

Gratitude Foundation



***“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”***

(Lk. 17:15-17)

The Second Sunday of Easter—Year C

Fr. Glenn Joseph Theoret
Executive Director

www.gratitudefoundation.us
frglenn@gratitudefoundation.us

3713 County 416 20th Road
Gladstone, MI 49837

“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”

(1 Thess: 5:18)

Second Sunday of Easter - C

Sunday of Divine Mercy

Reading I

Acts 5:12-16

Many signs and wonders were done among the people
at the hands of the apostles.
They were all together in Solomon's portico.
None of the others dared to join them, but the people esteemed them.
Yet more than ever, believers in the Lord,
great numbers of men and women, were added to them.
Thus they even carried the sick out into the streets
and laid them on cots and mats
so that when Peter came by,
at least his shadow might fall on one or another of them.
A large number of people from the towns
in the vicinity of Jerusalem also gathered,
bringing the sick and those disturbed by unclean spirits,
and they were all cured.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24

R (1) Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, his love is everlasting.

Let the house of Israel say,
"His mercy endures forever."

Let the house of Aaron say,
"His mercy endures forever."

Let those who fear the LORD say,
"His mercy endures forever."

R Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, his love is everlasting.

I was hard pressed and was falling,
but the LORD helped me.
My strength and my courage is the LORD,
and he has been my savior.
The joyful shout of victory
in the tents of the just:

R Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, his love is everlasting.

The stone which the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone.
By the LORD has this been done;
it is wonderful in our eyes.
This is the day the LORD has made;
let us be glad and rejoice in it.
R Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, his love is everlasting.

Reading II

Revelation 1:9-11a, 12-13, 17-19

I, John, your brother, who share with you
the distress, the kingdom, and the endurance we have in Jesus,
found myself on the island called Patmos
because I proclaimed God's word and gave testimony to Jesus.
I was caught up in spirit on the Lord's day
and heard behind me a voice as loud as a trumpet, which said,
"Write on a scroll what you see."
Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me,
and when I turned, I saw seven gold lampstands
and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man,
wearing an ankle-length robe, with a gold sash around his chest.

When I caught sight of him, I fell down at his feet as though dead.
He touched me with his right hand and said, "Do not be afraid.
I am the first and the last, the one who lives.
Once I was dead, but now I am alive forever and ever.
I hold the keys to death and the netherworld.
Write down, therefore, what you have seen,
and what is happening, and what will happen afterwards."

Alleluia

John 20:29

R. Alleluia, alleluia.
You believe in me, Thomas, because you have seen me, says the Lord;
blessed are those who have not seen me, but still believe!
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

John 20:19-31

On the evening of that first day of the week,
when the doors were locked, where the disciples were,
for fear of the Jews,
Jesus came and stood in their midst
and said to them, "Peace be with you."
When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side.
The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.
Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you.
As the Father has sent me, so I send you."
And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them,
"Receive the Holy Spirit.
Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them,
and whose sins you retain are retained."

Thomas, called Didymus, one of the Twelve,
was not with them when Jesus came.
So the other disciples said to him, "We have seen the Lord."
But he said to them,
"Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands
and put my finger into the nailmarks
and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

Now a week later his disciples were again inside
and Thomas was with them.
Jesus came, although the doors were locked,
and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you."
Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands,
and bring your hand and put it into my side,
and do not be unbelieving, but believe."
Thomas answered and said to him, "My Lord and my God!"
Jesus said to him, "Have you come to believe because you have seen me?
Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples
that are not written in this book.
But these are written that you may come to believe
that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,
and that through this belief you may have life in his name.

Exegesis

Acts 5:12-16

St. Luke forms a rather seamless transition between his Gospel and *The Acts of the Apostles*. The great commissioning of the disciples on that first Easter Sunday evening is now in full view. The Risen Lord continues to draw people to Himself in and through His disciples. It is no surprise that Luke, the physician, would highlight the healing power of Jesus now in His Church, His new body on earth.

The disciples were gathered in *Solomon's Portico*. Solomon's Portico was a covered walkway in the temple of Jerusalem.

Our pericope is taken from those very early days of the Church. God poured out His Spirit on His Church days earlier on the great day of Pentecost. The power of the Holy Spirit is vibrant, evident in the words and actions of the disciples, visible in the *signs and wonders*. The Risen Lord continues to heal and to drive out evil forces, now through His Church.

St. Luke describes these miracles as *signs and wonders*. This is an expression that he uses often in *Acts*, e.g., Acts 2:43, 4:30, 6:8, 14:3, and 15:2. The expression is also prevalent in the *Book of Exodus*. The journey through the desert to the Promised Land is a paradigm for the Church's journey through the world to Heaven, i.e., the Promised Land. (See Exodus 7:3 and 11:10). That journey began and was accompanied by many *signs and wonders*. (See also Deut 6:22; 26:8).

Just as the Apostles were shocked by the power that was flowing through them when Jesus sent them on their first missionary journey, they are likewise overwhelmed by the power of the Risen Lord working in and through them now. People were healed in the Gospels by merely touching the cloak of Jesus and now people are healed by simply passing in the shadow of St. Peter. The *signs and wonders*, just as in the Gospels, drew people to Jesus, now in and through His Church.

Exegesis (Continued)

Psalm 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24

Psalm 118 is an individual psalm of thanksgiving. It is titled *Hymn of Thanksgiving*. It is filled with gratitude to God from beginning to end. The tone is set by identical phrases which serve as “bookends.” The first and the final verse, i.e. verse 1 and verse 29, are identical, “Give thanks to the Lord, who is good, whose love endures forever.” Everything that is, that was, and ever will be, has its origin in God’s steadfast, unchanging love. God’s love therefore must be the foundation of all our lives and all our gratitude.

The Psalm celebrates the mercy of God. *His mercy endures forever*. The Hebrew word for *mercy* is the familiar word *hesed*. *Hesed* can be translated as *steadfast love, mercy, faithfulness, kindness* or *goodness*. It is a word that is most often attributed to God as human love often falls short of these attributes.

The Psalm is also a hymn of thanksgiving for the gift of salvation. *I was hard pressed and falling... but the Lord saved me*. The Hebrew word for *saved* is *Jesuah*, which is rendered in Aramaic as Joshua and finally into English as *Jesus*.

The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. Throughout Sacred Scripture the rock is symbolic of the immutability of God, the steadfastness of God’s love. The stone here is perhaps referencing the capstone or the cornerstone of the temple, and perhaps at a deeper level, the foundation of the promise of salvation through the line of David. The Prophet Isaiah writes: “Therefore, thus says the Lord God: See, I am laying a stone in Zion, a stone that has been tested, a precious cornerstone as a sure foundation.” (Is 28: 16). In the NT it represents the rejection of Jesus, ultimately His dying and rising. In rejection Jesus refers to Himself, when He asks His disciples: “What then does this scripture passage mean: ‘The stone which the builders rejected had become the cornerstone?’” (Lk 20: 17). (See also Mt 21: 42; Acts 4: 11; Rom 9: 33; 1 Pt 2: 70).

Exegesis (Continued)

Revelation 1:9-11a, 12-13, 17-19

Our passage today is selected from the first chapter of *The Book of Revelation*. It is sometimes titled *The First Vision* and sometimes titled *Vision of One Like a Son of Man*. After the greeting and introductory paragraphs, John reveals his vision. Like the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, John begins his mission by experiencing and sharing a profound theophany. John is instructed to write what has been revealed to him and to send his message to the seven Churches of Asia, representing the universal Church. John is therefore instructed to share his message with the whole world.

John found himself in the Roman penal colony on the Island of Patmos because of his preaching of the Gospel and his support of the Churches. Either he was arrested and sent to the island, or he chose to go there of his own accord to preach the Gospel, no one knows for sure. Patmos was a barren island in the Sporades chain off the coast of Asia Minor. It is a small island approximately ten miles long and five miles wide.

Several of the Early Church Fathers identified the author as the Apostle John. Modern scholarship questions this assertion because of the different style of the Greek than the Letters of John and his Gospel. Others suggest that a secretary doing the actual writing may account for this. The argument is beyond the scope of this exegesis.

Certainly, the polemic that the author describes is similar to the dualism that flows through the *Gospel of John*. The tension between the world and the spirit, between darkness and light, between ignorance and faith, and between evil and goodness flows through both *The Gospel of John* and *Revelation*. Both works also speak of the persecution and tribulation that face those who are followers of Jesus. Although there is no direct evidence of any significant persecution at the time that *Revelation* was penned, the great persecutions and tribulations were not far off for those who chose to follow the Way. John certainly prophesied about the coming trials that the Church would face.

John lists the seven Churches that he is called to address. There was a circular road that connected all seven Churches and John lists them in order of delivery. As seven is the complete and perfect number it further represents the Universal Church. The message and the mission are to the entire world.

John's reaction to the vision mirrors that of Daniel: "So I was left alone seeing this great vision. No strength remained in me; I turned the color of death and was powerless. When I heard the sound of his voice, I fell forward in a faint." (Dan 10: 8-9).

Then John hears the reassuring words of Jesus, echoed many times in the Gospels, "Be not afraid."

John saw *one like a Son of Man*. This vision is also echoed from the *Book of Daniel*: "As the vision during the night continued, I saw one like a son of man coming on the clouds of heaven." (Dan 7: 13).

Seven golden lamps. The seven golden lamps represent the seven Churches of Asia, and ultimately, as noted above, the Universal Church. The seven stars represent the angels in Heaven that are in overseers of the Churches. The important revelation is that Jesus, the Risen Lord, is walking among His Church. The vision reminds us of the final words of the Risen Lord in Matthew's Gospel: "Behold, I am with you always until the end of the age." (Mt 28:20).

Exegesis (Continued)

John 20:19-31

There are two words in today's Gospel that don't translate well into English. The first is the word *peace* and the second is the word *send* or *sent*. Jesus talked about a peace that only He could give and not as the world gives. The underlying word in Greek that John uses is *ei-rene*, and the Hebrew/Aramaic equivalent is *shalom*. The Jewish understanding of this peace is precisely that it comes from God, God is the source of this peace. As the serenity prayer states, it does not promise freedom from the storms of life, but peace amid the storms. It is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. For me it is an anchor point in this fast pace and turbulent world.

The idea of being sent by someone in the ancient world had a much deeper connotation than we often think of. The Greek word for *send* is *pempo*. It can also mean *to take the place of* or *go in exchange of*. To send someone was to give them whatever authority that the sender had to give. It might be likened to a modern-day power-of-attorney. If a king sent one of his subjects to perform some tasks or enter some contract, he would carry with him the full authority of the king. So, when Jesus sent out His apostles, He gave them His power and authority, the power and authority given Him by His Father. Recall their amazement when the apostles returned from their first missionary assignment. As priests and deacons, we can attest to those gifts in ministry.

Jesus appeared in the room although the doors were locked. Although there is no indication of where this house or room was, I always envisioned it being the Upper Room where they had celebrated the Last Supper with Jesus three days earlier. Regardless of the physical location, the important point is that the Risen Lord appeared and was no longer constrained by time and space, symbolized by the locked doors.

Whis this Gospel at a school Mass one day, I asked the children why the Risen Lord in His glorified body still had the nail marks in His hands and the wound in His side. One of the children answered, "Because He wants us to remember how much He loves us." That was a better answer than I was looking for. My thoughts are that there is a recognizable continuity between this life and the life to come. I feel that it is not some entirely different life but a continuation of the life that we now experience. It is the same life that begins at the moment of conception and is eternal.

He breathed on them. This gesture certainly evokes the story of creation: "The Lord God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being (*nepes/soul*). It also echoes the promise of God through the Prophet Ezekiel during the vision of the dry bones: "Thus says the Lord God: From the four winds come, O Spirit, and breathe into those slain that they may come to life." (Ezek 37: 9). Jesus bestows on the disciples, the Church, the gift of His Spirit, a Spirit of New Life. His promise during the Last Supper is being fulfilled: "When the Advocate comes whom I will send you from the Father, the Spirit of Truth that proceeds from the Father, He will testify to me." (Jn 15: 26).

Earlier in the story Mary Magdalene encountered the Risen Lord. She, like Thomas, wanted to physically experience the Lord, she wanted to hold on to Him. Jesus sent her to proclaim the resurrection to the disciples, and she does, "I have seen the Risen Lord." (Jn 20: 18). Thomas, a week later, was not content with her words or that of the other disciples, he too wanted physical proof. With the encounter of the Lord, Thomas seems to forget his request to touch the wounds of Jesus and proclaims, "My Lord and my God." This great profession of faith brings the Gospel to a great climax. John concludes by proclaiming: "These things are written that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life (eternal life) in His name." (Jn 20: 31).

Reflection

This weekend and often throughout the Easter Season we will be reading from the First Letter of John and from John's Gospel. John, the beloved disciple, knew the heart and the mind of Jesus. It is apparent that Jesus shared with John some of his deepest thoughts and revealed to him the most profound truths of life. John opens his first letter by talking about his very deep and personal relationship with Jesus.

John's Gospel is sometimes referred to as the Gospel of Love or the Gospel of Life. John wrote the great passage that sums up the Good News, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, so that those who believe in Him might not perish, but might have eternal life." (Jn 3:16) Love is the sharing of life and the sharing of God's life if for eternity, because God is being itself; i.e., the one who's very essence is to be. God is therefore eternal, and to share in the life of God is to live forever. At the end of the Gospel this weekend John states, "These (words) are written that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in His name." (Jn 20:31).

John reveals to us that faith equals eternal life. Faith is the acceptance of the gift of life that God wants to share with us. Because God is love and love must be free, we have the ability to remain connected to the source of being or we have the ability to turn away and cut ourselves off from the source of life. We, like the Prodigal Son, can turn away from the Father's love and travel to the big emptiness, or we can remain on the vine and draw upon the life-giving water of God's grace. Faith is based on this fundamental decision that each one of us must ultimately make. A line in Deuteronomy sums it up as God says, "I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse: therefore, choose life, that you may live." (Dt 30:19). Faith is a gift that must be accepted and lived.

The good news is that it is God's will that none of His children be lost. God wants "all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth." (I Tm 2:4). God wants all His children to accept the gift of His love and His life. Love is the sharing of life that seeks the good of the other and that seeks union with the other. Jesus prayed, "Father may they be one as You and I are one. (Jn 17:21)

John quotes Jesus as he proclaimed, "I came so that you might have life and have life to the fullest." (Jn 10:10) To live with the indwelling of the Spirit of God is to be fully alive. To live with the Spirit within us is to live with the gifts of the Spirit, bearing the fruits of the Spirit evident and transparent in our lives. St. Irenaeus once said, "The Glory of God is a human being fully alive." St. Paul reminds us that eternal life has already begun in us but is not yet complete. Eternal life begins in the here and now. It is in the here and now that we must make the choice to unite our lives with the Spirit of the Risen Lord. It is what St. John refers to as faith. Choose life therefore and do it here and do it now! Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of us Your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of Your love. Amen.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Fr. Glenn".

Personal Witness

The focus this weekend is on faith and on the gift of eternal life. I must confess that for years I looked at faith as a creed that we say or a system of beliefs that we adhere to. I looked at eternal life as something to hope for in the distant future. I now see that understanding of both faith and eternal life to be totally incomplete.

At a time in my life when my faith was very superficial and mechanical, I was searching for more. A priest friend recommended that I read several books written by Fr. John Powell, S.J. One of them was titled, *Fully Human, Fully Alive*. One of his lines in that book struck me particularly hard. He said, "Fear not that you might die, fear that you may never really live." At that time, I was existing and not really living. His words sent me searching even deeper. Over time I had become more and more self-centered and withdrawn. I was blocking God and others out of my life.

The premise of Fr. Powell's book was that we human beings often turn inward. It is a natural tendency of our fallen human nature. The inward journey always becomes a dead end, full of loneliness, and pain. Often, we become riveted on our own pain and become stuck. He taught that we first had to allow ourselves to be loved by God and others. With that love healing happens. With God's grace we can learn the truth, that we are loved unconditionally. Only then can we begin to accept and love ourselves. Only then can we move out of ourselves in self-giving love. When we empty ourselves, we allow room for God to enter our hearts and souls.

St. Paul often talked about putting on the heart and mind of Christ. He once said, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." Jesus is the source, the mediator, and the sustainer of all life. He is the one through whom all things came into being. At the Last Supper Jesus talked deeply of the promise of His indwelling presence.

One day in my struggles, I turned to God and pleaded with Him to show me His love and His presence. In a moment of grace God melted the crust that I had placed around my heart. I was overwhelmed by his love. Never had I experienced the embrace of His love and mercy so profoundly. It was an experience that would change my life forever. I often explain the transformation as moving from a dark black and white movie to a high definition bright and colorful world. Everything changed. I was looking at life through a new lens.

It was the influx of God's Holy Spirit. My life moved from existing to real living. I opened my bible that evening and was instantly drawn to the words of Jesus in John 10:10, "I came so that you might have life and have life to the fullest." For the first time in my life, I understood what Jesus meant by the fullness of life. It is the same Greek word, *zoe*, that is often translated as eternal life. God is the source of that life and so that life is forever for those who accept the gift and remain in His love. This is what John, the beloved disciple calls faith, the indwelling presence of the Risen Lord. And so, faith equals eternal life. They are one and the same.

I found myself able to love, where I could not love before, because Christ was loving in and through me. For that I am and will always be eternally grateful!

