masterpiece. God created Christ out of love, and Christ returned perfect love to God. We can see this in everything Jesus said and did while he walked on earth. We see this most clearly in Jesus humbling himself, “becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:8). And on the cross “he handed over the spirit” (John 19:30) to the Church so that we who are baptized put on Christ and become his body.

At Mass we ask God to “grant that we, who are nourished by the Body and Blood of your Son and filled with his Holy Spirit, may become one body, one spirit in Christ.” Our incorporation into Christ is the principal petition at every Eucharist. We pray that we, to paraphrase St. Augustine, be what we see on the altar and receive what we are—Christ’s body. Through Christ, in him, with him, our lives have meaning. We live for more

than ourselves. We are taken up into that great, mysterious plan of God that is Jesus Christ.

God’s Coworkers

And what is our role in God’s plan? Our mission is reconciliation. While God has reconciled all things in Christ, “making peace by the blood of his cross” (Colossians 1:20), with our incorporation into Christ, God has “given us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:18). We are to improve the quality of life for all, to alleviate hunger and disease, injustice and conflict.

And while this task may seem impossible, we Catholics know that it is possible. In fact, we know that it will be achieved because it is God’s plan. This is what gives us our inherent Catholic optimism. We are optimistic because we know that grace is more original than sin. God’s great plan of love did not start with Adam and Eve, the fruit, or the snake, but with Jesus. Everything starts with Jesus. +



Lord, you are the model of nonviolence and unconditional love. May your example inspire me to be a more loving and forgiving person in life.

—From *Mindful Meditations for Every Day of Lent and Easter*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

April 6–11

Monday of Holy Week: Is 42:1–7 / Jn 12:1–11

Tuesday of Holy Week:
Is 49:1–6 / Jn 13:21–33, 36–38

Wednesday of Holy Week:
Is 50:4–9a / Mt 26:14–25

Holy Thursday: Ex 12:1–8, 11–14 /
1 Cor 11:23–26 / Jn 13:1–15

Good Friday: Is 52:13–53:12 / Heb 4:14–16;
5:7–9 / Jn 18:1–19:42

Holy Saturday: Gn 1:1–2:2 or 1:1, 26–31a /
Gn 22:1–18 or 22:1–2, 9a, 10–13, 15–18 /
Ex 14:15–15:1 / Is 54:5–14 / Is 55:1–11 /
Bar 3:9–15, 32–4:4 / Ez 36:16–17a, 18–28 /
Rom 6:3–11 / Mt 28:1–10

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Bringing Home the Word

Easter Sunday, the Resurrection of the Lord (A)

April 12, 2020

History's Greatest Event

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

Today we celebrate the most important mystery of our faith, the greatest event in the Bible and all of history. Nothing before the events of Easter morning contains their full meaning, and nothing after makes sense without them.

Jesus' conquering of death validated all of his preaching, teaching, and miracles. Now his doctrine of love, forgiveness, faith, and baptism is confirmed, as is God's definitive

revelation for humanity's salvation. In short, the resurrection proves that Jesus wasn't simply a good man, a wise teacher, or a revolutionary. He was all of those things and more—he was the Son of God.

Without the rising of Jesus from the dead, you cannot explain his appearing to the women, apostles, disciples, and crowds before his ascension. You cannot explain the transformation of the timid and baffled apostles into powerful preachers or the conversion of St. Paul from a murdering Pharisee to a persecuted Christian. Without the truth of the resurrection, you cannot explain the courage of any of the martyrs. Indeed, the Romans and Jews took these martyrs seriously. And if either group could have produced a body of evidence or a convincing explanation to debunk the story, they would have.

So today, set aside your Lenten focus on the mocked, beaten, and buried Jesus. Celebrate the resurrection. Christ the Lord—and Christianity—is a reality and a force. Rejoice! Reflect on the truth and power of this day, and allow God's Son to open the tombs of your heart and life. +

***Christ the Lord—and
Christianity—is a reality
and a force. Rejoice!***

A Word from Pope Francis

Today...we see that our journey is not in vain.... Why do you think that everything is hopeless, that no one can take away your own tombstones? Why do you give in to resignation and failure? Easter is the feast of tombstones taken away, rocks rolled aside.

—Easter Vigil homily, April 20, 2019



Sunday Readings

Acts 10:34a, 37–43

This man God raised on the third day and granted that he be visible...to us, the witnesses chosen by God in advance.

**Colossians 3:1–4 or
1 Corinthians 5:6b–8**

Think of what is above, not of what is on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

John 20:1–9

Then the other disciple also went in, the one who had arrived at the tomb first, and he saw and believed.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS REFLECTION

- The resurrection changes everything. How does it change your life?
- Do you celebrate the resurrection of Jesus on Easter or every day?

We Are Made for Joy

By Kathy Coffey

Thou shalt be joyful.

Groans might greet this hypothetical eleventh commandment. Where are we supposed to cram joy on an overloaded to-do list? Does it go before or after the litany of chores, bills, and family obligations? All we want is to make it through the crunch of the workweek, then collapse in exhaustion.

Sad, but true. This stressed state of affairs points clearly toward the need for an eleventh commandment demanding joy. The rationale is this: If we were made for eternal joy, we should start now. We are more than cogs in a machine, toting up hours that feed corporate profits but fail to satisfy our souls. God made us for the everlasting bliss of gazing into his eyes. So if drudgery consumes our time, we should fill our free hours with deep nurture rather than televised fluff.

The acid test is always: How shall we be remembered? Imagine grandchildren saying, “She trudged dutifully, year after year, to all her commitments, but we didn’t see her much.” Or imagine their voices lightening as they recall, “She was so much fun! When we cooked her special chili we laughed and told stories.” “I’ll always remember his pride in his garden, how he’d grin at the first tomatoes, or how he happily took me canoeing.”



These positive attitudes aren't Pollyanna-esque. They are choices as difficult to honor as any of the Ten Commandments. Let's face it, daily news is often depressing. A sample of headlines: “Alabama Boy Kills Family.” “Coronavirus Looks Like a Pandemic.” “Two Teens Dead after Pickup Hits Runners.” The daily media hardly sends us rushing for the tambourines. That's why we need God's strength to remain faithful, confident, and hopeful.

Joy in the Real World

From prison comes an example of one who honored the difficult “eleventh commandment.” There, Fyodor Dostoevsky wrote, “Yes, we are in chains, deprived of liberty, but in our sorrow we are restored to joy, without which we cannot live.... We underground men, we will dig in the entrails of the earth a tragic hymn to the God of joy!”

If convicts can sing praise from the “entrails of the earth,” what about us? We are rich in faith, blessings, comforts, and wealth. Yet our distracted days and frowning faces give little praise to the “God of joy.”

Pursuit of Joy

Before we all start a serious pursuit of joy, a few qualifications: it cannot be sought.

It's a gift. It springs from the conviction that the kingdom of God is near. It's like Lazarus emerging from the tomb, squinting in the sunlight—and laughing. Joy is the appropriate response when we know we are saved, rescued despite failures, happy not in our achievements but in God's fidelity.

The image of a child snoozing in a parent's lap may be a cliché, but it resembles our contentment in God's presence, where we are at all times. Joy spills from the security of knowing every need will be met—not necessarily the way we foresaw, but in God's time and pleasure. Dancing conveys the same joy: arms wide, feet in rhythm, worries set aside.

Contrast that with our postures when burdened by negativity. We must carry ourselves with joy. The living Jesus won't be found in boredom and inertia but in what brings beauty and restores grace. And because he is risen, so are we. Despite suffering, we were made for joy. Maybe that commandment isn't carved on a stone tablet, but we can write it on our hearts. +



Lord, your resurrection pierces the darkness of doubt and fear. May the power of your resurrection help me to deepen my love for you and all people.

—From *Mindful Meditations for Every Day of Lent and Easter*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

April 13–18

Monday, Octave of Easter:
Acts 2:14, 22–33 / Mt 28:8–15

Tuesday, Octave of Easter:
Acts 2:36–41 / Jn 20:11–18

Wednesday, Octave of Easter:
Acts 3:1–10 / Lk 24:13–35

Thursday, Octave of Easter:
Acts 3:11–26 / Lk 24:35–48

Friday, Octave of Easter:
Acts 4:1–12 / Jn 21:1–14

Saturday, Octave of Easter:
Acts 4:13–21 / Mk 16:9–15

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Bringing Home the Word

Second Sunday of Easter (Sunday of Divine Mercy) (A)

April 19, 2020

Touching Jesus' Mercy

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

The memory of the marks of our sufferings can lead us to lose our peace. For Christ, this is not so. He shows the disciples his wounds and says, "Peace be with you." It may seem contradictory, but it isn't. To touch Christ's wounded side is to touch his mercy, to touch a love that overcomes everything. In spite of my sins wounding him, he comes to me in loving mercy. Jesus' wounds bring peace.

When the apostles see his hands and side, they rejoice. His wounds are a sign

that it is really him. No one else has those marks. His wounds are his identification! His wounds bring joy.

Thomas misses Jesus' first apparition, returning and demanding proof before he will believe. Rather than becoming angry, Jesus shows him his wounds. He invites Thomas to touch the signs of his suffering, and Thomas believes. Jesus' wounds bring faith.

We also need to insert our hands and hearts into Christ's side, to come into contact with his love and mercy. Only then can we be healed. Only then can we experience real peace, joy, and faith.

That's why Jesus breathes on his disciples and says, "Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them" (John 20:22-23). He wants to heal their wounds and see them produce joy and peace in others. God's grace is to reach all generations through the power of forgiveness he entrusts to his Church. The sacrament of penance is exactly that. We acknowledge our sins, and Jesus responds with understanding, forgiveness, and counsel. +

We need to insert our hands and hearts into Christ's side, to come into contact with his love and mercy.

A Word from Pope Francis

To us also, on this Sunday, which St. John Paul II wished to dedicate to divine mercy, the Lord shows us, through the Gospel, his wounds. They are wounds of mercy....Jesus invites us to...enter into the mystery of these wounds, which is the mystery of his merciful love.

—Homily, April 12, 2015



Sunday Readings

Acts 2:42-47

Awe came upon everyone, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.

1 Peter 1:3-9

You may have to suffer through various trials, so...the genuineness of your faith...may prove to be for praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

John 20:19-31

These [signs] are written that you may [come to] believe that Jesus is the Messiah,...and that through this belief you may have life in his name.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS REFLECTION

- How often and how sincerely do you receive mercy through reconciliation?
- How often do you show and share the forgiveness and mercy you have been blessed with?

Why Community? Why Church? Why Catholic?

By Jim and Susan Vogt



People have many reasons for being Catholic. Most are good, yet some seem weak: “Sunday morning without Mass would seem empty.” “I was raised Catholic. It’s all I know.” “I’m not sure there’s a God, but I’d rather err by believing than be surprised when I die.”

These aren’t *bad* reasons, but they may not stand up to the challenges of modern life. They’re like the house built on sand. When the storm came, it collapsed (see Matthew 7:24–27).

The storms are many: anger at the clergy sex-abuse scandals; dissatisfaction with the limited role of women; judging the Church as too wishy-washy, politically involved, rich, or concerned about rules; and hurt from negative personal experiences (for example, “The Church wouldn’t bury my father”).

Once a young adult leaves home, the practice of the faith may be seen as only a cultural commitment with no roots. Sometimes people aren’t welcomed when they approach the Church for marriage or other sacraments. Our Church must walk a delicate balance between staking out an identity that sometimes upholds unpopular values while welcoming all with unconditional love as Jesus did.

Lately we’ve been listening to folks who have left the Church and to others who have remained or returned to active

Catholicism. These are some of the more significant reasons we’ve heard about why people stay:

- **The communion of saints:** Many in the Church have been inspired by Catholics, some deceased but others still alive, who’ve been powerful witnesses of lives lived for others—true followers of Jesus.
- **Crisis:** Sometimes a life crisis drives us to ask the ultimate questions about life’s meaning. God often touches us during difficult times, and we come to understand that life is about more than collecting stuff or even surrounding ourselves with loving people.
- **The sacraments:** The Catholic Church has a rich tradition of combining the Word with actions and symbols in its seven sacraments. This reflects an understanding of how ordinary things—water, bread, oil, rings, words of forgiveness or commitment, and human touch—help us experience God’s love.
- **Universality:** People have told us that they were attracted to the Catholic Church because its heritage goes back to Jesus and there’s a unity of belief around the world.
- **Service and social justice:** The Catholic Church has perhaps the most extensive social service network

in the world—tending to the poor, coordinating aid during crises, and challenging everyone to live simply and help their neighbors because that is what Jesus taught.

- **Community:** Living a Christian life isn’t about being a “lone ranger.” Being in community with other believers, we can pool our resources and support each other.

In the end, the reason that we—Jim and Susan—are Catholic is that it’s where God has called us and spoken to us. There are many routes to God, but Catholicism is where we have experienced God’s touch. There may be Church policies with which we disagree, but we would find human foibles and failings no matter what religion we followed.

Some of the best and worst things in human history were done in the name of church, God, and religion. We must align ourselves with the best and repudiate the worst. The challenge is to be humble enough to remember that we’re not in charge and that we’re all imperfect sinners, still loved by God. As a community inspired by the life of Jesus, faith calls us to devote ourselves to the good of others.

Bottom line? Love. +

PRAYER

*Risen Lord, you share with me
God’s gifts of peace and
forgiveness. Open my heart to
share your peace and forgiveness
with all people.*

—From *Hopeful Meditations for Every Day of
Easter Through Pentecost*, Rev. Warren J. Savage
and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

April 20–25

Monday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 4:23–31 / Jn 3:1–8

Tuesday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 4:32–37 / Jn 3:7b–15

Wednesday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 5:17–26 / Jn 3:16–21

Thursday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 5:27–33 / Jn 3:31–36

Friday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 5:34–42 / Jn 6:1–15

Saturday, St. Mark:
1 Pt 5:5b–14 / Mk 16:15–20

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Bringing Home the Word

Third Sunday of Easter (A)
April 26, 2020

Hope Rekindled

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

Discouragement and exhaustion are familiar to many of us. When we are young, we are full of life, vigor, hopes, and dreams. But the challenges of life can lead us down rough and narrow streets with few exits. When a fresh hope—an opportunity or a new love—appears but doesn’t pan out, we are even more discouraged than before.

The two disciples returning home were convinced Jesus was the Messiah, but it doesn’t seem to be. Jesus isn’t surprised by their dissolution. He catches up to them and takes an interest in their

story. When he asks, “What things?” they unburden their hearts, and Jesus listens and cares.

With their eyes blinded, they do not recognize their companion. Their faith is dead, their hope is dimmed, their love is cold. The mystery of the cross makes no sense without an experience of the resurrection. They simply can’t understand why it had to be this way.

Arriving in Emmaus, their newfound friend needs to go on. But they insist, as should we in our prayer, “Stay with us!” We need God’s presence to enlighten our faith, rekindle our hope, and ignite our love. Jesus accepts; there is nothing he wants more. He has promised to be with us, and we need to be with him. Jesus offers us his presence not for a moment but for an eternity.

Imagine the precise moment of the disciples realizing who Jesus is. Meditate on what this moment says to you. +

We need God’s presence to enlighten our faith, rekindle our hope, and ignite our love.

A Word from Pope Francis

We have all had difficult moments in life, dark moments in which we walked in sadness, pensive, without horizons, with only a wall before us. And Jesus is always beside us to give us hope, to warm our hearts and to say: “Go ahead, I am with you. Go ahead.”

—General audience, May 24, 2017



Sunday Readings

Acts 2:14, 22–33

God raised [Jesus] up, releasing him from the throes of death, because it was impossible for him to be held by it.

1 Peter 1:17–21

He was...revealed in the final time for you, who through him believe in God who raised him from the dead and gave him glory.

Luke 24:13–35

He took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS REFLECTION

- Am I discouraged with God in some area of my life? Talk through these areas in prayer.
- It was necessary that the Messiah suffer. Do I accept suffering? Am I willing to die with Christ to live with him?

Hang on to Hope When the World Is Falling Apart

By Jim and Susan Vogt



It's easy for all of us to feel overwhelmed and helpless in the face of many natural disasters, blatant injustices, and tragedies in our world. Are earthquakes, floods, and droughts worse than in the past, or are we more aware of them due to modern communication? Injustices tear at our hearts the most since they are under human control. Terrorism, corrupt politicians, oil spills, and pollution are mammoth problems of human making. Tragedies like death, divorce, or lingering illness can devastate us. We wonder: *How can God allow such suffering when we try so valiantly to do what's right and pray so hard?*

What's a Christian to do? Wallow in grief or guilt? Rail at God? Give up? Grieving is OK—for a time. Even getting angry at God is human. The psalms are good examples of people pouring out their grief and anger to God. (See Psalms 22, 55, 57, 88, 94, and 102 for a start.) Don't worry. God can handle our strong feelings.

There comes a time, however, when we have to pick ourselves up and carry on. The following actions have helped us when we've felt overwhelmed or powerless in the face of problems and evils in our world:

- **Cultivate gratitude:** Let go of your anger through consciously noting one thing each day for which you're grateful. When Susan starts fretting about the ills of society, she calls to mind that at least our home has electricity and running water.
- **Pray in solidarity:** Of course we pray, both personally and at Mass, for people affected by natural disasters and tragedies of all kinds. Adding our bodies to our prayers through fasting or other sacrifices can build solidarity with the victims and reinforce our prayers.
- **Take action:** Actions put feet on prayer. If you're already feeling overwhelmed and stretched, remind yourself that you don't have to eradicate poverty or war today—or alone. Can you take one action step in the direction of change? This won't solve the whole problem, but it gets you out of the starting gate.
- **Protect your sanity:** When making even one step feels like too much, you might be right. Sometimes we're truly maxed out and have to trust others and God to take care of a problem. Count what you're doing as contributing to society and call it "enough."

- **Think bigger:** Those of us with ordinary demands on our time, energy, and money have the responsibility to think bigger, to consider a second or third step. We must go beyond the human temptation to throw up our hands and say, "It's too big a problem. I can't make any difference." Consider that your strong emotion of anger or helplessness may be a call from God to act. You've been touched and moved.
- **Make a friend:** Whatever problem is touching your heart, there are probably others who have organized a group that's already working on it. Besides, having others to work with is motivating and can refine bigger ideas.

What's Faith Got to Do with It?

Jesus spent his life showing us how to deal with adversity and how to be neighbors. And what did it get him? Crucified! If we're following Jesus, we shouldn't expect comfort and ease. Rather, we need to spend ourselves for others and learn to love better. Jim McGinnis, a modern-day prophet and cofounder of the Institute for Peace and Justice, wrote: "In the face of escalating violence, let us escalate love." +

PRAYER

*Risen Lord, you walk with me
as my friend and companion.
Help me to recognize your
presence in all people.*

—From *Hopeful Meditations for Every Day of
Easter Through Pentecost*, Rev. Warren J. Savage
and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

April 27–May 2

Monday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 6:8–15 / Jn 6:22–29

Tuesday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 7:51—8:1a / Jn 6:30–35

Wednesday, St. Catherine of Siena:
Acts 8:1b–8 / Jn 6:35–40

Thursday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 8:26–40 / Jn 6:44–51

Friday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 9:1–20 / Jn 6:52–59

Saturday, St. Athanasius:
Acts 9:31–42 / Jn 6:60–69

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