

3 Easter Year B Readings and Commentary

Celebration Summary by Maria Pitt: Lent, with its themes of discipline and penance, seems like a distant memory, yet the readings for today focus on sin. How can we reconcile this emphasis on sinfulness with the joyful hymns and jubilant alleluias of the Easter season? Has the glory of the resurrection faded so quickly?

The theme of sin during Easter may seem surprising because of a misunderstanding of Lent. Often viewed as a time of doom and gloom, Lent is primarily a time of preparation for baptism. The disciplines and sacrifices that we undertake during Lent are not meant to be an end in themselves; rather, these practices are meant to prepare us for a fuller celebration of Easter. In the reading from the Acts of the Apostle, Peter addresses the sin of those who have denied Christ and contributed to his crucifixion. In 1 John, we hear that despite baptism, some of the early Christians have fallen back into sin. Rather than being berated for their sinfulness, however, the apostles tell their audiences to repent and be forgiven.

Perhaps we failed in our Lenten discipline. Perhaps our efforts during Lent ended on Easter day. Lent has ended and Easter day has passed, but today we are reminded that no sin is too great and that it is not too late to seek forgiveness. In the Gospel Jesus appears to some disciples after he has risen, and they recognize him in the sharing of a meal. We, too, are offered the opportunity to repent and believe when we celebrate another meal with him in the Eucharist.

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First Reading Acts 3:13-15, 17-19

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

Peter said to the people:

"The God of Abraham,
the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,
the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus,
whom you handed over and denied in Pilate's presence
when he had decided to release him.

You denied the Holy and Righteous One
and asked that a murderer be released to you.

The author of life you put to death,
but God raised him from the dead; of this we are witnesses.

Now I know, brothers,
that you acted out of ignorance, just as your leaders did;

but God has thus brought to fulfillment
what he had announced beforehand
through the mouth of all the prophets,
that his Christ would suffer.

Repent, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be wiped away."

The word of the Lord.

Commentary Acts 3:13-15, 17-19 by Tom Conry: This is Peter's speech after the healing of a man lame from birth. It opens with a quotation from Ex 3:6,15, one of Luke's favorite passages (e.g. Lk 20:37; Acts 7:32) because of its claim to universality and connection to the past. One of Luke-Acts principal themes is the connection of the Jesus-movement to the ancient stories and traditions of the Jewish people. For the Graeco-Roman elite, whom Luke evidently wished to impress, that which was old was automatically honorable and worth studying. What was novel and surprising was ipso facto suspicious.

Peter's rhetoric echoes the Septuagint – it carries an air of authority because it sounds like what his audience would have identified as their bible, i.e. the Hebrew scriptures translated into Greek. In this way, Peter's speech is analogous to Lincoln's use of the patterns of speech in the King James Bible. Think of the way Lincoln's 2nd Inaugural speech mixes practical politics with the heightened language we hear in church: e.g. "It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces, but let us judge not, that we be not judged." That is the kind of effect that the author of Luke-Acts wants us to imagine.

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Responsorial Psalm Psalm 4:2, 4, 7-8, 9

℟(7a) Lord, let your face shine on us.

Or:

℟Alleluia.

When I call, answer me, O my just God,
you who relieve me when I am in distress;
have pity on me, and hear my prayer!

Know that the LORD does wonders for his faithful one;
the LORD will hear me when I call upon him.

O LORD, let the light of your countenance shine upon us!
You put gladness into my heart.

As soon as I lie down, I fall peacefully asleep,

for you alone, O LORD,
bring security to my dwelling.

Commentary Psalm 4:2, 4, 7-8, 9 by John Paul Heil: Main Theme: FAITH that God will HEAR us when we call upon him in PRAYER.

This psalm is an individual lament in which the psalmist expresses his deep faith that God will hear him when he calls upon him in prayer to relieve him from distress, restore his happiness, and grant him a peaceful security. As it has been chosen to accompany today's first reading, the psalm's lament can be considered to be spoken by Jesus himself, who, as Peter declares, was handed over and denied in Pilate's presence, even though he had decided to release him as innocent. As the unjustly accused "holy and righteous one," then, Jesus could aptly, like the psalmist, pray to "my just God" to "relieve me when I am in distress." God's answer in raising Jesus from the dead then corresponds to the psalm's exclamation that "the Lord does wonders for his faithful one." The benefit that Jesus' resurrection means for us can be viewed as the answer to the psalmist's prayer--"O Lord, let the light of your countenance (divine favor) shine upon us!" By raising Jesus, God put gladness in the heart of the psalmist and us. And, like the psalmist, we can "fall peacefully asleep" in the security God brings to our dwelling because of our faith that the God who raised Jesus will also raise us from the dead.

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Second Reading 1 John 2:1-5a

A reading from the first Letter of Saint John

My children, I am writing this to you
so that you may not commit sin.
But if anyone does sin, we have an Advocate with the Father,
Jesus Christ the righteous one.
He is expiation for our sins,
and not for our sins only but for those of the whole world.
The way we may be sure that we know him is to keep his commandments.
Those who say, "I know him," but do not keep his commandments
are liars, and the truth is not in them.
But whoever keeps his word,
the love of God is truly perfected in him.

The word of the Lord.

Commentary 1 John 2:1-5a by Tom Conry: The first letter of John (which is not really a letter but rather seems to be fragments from several homilies) is an attempt to address divisions in a local church. In today's reading, the author argues that "knowing" Christ is only possible within the discipline of

the local community, within which the commandments of God are interpreted and kept. The conflict is apparently between those who would like to "spiritualize" the gospel and those who would insist upon a religious experience more grounded in the nuts-and-bolts of daily existence. Thus the letter begins, "We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands" (1:1).

The author uses many of the familiar Johannine themes but with a substantially different logic and focus than the fourth gospel. The symbols of light and darkness mark this particular section. Being in the light is determined not by a personal experience or revelation, nor by a special understanding. Rather, those who are in the light have fellowship with one another (1:7), obey Christ's commandments (2:3), and love their brothers and sisters (2:10).

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Gospel Acclamation cf. Luke 24:32

✠ Alleluia, alleluia.

Lord Jesus, open the Scriptures to us;
make our hearts burn while you speak to us.

Gospel Luke 24:35-48

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke

The two disciples recounted what had taken place on the way,
and how Jesus was made known to them
in the breaking of bread.

While they were still speaking about this,
he stood in their midst and said to them,
"Peace be with you."

But they were startled and terrified

and thought that they were seeing a ghost.

Then he said to them, "Why are you troubled?

And why do questions arise in your hearts?

Look at my hands and my feet, that it is I myself.

Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones
as you can see I have."

And as he said this,

he showed them his hands and his feet.

While they were still incredulous for joy and were amazed,
he asked them, "Have you anything here to eat?"
They gave him a piece of baked fish;
he took it and ate it in front of them.

He said to them,
"These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you,
that everything written about me in the law of Moses
and in the prophets and psalms must be fulfilled."

Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.

And he said to them,

"Thus it is written that the Christ would suffer
and rise from the dead on the third day
and that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins,
would be preached in his name
to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

You are witnesses of these things."

The Gospel of the Lord.

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