

# HOMILETICS

by

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## I. BIBLICAL NOTES FOR MARCH

### **SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT (March 6, 1977)**

**First Reading:** Genesis 15: 5-12. 17-18

**Second Reading:** Philippians 3: 17 to 4: 1 (or 3: 20 to 4: 1)

**Gospel Reading:** Luke 9: 28-36

**First Reading:** A promise of innumerable progeny made by God to Abraham, when he was old and childless, demanded great faith from the patriarch, but his willing response met the challenge. Because of this, God accounts him as just and pleasing to him (which later theology would call "justified by sanctifying grace" or simply "being in God's friendship"). A second promise to give him the land of Canaan is guaranteed by a covenant oath within an ancient covenant rite. Ritually mature animals (three years old) were cut in two and placed on opposite heaps. The covenant participants passed through the midst, thus symbolizing their acceptance of the same fate should they prove unfaithful to the sworn covenant. (See Jer. 34:18). The fading light, the trance and the total darkness all heighten the solemnity of the occasion.

Abraham drove off the vultures, relying fully on God's word. Fire and the burning torch symbolize the transcendent Lord, as often in the Scriptures (Ex. 3:2; 13:21; 19:18). The Great River is the Euphrates to the East, and the Wadi (brook) of Egypt to the West marks the confines between Egypt and Canaan. Observe how God accommodates himself to man's customs and rites in dealing with him. This mighty act of God was Abraham's beacon light in the trials that were to test him later on.

**Gospel Reading:** This brilliant theophany, or manifestation of the divine in Jesus, follows upon the conditions for true discipleship (vv.23ff), which are demanding and all-embracing. Thus it is in-

tended as an encouragement in the dark days to come. What the three disciples experienced was very difficult to describe (as is every mystical contact with the divine) and so comparisons are made to clarify it. Here it is being compared to the theophany on Mount Sinai of which the transfiguration is the counterpart. There, in another theophany, the Law and the Covenant came about through Moses; on the same Mount (Horeb) Elijah sought to renew the Covenant for his wayward people (1 Kgs. 19: 9ff). But now both Law and the Prophets give way to Jesus, who by his passion and death (his passage or exodus) becomes God's Covenant with men in person. From now on it is Jesus to whom all must listen, for he is the perfect manifestation of the Father's will (law), and the very Word of God speaking in the name of the Invisible God.

Peter wishes to prolong the experience but after the theophany has passed (cloud, voice, brilliance) Jesus appears again as usual, to make them realize that only through labor and suffering will the glory be obtained. "Eight days" (instead of six in Mt. and Mk.) is Luke's liturgical reflection, the octave number marking the climax of an event. (See also Bol. Ecl., Jan. 1976, p. 87).

**Second Reading:** Paul is convinced that he is presenting Christ correctly, so he can ask his converts to follow his example securely. Neither those who demand Jewish obsolete rules for food or body (circumcision), nor permissive persons who give full reign to their cravings, are true disciples of the crucified Christ. They only end in frustration. True disciples live with Christ in a spiritual realm, waiting for full redemption and complete transformation from this lowly state into the splendor of the glorified Christ. Paul begs them in an impassioned appeal to remain true disciples of Christ.

### **THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT (March 13, 1977)**

**First Reading:** Exodus 3: 1-8, 13-15

**Second Reading:** First Corinthians 10: 1-6, 10-12

**Gospel Reading:** Luke 13: 1-9

**First Reading:** Tending sheep has made the self-confident Moses (Ex. 2:12), trained in all the learning of the Egyptians, into a humble shepherd Israel, his flock. "Mountain of God" is so named because who need just such care. Such a one God wanted for a leader to shepherd Israel, his flock. "Mountain of God" is so named because of the later events transpiring there. In a theophany, or divine manifestation, God makes himself known to Moses whom

he calls to deliver the offspring of Abraham. "Angel of the Lord" is the visible appearance in which God revealed himself, or the messenger he sends. The phrase fluctuates between both (see Gen. 16:17; Ex. 15: 19; Jdg. 6:11.14). Fire symbolizes the transcendent God whose sanctity is such that one dare not approach unprepared. Aware of God's presence, Moses dares not look further, because it was common conviction that no one could see God and live (Ex. 32:30).

The Lord comes as Savior to deliver Abraham's offspring from their present miserable condition, and as Leader and Guide to the land of Promise. Moses is chosen to represent him. On this occasion, God reveals his name as "Yahweh" (given in English bibles as "the Lord"). He is the God who promised their forefathers the twofold blessing of progeny and land (Gen. 15:1-7). Israel is this progeny and Yahweh is thus also Israel's God. The meaning of the name (Yahweh) in v.14 could well be the sacred writer's explanation of it, when writing at a date later than the events happened. Though in its root form it seems to refer to the One-Who-Brings-All-Things-Into-Existence, the popular interpretation, often connected with an event, would be the meaning by which Israel came to know him, namely, a Saving God, who cared for them and delivered them in the events of the Exodus. (See Bol. Ecl., Oct. 1976, p. 755)

**Gospel Reading:** The first incident is known only from this passage, but history knows Pilate to be ruthless at times. Jesus makes it clear that the calamities are not punishment due to the sins of the individuals. Yet both calamities are God's providential warning to Israel as a nation, and a call to sincere repentance before it is too late. Otherwise chastisement will be meted out severely (Jerusalem's destruction was forty years later).

Bearing out the same lesson is the little parable of the fig tree. In three years fig trees should bear fruit, else they are cut down and used as firewood. So the time for Israel's conversion is running out. Before the final decision, one last chance is given. In Jer. 8:13, the barren fig tree stands for unrepentant Israel. Perhaps the Lord had in mind his three years of public ministry. Note how throughout there is real urgency of immediate repentance before it is too late.

**Second Reading:** Much can be learned from this passage how the Holy Spirit prefigured the new People of God in the events of the Old Covenant. Paul mentions those which especially prefigure Christian baptism and the eucharist. His lesson however is very grave: Despite the fact that those of old received God's wonderful favors, most of them were not pleasing to him, and were meted out dire chastisements. The conclusion is clear: Receiving Christian



baptism and the eucharist must be followed up by holiness of life: renunciation of evil desires (v. 8), submission to God's will (v. 10) and vigilant prayer (v. 12).

Divine Providence is symbolized by the cloud that covered them and protected them (Ps. 105: 39). "Baptized into Moses" refers to their allegiance to him as Deliverer from bondage and Leader to the land of Promise. The manna and the water from the rock are called "spiritual" because they were intended by the Spirit to prefigure greater things (namely the Eucharist and the Living Water, which is the Spirit who is Christ's Gift). Paul need not be referring to the legendary rock which was said to have followed Israel all through the desert. Christ himself is the rock, who as Divine Wisdom was already with the People of the Old Covenant, nourishing them (Wisd. 11: 4 and 10: 21). This he does now by his own Body and Blood, and by imparting the Spirit.

#### **FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT (March 20, 1977)**

**First Reading:** Joshua 5: 9a. 10-12  
**Second Reading:** Second Corinthians 5: 17-21  
**Gospel Reading:** Luke 15: 1-3, 11-32

**First Reading:** Israel celebrates the Passover in the land promised her by her forefathers, in deepest gratitude for the favors of Divine Providence who brought them through all the dangers of their wandering into their future home. "Reproach of Egypt" seems best to refer to the humiliating state of slavery under Egyptian bondage, called a reproach in the sense of disgrace. After celebrating the Passover, the manna which is the symbol of desert wandering, as it was ceased, and they thereafter ate of the produce of the land as a settled people. The Christian Passover-lamb is Christ who offers himself in thanksgiving for his brothers; (eucharist means thanksgiving).

**Gospel Reading:** The parable consists of three scenes:

1. **At home:** Unappreciative of his father's goodness and the abundance of his father's house, the younger son demands his share of the inheritance. He wants to be on his own, away from parental vigilance, away from all restraint. Without a word, his father gives him his share. Gaily and thoughtlessly the lad turns his possessions into ready money and goes off for a good time. He is unconcerned over the father's silent grief, and tries to forget home as soon as possible. At last he is "free".

**2. In a far off country:**

a. High life: Now he is really "going to town": carefree, reckless living, no curfew; food, drink, pleasure in abundance, friends aplenty. But unexpectedly a famine hits the land, just when he had squandered all his goods. His gay friends abandon him (who were no friends to begin with) and he is alone.

b. Brought low: Alone and in want; prices have sky-rocketed. Yet he is still too proud to admit defeat; he will work for a living. But the only job offered him is feeding pigs (utterly contemptible for a Jew!). Pangs of hunger now drive him to eat the very husks given to the swine, for no gives him anything to eat. (These husks have an insipid taste and only in extreme need are eaten by man).

c. Repentant: Reduced to extreme necessity and in utter loneliness, the lad comes to his senses. What a fool he has been! His father was always so good to him. The servants are well clothed and have plenty to eat, and he the son is in such misery. Could he not go back? But he has deeply grieved his father. He has squandered his inheritance and has no right back home anymore. Yet his father's goodness keeps appealing to him. Would he give him another chance? He will do anything to be taken back, willing even to be a mere servant on his father's farm. Yes! He will go back, admit his offense, beg his father to forgive him.

**3. The return:**

a. His father: Always remembering his wayward son, he is constantly on the lookout for him. When at last he returns, he does not wait for him to come and beg pardon, but hastens out to meet him, embraces him with great warmth and fatherly love. There are no bitter words of reproach for he understands what his son has suffered. The long separation is over. Reconciliation is at hand. He interrupts the acknowledgement of wrong-doing, forgives, forgets, and calls for general rejoicing. He treats him not as a servant but as his very dear son and orders the best to be brought for him.

b. The repentant son: Amazed beyond words, he now realizes the depth and the breadth of the merciful love of his father. He is reinstated! What joy and gratitude must be his! What resolve to do his father's will in the future!

c. The older brother: In place of brotherly affection and joy on seeing his lost brother, he displays anger, jealousy and disdain. He accuses his father of injustice and folly. But the father quietly remonstrates that the elder son would in time inherit all he

possesses, yet true fatherly love prompts him to act thus toward one who had always remained his son. He can appreciate humiliation and the courage it took to return and admit his mistake.

No word of explanation was necessary on the part of Christ or the Evangelist to draw out the lesson of the parable which is meaningful in the extreme. Jesus could hardly have depicted more vividly the infinite mercy of God and his eagerness to forgive the repentant sinner, no matter how great and manifold the offenses, provided he repents and returns to God. God, the Father of mercies, knows what true repentance costs. God's love for man never changes. The self-righteous, whose attitude toward repentant sinners is otherwise than that of the compassionate father, are terribly wrong. They do not reflect the divine mind. Perhaps in the first level of interpretation, Jesus may have had in mind the sinners and the pagans over against self-righteous Israel.

**Second Reading:** Reconciliation with the Father through his Son Jesus Christ is the thrust of this passage. God himself brings it about through the sufferings and death of Jesus. In baptism, sinful man dies and is buried with Christ, and rises to new life. He becomes a transformed new creature. Now the center of his life is Christ, not Law nor human aims. To accomplish man's reconciliation, God made his own Son a sin-offering (the term used for such in the Old Testament liturgy), burdened with all the sins of men (Is. 53: 10). He becomes sin personified, so to say, though he himself is sinless. This magnificent work of divine love is what constitutes the main message of Paul who is God's ambassador to the world, endeavoring to make all men share in Christ's work to bring man back to God by means of the death and resurrection of his Son.

## **FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT**

**(March 27, 1977)**

**First Reading: Isaiah 43: 16-21**

**Second Reading: Philippians 3: 8-14**

**Gospel Reading: John 8: 1-11**

**First Reading:** Brooding over a glorious past in the midst of exile does no good. Let the People of God look up and ahead. God takes the initiative. Exile comes to an end. He will deliver his People and lead them forth like in the Exodus and deliverance of old, when the armies of Egypt lay prostrate, overcome by a mighty act of God.

He will care for their needs as he did then for his People, and they will resound his praise.

**Gospel Reading:** Another trap of the leaders in Israel to find matter for condemning Jesus. An adulterous wife (which is here presumed) was punishable by death (Lev. 20:10). If Jesus decides for mercy, he will be accused of acting against the Law. If for death, the Romans could take it as an abuse of their authority, for only Rome could inflict the death penalty (Jn. 18:32). Jesus does neither. He felt great compassion for this sinful woman, thrust so shamelessly before the eyes of all.

Displaying sheer lack of interest in the disgusting procedure, Jesus bends down silently tracing something on the dust of the Temple grounds. (It is futile to surmise if he wrote words, and what words. Surely he does not reveal the hidden sins of his opponents! Most likely he merely traced on the ground). Finally he lifted his head and shot his response at them: Let the one whose conscience does not accuse him of any sin be the first to throw a stone. Caught by surprise by this remarkable show of fairness, they ashamedly slink away. The woman could also have easily done so while Jesus bent down a second time. That she remained, silently awaiting his answer, convinced him of her sincere compunction, and he manifests great love and mercy toward her. No laborious penance is imposed. One word he tells her: Avoid this sin in the future. He condemns the sin, but has mercy on the sinner.

**Second Reading:** Before his conversion, Paul's ideal of holiness was to know every last detail of the Law and endeavor to carry them out flawlessly (an ideal unattainable to man left to himself). Now his whole effort centers on Christ's Person, God's great Sacrament of divine holiness; his whole effort is to acquire the deepest possible knowledge of Christ, to share his sufferings and death, and thus to share in the power of his resurrection. God alone makes man holy. Paul now considers his former knowledge and efforts a lot of rubbish (literally, dung).

Full participation in Christ is a life-long task. Although Christ has truly taken hold of Paul, drawing him like a magnet, Paul forges ahead to full participation in Christ, like an athlete races toward the finishing line. Having won the race, the reward is the very glory of Christ.



# BIBLICAL NOTES FOR APRIL

## PALM SUNDAY OF THE LORD'S PASSION

(April 3, 1977)

**First Reading:** Isaiah 50:4-7

**Second Reading:** Philippians 2:6-11

**Gospel Reading:** The Passion acc. to Luke 22:14 to 23:56  
(or: 23:1-49)

**First Reading:** This is the third of the "Servant of Yahweh" songs. The Servant knows how to counsel and compassionate weary wayfarers, for he faithfully listens to God speaking to him. He has been called to suffer much for his people, and he meekly accepts it all, both insult (plucking one's beard) and maltreatment. But his whole trust is in God who will eventually vindicate him.

**Gospel Reading:** In his passion account, Luke continues to depict the universal love of the Savior toward all classes of men. Several scenes are peculiar to the third gospel: the bloody sweat, the cure of the servant whose ear Peter cut off, Jesus before Herod, the weeping women of Jerusalem, the first word of Jesus on the cross, the promise for the repentant thief.

**Second Reading:** A deeply theological hymn of superb beauty and depth, either composed by Paul himself or taken from an early Christian repertoire and inserted here by Paul as a trump-card to bring home his point of self-effacement mentioned in vv. 3-4, the motivation for which is none other than the stupendous example of the Son of God in his grandiose act of self-abasement as Servant of Yahweh. The hymn consists of two strophes, vv. 6-8 giving the downward movement from the heights of divinity to the humiliation of death on the cross, and vv. 9-11 giving the upward movement from the depths of death on the cross to the heights of divinity, with the Sacred Humanity now included. The symmetry is inescapable. It is also a good example of Semitic "inclusion", v. 6 and v. 11 being the two end-terms.



In becoming man, Jesus did not grasp at or insist on the divine honors and protocol which were his by right, but "emptied" himself of them. The Greek word (*kenoo*) is always used by Paul in the figurative sense of making no account of oneself, foregoing something which one could claim. On account of this willing obedience during his entire life and total "kenosis" even unto death on the cross, God exalts him on high as Lord of the universe. (The Jerusalem Bible omits the causal "because of this" or "therefore" of the original text, which is very meaningful here since the exaltation is the reward). The exaltation includes the homage and adoration of the entire universe (symbolized by the bending of the knee), and the universal acknowledgement that Jesus is Lord (=Yahweh), entering into that glory (as man) which was always his by right and is now his by conquest. This early credal profession of faith is a powerful admittance of his divinity.

### **HOLY THURSDAY** **(April 7, 1977)**

For the explanation of the readings, see Boletín Ecles.  
February 1976, pp. 165f.

### **EASTER VIGIL MIDNIGHT MASS** **(April 10, 1977)**

**First Reading:** 6:3-11

**Gospel Reading:** Luke 24:1-12

**First Reading:** Paul's deeply mystical explanation of Christian baptism is very fitting for Easter, the climax of the Paschal Mystery, for it depicts the Christian's renewal in the Risen Christ. This is especially meaningful for the catechumens newly baptized in the vigil ceremonies. In baptism, the Christian enters into the closest union with Christ in person, in his redemptive acts of death, burial and resurrection. With Christ he dies to sin and sinful habits, his old self is buried with Christ, and he rises in Christ to a new life for God. The homiletic value of this passage is evident. Moreover, this spiritual renewal in the Risen Christ is an anticipation and prelude of his bodily resurrection and enjoyment of eternal life in God. If the early Christians received baptism through total

immersion, the lesson became all the more striking through the clear symbolism of immersion and rising from the grave "of death" unto new life. Now identified with Christ, the Christian must put off sin for good, identify himself with the Christ-life and endeavor to please God in all things.

**Gospel Reading:** All the resurrection "apparitions" are intended as theological presentations by the Early Church of the fact that Jesus was truly risen. This is brought home in various ways. In this passage, it is the clear communication of heaven in vv. 5-8, and it was duly prophesied by Jesus himself before his death. It is beside the point to endeavor to "harmonize" the "apparitions". Their literary form differs from the rest of the gospel. Emphasis is here given to the skepticism of the Eleven toward the message of Christ risen from the dead. This is a clear indication that the resurrection was not their pre-conceived concoction. Peter verifies for himself the account of the women, and, full of wonder, is thus prepared for his personal encounter with the Risen One mentioned later in v. 34.

### **EASTER SUNDAY MORNING MASS**

**First Reading:** Acts 10: 34a. 37-43

**Second Reading:** Colossians 3: 1-4

**Gospel Reading:** John 20: 1-9. Or: Luke 24: 1-12.

For the explanation of these readings see Boletin Ecles., Feb. 1976, pp. 166f.

For Luke 24: 1-12 see the Vigil above.

### **SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER**

**(April 17, 1977)**

**First Reading:** Acts 5: 12-16

**Second Reading:** Revelation 1:9-11, 12-13, 17-19

**Gospel Reading:** John 20: 19-31

**First Reading:** A glimpse into the early Christian community. The Pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit was accompanied by many "signs" and "wonders". All were made to see that the community headed by the Apostles was God's work and not man's. They met as a body in one of the porches of the Temple-grounds toward the East. Only those who professed faith in Jesus could belong to their group. Peter's prominence stands out as he continues the role of Christ the Good Shepherd.

**Gospel Reading:** It is the climax and closing chapter of John's Gospel (ch. 21 is a later inspired addition). Jesus now imparts the fruits of his salvific work: 1) three times he wishes his disciples the Easter Shalom-Peace, which he had promised them in the farewell discourses (14: 27). It contains the fullness of messianic blessings. 2) he shares with them his divine sending, his identical mission received from the Father, whereby they become his "apostles" or "those who are sent" (from the Greek *apostello*: to send). 3) he imparts to them the Holy Spirit, the first-fruits of his passion-death-resurrection salvation. The scene reminds us that in the beginning, God breathed on man to make him truly human (Gen. 2:7). Now by the gift of God's Spirit, they become sons of God (cf. Gal. 4:6). Luke describes the outpouring of the same gift (Acts. 2) from his own liturgical and theological standpoint. (Chronology is not in question). 4) Jesus truly imparts to his apostles the power to forgive sins. It is exercised in the sacrament of penance (Council of Trent). That the power did not die out with them but passed on to those who represent them as long as the Church exists on earth, is the only reasonable conclusion. Why should it be confined to the first century only?

The doubt of Thomas and his subsequent profession of faith only serves to confirm the reader's conviction that the Apostles are proclaiming the truth about the Risen Christ. On the lips of Thomas is the faith of the entire believing community. John follows this up with the double aim of this gospel-writing: faith in Jesus as Messiah-King (Christ) and Son of God, and then sharing by means of this living faith in the divine life which he imparts. This twofold purpose runs throughout the entire gospel of John and lights up every chapter.

**Second Reading:** John makes it clear that sharing Christ's kingly reign on earth entails suffering, in bearing witness to Christ and his gospel-message. Darkness will always hate the light and try to snuff it out (Jn. 1:4). Patient endurance wins the crown.

A brilliant vision unveils Christ gloriously reigning in the midst of the Church, symbolized by the lampstands (v. 20), seven being the symbolic number of fullness. Christ is equally present to all. His garment reaching to the ankles marks him as high priest (Ex. 28:4; 29:5). "Girt at the loins" is a symbol of continence and sinlessness (see 1 Pet. 1:13). Gold stands for royalty. The vision is overpowering but Christ assures him that there is nothing to fear. All things are in his hands. He has overcome all hostile powers, even those of the underworld. Now he is the source of eternal life for all who accept him. With authority he communicates a revelation for the universal church.



**THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER**  
**(April 24, 1977)**

**First Reading: Acts 5: 27-32.40-41**

**Second Reading: Revelation 5: 11-14**

**Gospel Reading: John 21: 1-19 (or 21: 1-14)**

**First Reading:** The Pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit has made the Apostles fearless in bearing witness to Christ. They preach the plain truth, without trying to soften the message, and that in front of the highest officials in Israel. Peter's reply to the high priest shows how seriously he took the command of v. 20. His sermon in digest form puts forth the same essential points of the proclamation (kerygma) as in the preceding chapters: Christ's death, resurrection and exaltation, as the God-given Leader and Savior, to bring reconciliation to Israel, and the outpouring of the Spirit on all who believe. Gladly the apostolic band shares the sufferings of Jesus, being filled with the joy of the Spirit (Lk. 6:22).

**Gospel Reading:** This chapter represents an independent tradition and is an inspired appendix to the gospel already concluded in 20:30f. The Sea of Galilee was also called Sea of Tiberias because of the important center of learning at its South-west corner. Quite similar is the miraculous catch in Lk. 5, and it would seem that the author is rather giving a symbolical presentation of theological import. The great draught of fish is a sign manifesting Christ, and the disciple of love is the first to recognize the meaning of the sign, but Peter is the first in initiative, signifying his pre-eminence. The net is the Kingdom with the Apostles as fishermen of God's people drawing in the net, which remains intact despite the great quantity of fish enclosed. In the Early Church the fish represented baptized Christians. Though one hundred and fifty-three remains a problem, St. Jerome states that the men of his day classified that many groups of fish, (though this cannot be further ascertained) which would symbolize the universality of men entering the Church. Jesus awaits them at the shore and feeds them with the Eucharist, or preferably, on the eternal shores he welcomes them to let them partake of his divinity.

There follows the celebrated passage of Jesus conferring the primacy of jurisdiction on Peter (Vatican D). All through the fourth gospel Peter held a prominent place. Even though he denied the Master three times, he now proves his loyalty by a threefold profession of love. However, he is no longer the self-confident Peter as before the Passion, but humbly states that Jesus knows how

much he loves him. Thereupon Jesus confers on him as Chief Shepherd the care of the flock of Christ. This will entail following Christ closely (v. 19), suffering and even dying for the flock as Christ did. His death is foretold in veiled terms (v. 18). Tradition tells us he was crucified upside down.

Concerning the lot of the Beloved Disciple, Jesus plainly states that is not Peter's concern, and repeats his injunction to follow him. The vague statement of Jesus concerning John gave rise to a false interpretation, as if John would live to see the Parousia of the Lord. The author asserts that Jesus said nothing of the kind, and concludes the chapter, testifying to John as the man behind the fourth gospel. Though the last verse contains a hyperbole, it is nevertheless true that there is a never-ending flow of books coming into print on Jesus, Son of God, Messiah-King and Savior.

**Second Reading:** A vision depicting the glorification of the Lamb who was slain and lives now forever. He shares the throne with the Father (22:11), receives equal honor, glory and adoration with the Father (5:13). He is the Lamb of immolation (v. 12), but by his passion and death he became supreme Arbiter and Judge of all men. The celestial court (the four living creatures, the twenty-four elders, the innumerable angels) send forth a song of seven-fold praise in homage to him (seven being the number of fullness). The entire universe takes up the respons with a mighty "Amen" (so be it) and a fourfold word of applause (four being the number of creation).

## HOMILIES FOR MARCH

### "LISTEN TO HIM"

**March 6, 1977: Second Sunday in Lent**

**The Human Situation:** Just before the outbreak of World War II between America and Japan, when tension between the two countries was already great, a radio operator in the Pacific was listening for anything that might need immediate reporting. His vigilant listening was rewarded when he detected the waves of Japanese planes coming toward Pearl Harbor on that eventful morning of December 8th, 1941. At once he communicated his apprehension to headquarters. But headquarters were not listening. Something else diverted their attention. The alert went unheeded, and Pearl Harbor was bombed with intense havoc to men, planes, ships and installations. They did not listen.

**The Good News:** It is the Father himself who speaks these meaningful words on the mount of Transfiguration: "This is my Son, my Chosen One. Listen to him." It ought to electrify every individual man and woman when the commander of an army gives an order. He who speaks here is the Almighty Lord of the universe, and it is he himself who directs our attention to the one and only Savior he has sent to be man's salvation. In his hands alone lies the solution to man's problems, individual and personal problems, national problems, world problems, for he is our personal Savior, the Savior of each and every individual who comes into this world. If he is not listened to, to whom shall we turn for guidance, for assistance and salvation? He alone is the God-given Way, the Truth and the Life. He alone is the Light of the world.

But there are many things that keep men from listening to God's Chosen One. First of all today there are multiple distractions. One's business takes up most of the time of the day and night. There is the daily newspaper, the TV and radio programs, the movies one wants to see, meetings and seminars to attend, discussions and dialogues which demand attention. In the midst of it all, the mind can hardly find time to listen quietly to the Spirit of God within or to the word of God beamed so urgently from the Sacred Scriptures, read either in public or perused privately. People have ever so many engagements, time is so short and one must hurry from one place to another to get things done. The voice of the Father commanding us to listen to his beloved Son goes almost unheeded. Or if listened to it is only in a hurried, superficial way.



A second factor keeping us from listening to Christ and his Gospel message is simply lethargy. To listen seriously to God's voice or to endeavor to read the word of God attentively takes energy and concentrated effort. Often the mind is heavy and inactive, indisposed for anything spiritual. God's word calls for action, but the heart of man is often given over to comforts, pleasures, easy-going ways. Listening to the voice of Jesus would mean serious examination of conscience, a thorough change of heart and aims, a real metanoia, true interior compunction and amendment of one's sinful ways. For that, the necessary energy is often lacking. Over-indulgence in food and drink leaves the heart of man heavy and paralyzed for anything spiritual. Only the gentle rains of the grace of the Spirit can dispose a man to listen as he should, and for that grace he needs to pray.

Finally, man sometimes doesn't want to listen. There is open hostility. He prefers to go his own way, even though like Israel of old, that will lead to utter frustration and destruction. Again and again Israel heard the prophets urging them to change her ways, but she did not listen until the enemy came and swept all away in utter destruction. Again and again the lukewarm Christian hears the word of God read or preached to him, but he does not listen to its content, its meaning and its importance for his life, because he does not want to. It is too demanding, and inevitable chastisement will be the result. God sends temporal chastisement as a medicine and remedy, but if that is of no avail, he lets man go his own way to eternal frustration.

Yet, man was made for happiness that is not merely temporal but everlasting. He will not be happy if he rejects Christ. He will not be happy if he does not listen to Christ during his earthly life. He will not be happy if he does not take to heart the words and deeds of Jesus and learn from them what the message of Christ is for each of us. Lent is the time to examine our dispositions, our aims, our strivings. Lent is the opportunity to undergo a change and come out renewed in the transforming death and resurrection of Jesus. Lent is the time when the grace of the Spirit is bountiful, calling us to listen carefully to the voice of Jesus, and set right our relations to God, set right the way we treat our neighbor, set in order all the things of the heart, so that we be prepared when we are called to the account. For some this Lent may be a last warning, the last invitation to sincere repentance. He comes at times wholly unexpected, to take us to himself.

**Our Response:** Of his Blessed Mother Jesus said: Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it. This is the model for every Christian, the example that Mary gave us in her earthly

pilgrimage: to listen daily and carefully to the word of God, and then to ponder over it, imbed it, carry it out in our daily deeds, and let it take effect within us to transform us into Christ.

### AN EARNEST WARNING

March 13th, 1977: Third Sunday in Lent

**The Human Situation:** Jerusalem did not heed the warning which Christ so often gave it. It did not accept its own Savior and Messiah, but went its own way, thinking that as children of Abraham, God had to protect them. Theirs was the holy city of Prophets; they were God's Chosen People. The Temple was dedicated to Yahweh and he had to shield it from harm. All this however did not alter the fact that Jerusalem had sinned, and sinned deeply; hence chastisement was meted out to it. The Romans came and besieged the city, battered down the walls, set fire to the Temple, destroyed homes and people. There was not enough wood from the trees on the surrounding hills on which to crucify all the male Jews. Thousands were carried off to slavery to build the edifices in the cities of the Roman Empire.

**The Good News:** In today's readings there is a very urgent tone: a warning to repent while there is still time to repent. So often we read of or even have a taste of natural catastrophes such as earthquakes, floods, typhoons; or again, sicknesses, accidents, wars. These are allowed by a long-suffering God to make us realize the real meaning of life, how short it is when compared to eternity, and that life is meant to be a preparation for the reward of eternity. So many people have no time to think of eternity because they are enmeshed in business projects, activities of all kinds or pleasures. But God made us for himself and to enjoy with him an eternal happiness in his heavenly home. So he sends these things as reminders. Lent is the time to take to heart the warnings of the Lord. To delay reconciliation with God if our conscience tells us that we are at odds with him is a very risky and dangerous matter. God will not be mocked. He is all patient but he is also all just.

Many people continue to harbor the age old conviction: all such calamities are sent by God as punishments for our sins. Long ago the patriarch Job entered into a long discussion with his three friends to refute this. Jesus also makes it clear in today's gospel that the disasters which befell his countrymen did not single them out because they were more sinful than the others. Rather, God allowed these temporal evils to take place in order that this divine judgment might be a providential warning to the men of the day.

Yet it went unheeded, Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans. Sufferings have a different dimension in the mind of God as can best be seen by the fact that God did not spare his own Son but delivered him up for us. In no other way could the Father in heaven prove to his children that he really loved them than by giving his Son up to the extreme sufferings of the Cross. To leave unheeded such a manifestation of divine love will eventually end in severe chastisement.

Truly, there is also such a thing as national guilt and national chastisement. When the Lord finally punished his People by destroying their Temple and city, there were undoubtedly many people who were serving God with their heart among them. Jesus had warned them to flee but not all were perhaps able to do so. Now they share the chastisement of their nation, being a part of it. Individually however they could benefit by these disasters and sufferings by bearing up patiently and submitting to God's will in the matter. Their example in face of death imposed by the Romans, or the heavy labors in their exile, may have been the occasion for many to turn to God in sincere compunction. Jesus is our Savior, he comes to save man from eternal ruin. Only when time is no more, is there no more opportunity for repentance. His warnings are warnings of love.

**Our Response:** In earthquakes and floods, many innocent people perish. Yet that is not the end of life. God takes them all to himself to reward each one according to his works. Only let each man be prepared to meet his Judge and God. Before it is too late, let the sinner return to his God. He is a God of mercy and compassion.

## RETURN TO THE FATHER

**March 20th, 1977: Fourth Sunday in Lent**

See biblical notes for this Sunday which offer ample material.

## THE COMPASSIONATE SAVIOR

**March 27, 1977: Fifth Sunday in Lent**

**The Human Situation:** As a boy he was always getting into trouble. Since he was highly talented, classes bored him, and he was frequently being punished for his misbehavior. The teachers



scolded him, reported him to his mother again and again, who also punished him each time. But there was one teacher who understood. He took the boy aside and spoke kindly to him, recognizing his potential. He continued to show an understanding heart for the boy's weaknesses, and in time the boy responded generously. Later in life, the grown boy became superintendent of a large school. His dealings with boys are compassionate and understanding, for he himself admits that were it not for that kind and understanding teacher, he would never have made it.

**The Good News:** If there is any outstanding trait of Jesus the Savior it is his loving-kindness and compassion. As High Priest he is not characterized by the Scriptures as exercising some liturgical office, but as mercifully and faithfully pleading before God on behalf of his brothers (Hebr. 2:17). He was sent to bring glad tidings to the poor (Lk. 4:18), and the sinners find in him an understanding friend (Lk. 7: 34) for he is not ashamed to associate with them (Lk. 5: 30). He is moved with pity for the widow whose only son was being carried out for burial, raising him to life and giving him back to his mother (Lk. 7:13-15). He took compassion on a distraught father whose daughter was on the point of death (Lk. 8:41). When Peter cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest that came out to help arrest him, Jesus touched it and healed it (Lk. 22: 25). At all times and for all classes of people Jesus is the compassionate Savior.

In all this, Jesus, the Son of God, was revealing the face of his heavenly Father. For, the Inner Being of God is mercy and love, and God's inmost impulse is to show loving-kindness to those whom he made in his own image. Though the self-righteous Pharisees disdained the sinner, as they did the woman caught in adultery in today's gospel, Jesus proclaimed the good news of infinite mercy for those, who, although they had sinned deeply, were repentant and full of compunction. His heart went out to this poor woman whom the heartless Pharisees had thrust in the midst exposing her to the gaze of all. She stood there helplessly, her accusers cruelly demanding the rigor of the Law. But Jesus did not condemn her. He saw her humiliation and compunction and simply said to her: "Go and avoid this sin in the future". God does not desire the death of the sinner, he does not even despise him for his sinfulness. He only longs all the more to receive back the repentant heart as the father of the prodigal who ran out to

embrace his repentant son (Lk. 15: 20). With such a shining example as Jesus gives, sinful man ought to convince himself that it is not difficult to return to God. For he is 'the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation' (2 Cor. 1:3).

We in turn are exhorted by Jesus to be compassionate as our heavenly Father is compassionate (Lk. 6:36). This is the trait that Jesus expects in every one of his followers. In fact, in the parable of the merciless official whose immense debt was forgiven by the king but who in turn would not remit a very small debt of one of his fellow-servants, Jesus says emphatically: "My heavenly Father will treat you in exactly the same way unless each of you forgives his brother from his heart" (Mt. 18:35). We can more easily forgive others if we remember that they are weak human mortals like ourselves, for then we are more willing to be understanding and compassionate. If we refuse to be compassionate and to forgive, our heavenly Father will mete out severe chastisements to us as was done to the merciless official (Mt. 18:34).

**Our Response:** People sometimes find it hard to forgive a serious injury done to them. Then the words of Blessed Conrad von Parzham ought to come to mind: "One glance at the crucifix is enough for me to tell me what to do". One glance at the crucifix tells me that God's own Son forgave me everything I did against Him and even coupled me with immense favors. How ungrateful I would be to be reluctant to be compassionate toward my fellowmen.

## II. HOMILIES FOR APRIL

**Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion: April 3, 1977**

Read the Passion of the Lord according to Luke.

### THE HOUR OF GLORY

**Holy Thursday: April 7, 1977**

**The Human Situation:** Mother Teresa of India accepted a gift for her poor at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C. In accepting it she said that "the death and resurrection of Jesus occurred so that you and I could have the

joy of feeding him, clothing him, giving him a home, and loving him. Jesus is around the world in every place, looking up to you and me and asking: Will you love me?"

**The Good News:** With the Last Supper, Jesus entered upon the hour of his glory. It is the glory of the cross, for this is how St. John presents the cross in his gospel (13:31). All during his life, Jesus had waited and longed for this hour, and all other actions were intentionally directed toward this hour. Now the hour had come in which he consummates the Paschal Mystery. He begins it with a stupendous act of humiliation by laying aside his garments (like putting aside his royalty) and donning the image of a slave in order to wash the feet of his disciples, something unheard of before, that a Master should wash the feet of his own disciples. Peter at first resisted, but Jesus knew what he wanted. He was manifesting in the extreme his glory and the glory of his Father who had given his only Son over to such a supreme act of humiliation and self-abasement. In olden times God had manifested his glory by a shining cloud or bright flame of fire, but now he chooses to display his glory in the utter humiliation and sufferings of his Son.

Peter at first resisted Christ's action because he did not realize God's plan of love. But Jesus made it clear to him that only by entering into his way of humiliation and suffering would anyone have part with him. His true followers must follow the way Jesus had opened up. "If I washed your feet, I who am Teacher and Lord, then you must wash each other's feet. What I just did was to give you an example: as I have done, so you must do" (Jn. 13:14f). Thus Paul gloried in his humiliations and sufferings (Gal. 6:14; 2 Cor. 12:9). It is the Christian's glory to follow Christ in accepting every humiliation in the service of his fellowmen, for the most menial tasks and the humiliations accompanying them are nothing compared to what the Lord of glory has submitted to for our sakes.

After that Jesus manifested his glory still more. He instituted the Eucharist, which is the great sacrament of his love, wherein he willed to hide himself, not only the splendor of his divinity but also the attractiveness of his sacred humanity, under the common appearances of bread and wine. Here only genuine faith will discover him and falling down, adore the glory of God revealed in his Son. In the Eucharist, Jesus make himself available for all classes of men, for the poorest of the poor, for the educated and those less educated, for those in power and those minority groups who are oppressed and yet continue to suffer in patience. The gift of himself he has prepared for all men, and he glories in stooping down to each one individually to give himself totally to



that human heart. How could the love of God manifest itself more? This is indeed the glory of God's Son. How easily he could have come in high state as a mighty king, but he prefers to be our Lamb of Sacrifice.

This theme of the immolated Lamb pervades the liturgy of Holy Thursday. For the Eucharist is both sacrifice and food, the sacrifice of the Lamb which the People of God immolate and consume on their journey toward the Promised Land. To insure his sacrificial presence among them for all times, Jesus on this sacred evening instituted the priesthood of the new Covenant. "Do this as a remembrance of me" he told them at the Last Supper. He thus confers on his Church the priesthood which was to benefit all men as long as the Church exists and until the Bridegroom comes to take her to his home.

**Our Response:** All three motifs are objects of our profound gratitude today: the stupendous example of Christ's self-abasement in service of his own disciples, the gift of his sacrament of the Love which is the Eucharist, and the priesthood to make present for all times his sacrifice and sacrificial meal for the People of God. A whole-hearted response on the part of God's People is expected from that Sacred Heart that has so loved men.

### **POINTERS FOR THE SEVEN LAST WORDS** **(Good Friday: April 8, 1977)**

**First Word:** "Father forgive them; they do not know what they are doing" Lk. 23:34).

- a. Addressed to the heavenly Father by the dying Son in behalf of sinful man. Undaunted by the charges of blasphemy, Christ openly calls upon God as his Father.
- b. In content it is a plea that the Father have mercy and forgive the greatest crime ever perpetrated. He thus unveils the very nature of God's Being: Love. By his own example he teaches love of enemies in the highest degree (cf. Mt. 5:44). In his death agony, there is only concern over wayward, blinded man.
- c. The object of his prayer are all those who brought about his death, which are first the representatives of Israel; but then it embraces all sinners, for it is the sins of all men that have crucified the Lord. His generous heart finds as an excuse for their wrongdoings, the blindness brought on by sin: they do not know what they are doing.

**Second Word:** "Jesus replied: I assure you: this day you will be with me in paradise" (Lk. 23:43).

a. Addressed by the Good Shepherd to the wayward sheep. He speaks as the Lord of Glory who holds the destiny of all men in his hands. He really reigns from the cross.

b. In content it is a promise of prompt reward for the prayer of faith of the penitent thief. Till now he had been in the company of evil men; one word with Jesus has changed all: from this day forward he will be in the company of Christ, the King, and his whole court. "Paradise" means the abode of the just after death (like "Abraham's bosom" in Lk. 16:23). For the repentant thief the continual presence of Jesus is a true Paradise.

c. The object of this promise is a dying sinner. No sinner can turn to the Good Shepherd even in his last moments without obtaining mercy. Both malefactors turn to Christ: one in derision and despair; the other in contrition and faith, asking for life in the kingdom. This plea was granted at once.

**Third Word:** "Jesus said to his mother: Woman, there is your son. In turn he said to the disciple: There is your mother." (Jn. 19:26f).

a. Addressed by the dying Savior to the mother who bore him and to St. John, the beloved disciple, but in neither case are the persons mentioned by name. He addressed his mother first, so it cannot be merely giving a commitment to John. And he does not address John with the title "son". In John's gospel, living individuals often take on an added corporate meaning, embodying in themselves the collective group for which they stand. Mary in this scene is the New Eve who cooperates with the New Adam in the death-holocaust at the Tree of Life from which new Life was imported to men. John stands for the transformed disciple, transformed into Christ by sharing the new life, and he represents all those who live this new life of Christ. The Mother of Jesus stands for the Church, begetting in Christ the new man.

b. On Golgotha, to the favored and faithful disciple bearing witness to the climax of redemption, the dying Savior proclaims the spiritual motherhood of her whom he again addresses as "Woman" (as he did at Cana Jn. 2:4). Mary as his life-companion (alma socia) is inseparable with her divine Son in the salvific work of regenerating all mankind into the new life that is Christ. Since the main theme of John's Gospel is life (20:31) the Golgotha scene must be seen in that setting, for it is the "Woman" who gives life (Gen. 3:20).

c. The object of Jesus' words is to commend to her spiritual care all those who are one with him in the newness of the Christ-life. The faithful disciple (represented by John) is to look to Mary (representing the Church) as his spiritual mother, and Mary through the Church is to exercise her function of spiritual motherhood over all the faithful. There is but one Christ, and he is the Son of Mary.

**Fourth Word:** "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me"? (Mt. 27:46 quoting Ps. 22:2).

a. Addressed by the suffering and dying Messiah-King to Yahweh, God of Israel and his God.

b. The meaning of the words must be taken from the psalm which Jesus is quoting. The original word which is translated "to forsake" means "to leave utterly without help one who needs help." Thus, God is not withdrawing his person from Christ, but his help. It is the moment of supreme suffering, when the Father allows the full fury of the enemy to fall upon the Victim-Lamb (diabolical influence, physiological and psychological factors, the fury of the mob, the abandonment of friends etc.), suspending the special helps given to enable him to bear up till now. But in this climax of suffering which Psalm 22 expresses throughout, there is no question of God being absent, only of God permitting the fury of the enemy to unleash itself against the dying Savior.

c. Response: A taunt greets this cry of deepest anguish of the Savior is his death struggle. In derision, they pretend to have heard "Elijah" for "Eli", and make fun of it. The Jews expected Elijah to return before the coming of the Messiah.

**Fifth Word:** "I thirst" or "I am thirsty". (Jn. 19:28).

a. Addressed to all and anyone who would have pity on him in his dying condition.

b. In content, the Savior first of all refers to physical thirst, one of the most horrible sufferings of the dying, as doctors testify. Christ fulfills the Scripture of Ps.22:15 and 69:22. St. Augustine remarks: Your thirsting won my salvation (*Sitis tua, salus mea*). But far greater was his spiritual thirst. Now that all things were accomplished, mankind redeemed, he thirsts for the human heart (St. Thomas Aquinas). This spiritual thirst for souls incessantly kindled the fire of zeal of St. Therese of the Child Jesus (Autobiography, ch. 5).

c. Response: One of the soldiers, repeating the words of the bystanders, offered Jesus a drink from the jug of cheap wine which they kept handy to quench their thirst. The act may have



betrayed compassion, so Jesus accepted it. The last thing that man offered his dying Savior was tart, cheap wine, whereas the night before he had instituted the sacrament of the wine of his blood.

**Sixth Word:** "It is consummated" or "Now it is finished" (Jn. 19:30).

a. This is the crowning word of the Savior. It marks the end of that mortal life which he gave as a ransom for many (Mt. 20:28).

b. Now the work of redemption is accomplished. Christ has carried out the Paschal Mystery as planned by the Father: man is reconciled with his God; the Spirit of God has been won for the sons of God; Satan is deposed and his dominion over the world is broken. Heaven is soon to be open with the dawn of the New Day.

c. Fulfilled at last are all the prophecies and prefigurations concerning his person and his work on earth. He has conquered.

**Seventh Word:** "Father into your hands I commend my spirit" (Lk. 23:46)

a. Addressed to his heavenly Father, professing his divine sonship to his dying breath.

b. The content (taken from Ps. 31:6) bespeaks perfect resignation to the Father's will. The original Greek word expresses more than to "commend". It means to entrust for safe-keeping. It is a prayer of perfect confidence and already we glimpse the first rays of the resurrection.

c. Lesson: To each one Jesus gives an ideal example of dying with filial dispositions of resignation and confidence in our heavenly Father who will "raise us up with Christ" (1 Cor. 6:14). It is the night prayer of the Church and of all who live the life of the Church. Well did the martyr Stephan learn the lesson of the Heart of Christ (Acts. 7:59).

## THE EASTER MESSAGE

**April 10, 1977: Easter of the Lord's Resurrection.**

Joy and exultation fill our hearts on this glorious occasion, for Christ our Savior has overcome all his enemies, even death itself, and has risen gloriously and triumphantly, never to die anymore. He is alive, living in our midst, as Shepherd of his flock, full of tender care for each. He leads us daily to good pastures of the word of God in the sacred writings, and nourishes us with his own Body and Blood in the Eucharist. He is drawing all men to himself by the magnetism of his glorified existence (Jn. 12:31) and he

is constantly making intercession for us before the throne of his Father (Hebr. 7:25). On our lips is a glorious "alleluja": Praise the Lord!

But we too have risen spiritually with him. The spiritual resurrection involves a relinquishing of our former lives often filled with infractions of God's law, especially the law of love. Easter means for every Christian a renewed life in the Spirit of Jesus, which is one of love and mercy toward all. Having put off the old self with its sinful ways, we live for God, and let divine love motivate all our words and actions. This is however not just the resolution of the moment. It will mean a continual "onward and upward" to meet the demands of a life that is risen with Christ and lives for God. There will be painstaking efforts to avoid the former pitfalls, the occasions that invariably led one into sin, the places that we know Christ would not want us to frequent, the companionship that leads away from God. But we are not alone for he is with us. He has placed at our disposal many and various means to continue on the way that this Easter feast has opened up to us: Holy Mass, the sacraments, the scriptures, prayer, good companionship.

A "drifter" decided to leave his drug addiction and give his life totally to Christ. He felt an inner urge to enter a monastery and live the life of a monk. After some months he wrote to a friend: "May prayer burn within you. May Jesus' name be like honey in your mouth, may it flow like a stream. The more we pray and love Jesus, the more we penetrate into the Kingdom. We see nothing but him: more beautiful, greater and greater! And we become like little children". Such is the spiritual resurrection that this drug-addict underwent when he gave himself totally up to the following of Christ.

Easter is also an anticipation, an anticipation of our total resurrection in glory on the last day when the Lord will become visible to all in the splendor of his glory, and the final triumph will be celebrated by all who have lived life while on earth. And on their lips will be an eternal "alleluja": Praise the Lord!

### **THERE IS NOTHING TO FEAR (Second Reading)**

**April 17, 1977: Second Sunday of Easter.**

**Note:** For an outline of a homily on the Gospel, see biblical notes for today.

**The Human Situation:** Mary was born without arms in a family of eight. Her dear mother wept, yet never did she say: I wish my baby had never been born. Instead, she prayed that God

would give her the strength to raise her child as a useful human being. When not even one year old, the babe was using a foot to grasp a spoon and feed herself. At five, she could flip the pages of a book with her feet, and scribble with a pencil clenched between her toes. Undaunted, she graduated from both high school and college, majoring in English and history. Later, she married happily and has a robust boy of her own. The seemingly unsurmountable was overcome by sheer determination with her eye on the goal.

**The Good News:** Christ the Son of Man stood in all his glory before John: no longer now was he in the humble garb of the Galilean, no longer in the awful ignominy of the Crucified, but in the brilliant splendor of the Risen Lord, effulgent with all the rays of the resurrection. His long garment marked him as high priest of all mankind, but above all of the Church, symbolized by the seven lampstands. Girded at the breast marked him as the man of perfect control and the shining gold dazzled the disciple. His eyes blazed like fire, and the hair of his head was snow-white (Rev. 1:14). Overcome by the splendor of it all, John swooned away and fell at his feet. But Jesus touched him gently with his right hand, that hand that had wrought so many wonders, and said to him with a voice of authority: There is nothing to fear.

There is nothing to fear. I am the Alpha, the Source of all things, and the Omega, the final goal of the universe, to which all things are tending. I was once dead, but now I live forever. Trust me. Sickness, accidents, and even death itself cannot really harm you if you trust me. I have conquered all sickness and death by my resurrection from the dead. This is your goal also. Accept your lot, accept your sickness and whatever befalls you as coming from me. Accept your death at my hands, and you too shall share in my resurrection. You too shall overcome all sickness and death itself and you shall live forever. Trust me.

There is nothing to fear. All the powers of evil cannot hurt you if you trust me, for I hold in my hands the keys of the netherworld. I myself have overcome Satan singlehanded and all the powers of hell. Wickedness may grow apace day by day, evil may seem to be victorious everywhere. But evil will not win out. I am the Lord of the universe, I am the Judge of all nations. Victory is mine, and it is for all those who are one with me in faith, hope and love. By the power of my resurrection I shall smite all evil-doers and they shall come to naught. The Day of my triumph is approaching. Trust me.

There is nothing to fear. Persecutions and distress will be the lot of my faithful ones, for if they persecuted the Master, they will persecute the disciple. But the martyrs triumphed in



their very persecutions for it was I in whom they trusted, and it was I who triumphed in them. Now they are enjoying immense bliss and glory in the dwelling place of my Father. There I will lead all who suffer with me, for they are faithful to my word and have not denied me in the face of sufferings and death. This life is short and full of sorrows. But there is nothing to fear if you are with me. For in my hands are the destinies of all the nations, and the destinies of every single man that walks on the face of the earth. Have confidence, I have overcome the world. I have conquered. There is nothing to fear.

**Our Response:** The words of the Risen Christ who lives in our midst and who dwells in our hearts ought to instill courage and determination in all the ups and downs of life, in our sorrows and our failures, our mistakes and our sins, for Christ has overcome once and for all. He has overcome also for each one of us. Cast out fear, trust the Savior, trust the great Lord of all.

### **WORTHY IS THE LAMB (Second Reading)**

(Note: Pointers for a homily on the gospel will be found in the biblical notes for today).

**The Human Situation:** For seventy hours, a Norwegian lad braved a terrifically stormy sea, alone in a raft after their freighter had sunk, without food or drink or sleep, in an incredible feat of human endurance. Seventy-five miles an hour (120 km.) winds, and fifty-foot (15 m.) killer-waves tossed him around like a toy. Freezing temperature, snow, sleet and hail were his constant enemies. He was dehydrated, cut and bruised, twice thrown fully into the sea; but he was able to climb back into his raft. Yet, through dogged determination he lived to tell the story. He had conquered.

**The Good News:** Christ is the Lamb of sacrifice. Long ago Isaiah the prophet had said of him: "Like a lamb led to slaughter, and as a sheep before his shearers he was silent and opened not his mouth" (Is. 53:7). He is the Lamb of expiation as pointed out by John the Baptist to his disciples: "Look! There is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn. 1:29). The Evangelist himself depicted him as the Paschal Lamb hanging on the cross with no bones broken, as was prescribed for the paschal lamb in the Old Covenant liturgy (Jn. 19:33-36). His life was one long life of sacrifice for others, and it entailed hard work, constant determination in face of opposition, courage in face of opposition, courage in face of rejection, heroic love in face of crucifixion. Yet the

Lamb of God remained meek and gentle throughout, undaunted by what evil powers and man himself did to him, and he came forth victorious and triumphant.

That is why the book of Revelation immortalizes the victorious Lamb. Twenty-eight times it refers to Christ as the Lamb in the various phases of his Paschal Mystery. He has the wounds of immolation, for he was slain (5:6,9). With his blood (that is, by his death on the cross) he purchased for God men of every race and tongue, of every people and nation (5:9). In his blood the huge crowd standing before God's throne has washed their robes and made them white (7:14). By the blood of the Lamb the community of believers has defeated the red dragon, and for his sake they spurned even death (12:11).

Therefore the heavenly liturgy breaks out in today's reading, giving sevenfold homage and praise to the Lamb who "is worthy to receive power and riches, wisdom and strength, honor and glory and praise!" (5:12). And the entire universe adds a mighty "Amen", so be it, in a fourfold jubilant response: "To the one seated on the throne, and to the Lamb, be praise and honor, glory and might, forever and ever. Amen!" (5:13f). Truly worthy is the Lamb who is God's own Son to receive the homage of redeemed humanity for he is their Redeemer and Savior. Worthy is the Lamb to receive homage from the entire universe for he has let no obstacle in the whole of creation deter him from his determined goal. He has conquered every enemy and has come out victorious. He is truly worthy to receive world dominion which is here symbolized by receiving the sevenfold sealed scroll from the almighty in the midst of the heavenly court. No one else has been given this power, but to him it belongs both by right and then by conquest. For the Lamb who was slain has conquered!

He is worthy to receive divine adoration, for as God-Man he shares the throne of the Father (22:1). He has overcome all the powers of evil for he is Lord of Lords and King of kings (17: 14; 19:16). All who remain faithful to the Lamb will share his victory, for on their heads will be inscribed the name of the Lamb and the name of his Father (14:1). They follow him wherever he goes (14:4), singing the song of Moses and of the Lamb (15:3). The Lamb enters upon his wedding feast with his bride, the Church (19:7,9) when the bride is ready, and it is he who accomplishes the final

separation of good and evil in view of the content of the Book of Life, for it belongs to him to do so (13:8; 21:27). In the New Jerusalem, he takes the place of both the temple and the lampstand (21:22f) for he is the Living Temple of God for the People of God, and he is the Light for every man. As divine King and Shepherd he will feed his flock forever with the riches of his divinity (7:17). Forever will they enjoy his presence, never again to suffer or die (22:1-3).

**Our response:** To share in the glorious triumph of the Lamb it will be necessary to share his sufferings and labor during our earthly pilgrimage. But he is always with us as the Lamb or Sacrifice in the Eucharist, pleading for us before the Father to obtain whatever we need; he himself is our strength in the Eucharistic meal by which we are enabled on our part to conquer all the powers of evil and meet death as he did, calmly and resignedly, knowing that death is not the end of things but the real beginning, for through death we come to the New Jerusalem, to be without pain and sorrow anymore, for we too have conquered by the blood of the Lamb