

Easter 1

Morning Prayer A

First Lesson: Wisdom 2:23-3:9

Second Lesson: Rom 1:1-12

Homily

*"For God created man to be immortal,
and made him to be an image of his own eternity.
Nevertheless through envy of the devil
came death into the world:
and they that do hold of his side do find it.*

There, in our Old Testament reading is one of the most succinct statements to be found of the whole theme of Easter, the central theme, in fact, of the Gospel. However literally one wants to take it, the main points are clear and consistent throughout the whole of Scripture:

God created man in his own image,
and created him not to die, but to live forever;
Satan, in his pride, had another idea,
and talked man into denying God,
and so death came upon us;
but God was not content to leave it that way.

Wisdom goes on:

*But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God,
and there shall no torment touch them. "*

Who are the righteous?

Is there anyone that deserves that label?

In another place St. Paul declares,

"There is none righteous, no not one,"

and in that He agrees with Our Lord Himself, who said,

"There is none good, but one: that is God."

So, who are the righteous?

Is this just an empty word,
one that applies to nobody?

Are we therefore utterly lost and without hope?

Not so!

St. Paul addressed his Epistle to the Romans like this:

*"To all that be in Rome,
beloved of God,
called to be saints:"*

"Beloved" --

*"So God loved the world,
that he gave his only begotten Son,
to the end that all that believe in him
should not perish,
but have everlasting life."*

"called to be saints" --

No, we have no righteousness in ourselves,
but god has called us to be righteous.
It is in His mind that we shall be among the saints,
that we shall shine in His Presence forever.
He already thinks of us as the righteous,
and is making us to be just that.

As Wisdom says:

*"As gold in the furnace hath he tried them,
and received them as a burnt offering. "*

What does it mean for gold to be tried?
Does it mean for it to be checked out
and found to be OK?
That's what it sounds like to us, isn't it?
But that's wrong.
To try gold is to recognize that it is not pure,
and to work it with heat and hammer,

until one has "tried out" all the impurities.

We need to be purified, just like the gold,
and it doesn't come any easier.
It can be very hard to grow in holiness,
it can be painful,
but the end is in sight,
and He wants us to make it.
As Paul said to the Romans, He is ...

*"...the Son of God with power,
according to the spirit of holiness,
by the resurrection from the dead:
By whom we [Paul] have received grace and
apostleship,
for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his
name:
Among whom are ye also [that's us] the called of
Jesus Christ:*

We are His.
He rose to claim us for His own.
He has called us out of sin and darkness.
He has delivered us from the power of death.
We shall shine among the saints forever..
May it be so for each and every one of us.

Let us pray.

Christ is risen, we are risen!
Shed upon us heavenly grace,
Rain and dew and gleams of glory
From the brightness of thy face;
That with hearts in heaven dwelling,
We on earth may fruitful be,
And by angel hands be gathered,
And be ever, Lord, with thee. Amen.

Easter 1

Morning Prayer B

First Lesson: Isa 43:1-12

Second Lesson: Luke 24:36-49

Homily

They were cowering in a corner,
 behind locked doors,
 trembling in fear lest the same authorities
 that had killed their Teacher
 should do the same thing to them.
 Oh, yes, they had heard that He was alive again.
 There were some that had even seen Him,
 but the Romans were still in charge,
 and the Temple authorities were no better,
 and they were in grave danger.
 They hid and they trembled.
 But still they spoke His name,
 still they revered Him,
 and it was because of Him that they gathered.
 He had said:
*"When two or three
 are gathered together in my name,
 there am I in the midst of them."*

And, oh my! there He was ...
 suddenly, in a locked room, in their midst.
 "Peace," He said, or rather, "Shalom,"
 which is a bigger word than we have in English.
 It means not only quietness and rest,
 but health, wholeness, completeness.
 It means either,
 "May everything be right," or
 "Everything is right."
 That one word,
 though it is a routine greeting in Hebrew,
 contains within itself
 the highest blessing that can be given.

"Shalom!" He said,
 and showed them His wounds,
 the ugly scars in His Hands and His feet,
 the marks of pain and suffering and love
 that He still wore,
 even though he had risen from the dead --
 the marks, as many believe,
 that He still wears, at the Father's throne,
 marks of glory and honor and power --
 and of the greatest love that can ever be,
 wounded hands reaching out to touch,
 and to heal,
 and to hold.
 He blessed them, He ate with them,

and He taught them,
 in the Old Testament Scriptures,
 holy writings that spoke of many things,
 that ever and always the real purpose
 was to speak of Him,
 and that this tiny and cowering band of men
 were to be His messengers from this time forward.

And, friends,
 though we do not see Him as they did,
 He is just as surely with us
 as he was with them that day,
 and the job he gave them,
 he gave to those who would follow them,
 to the Church, to us.

We heard Isaiah, quoting the Lord,
 in a message to the Israel of his day,
 just before they were carried off into a long exile.
 He is speaking also to the New Israel, the Church,

to us who labor on in a world
 that is not friendly to God,
 nor to His people. Listen ...

*"Fear not: for I have redeemed thee,
 I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.
 When thou passest through the waters,*

*I will be with thee;
 and through the rivers,
 they shall not overflow thee:
 when thou walkest through the fire,
 thou shalt not be burned;
 neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. "*

Has He promised
 that our life here will be all pleasant?
 Has he promised that we'll never have problems?
 No, He assumes that there will be floods and fires.
 These are part of the reality of this world.
 Christians do suffer what all men suffer,
 and sometimes, in a world controlled by sin,
 Christians seem to suffer more than most.
BUT HE IS WITH US!

In the midst of our troubles,
 in the midst of our fears,
 He is with us.

*"Yea, though I walk through the valley
 of the shadow of death ..."*

(And I do - we all do.)

"... I will fear no evil, for thou art with me ..."

As the reading from Isaiah concluded:

*"I, even I, am the LORD;
 and beside me there is no saviour.*

*I have declared, and have saved,
and I have shewed,
when there was no strange god among you:
therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD,
that I am God."*

Let us pray.

O God, who hast made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell upon the face of the whole earth, and didst send thy blessed Don to preach peace to them that are far off and to them that are nigh; Grant that all men everywhere may seek after thee and find thee. Bring the nations into thy fold, pour out thy Spirit upon all flesh, and hasten thy kingdom; through the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Easter 1

Evening Prayer A

First Lesson: Zeph 3:14-20

Second Lesson: John 20:19-31

Homily

Most of the disciples had been gathered behind locked doors, cowering in fear, afraid of those who had killed their Lord. He came to them, ate with them, blessed them, and commissioned them to continue His work on earth, even giving them authority to absolve sins, as their successors still do. What an incredible gift to such a weak and fearful group! What an amazing thing that God gives his own power to a Church that simply cannot deserve it!

One of them was missing, however, Thomas, called "the twin". Where was he? Scripture does not tell us that, but we know he was not hiding with the others.

It may be that he had simply found another place to hide, but is it not possible that he was braver than the others? Was he perhaps out where the danger was, seeking for some kind of solution? When he showed up, they told him about Jesus' appearance. He declared that he could not believe, and thus we call him, "Doubting Thomas".,

and we use that nickname to belittle those who don't believe what they are told. But is that always a bad thing? People are always getting into trouble for believing what isn't true, aren't they? and sometimes the results are truly horrible. Think of Nazi Germany, or of Jim Jones, or, more recently, of the Twin Towers at 9-11. People believed what they were told, without questioning, and the results were awful. Thomas certainly wanted the reports to be true, but he did just what St. Paul advised Timothy to do: *"Try every spirit to see if it be of God."*

He didn't take their word for it.
 He wanted to see for himself.
 He needed to see for himself.
 And he did.

God knows our needs and He knows our hearts.
"Seek and ye shall find," said the Lord.
 Thomas sought, and Jesus came once more,
 and the man who had demanded to touch His
 wounds,
 saw Him,
 and knew Him,
 and needed no more,
 and he whom we call 'doubting'
 revealed himself to be 'Believing Thomas',
 in a way no one else yet believed,
 for his was the very first voice
 to ever address Jesus Christ as,

"MY LORD AND MY GOD!"
 with a pure, unlimited, and unveiled worship.

It is his words that many of us repeat
 when the Body and the Blood
 are lifted up in our sight,
 at the celebration of Mass.
 It is this famous "doubter"
 who has taught us to believe,

not just through hearsay,
 but through asking Him to come to us,
 just as he so faithfully promised.

What matters, after all,
 is not so much what we think of Christ,
 but what Christ thinks of us.
 He loves us, loved us even before we existed,
 loves us even in our sins,
 loved us as He hung upon that Cross,
 loves us from His throne in heaven,
 and from His altar-throne here below.

And, in those truly amazing,
 truly remarkable words we heard tosay
 from the Prophet Zephaniah,

*The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty;
 he will save,
 he will rejoice over thee with joy;
 he will rest in his love,
 he will joy over thee with singing.*

Let us pray.

Grant, Lord, that we may know thee as surely as did
 those who walked with thee; that we may recognize
 thee in the Breaking of Bread, in the preaching,

hearing, and reading of thy Word, and in the changes and chances of our daily life; that we may hear thy voice and truly obey; and, above all, that we may know thy love within our hearts, as thou singest with joy in the presence of the Father and the Holy Spirit, reigning with them, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

An Alternate Homily in Verse
for Evening Prayer A

based on the First Lesson from Zephaniah

(This is a bit longer, and being a dramatic poem is perhaps a little more demanding to read, but that lesson from Zephaniah raised such amazing pictures and thoughts in me, that I felt it good to offer this poem from 1998 for use in preaching. May it be a blessing. Ed Pacht)

WEDDING MUSIC

BY ED PACTH

When the angels sing ...

The heavens ring
When the angels sing.

The heavens ring
When the angels sing
And praises bring
To th' eternal King.

When the angels sing ...

When the saints arise
And in the skies

Bring glad replies,
Adoring cries,

When the saints arise ...

The music fills the holy place,
Melody swells and roars,
And moves and flows and spills abroad,
Beyond the holy doors
That stand between the throne of God
And the world of sin-filled space.

Oh hear the music deep within!
Join in the heavenly choir!
Let Him remove from you your sin,
And fill you with holy fire.
With songs aflame to His holy name,
O Christian lift your voice.

Voices high,
Voices low,
Voices sweet and strong,
In harmony with trumpet blare,
And strings of harp and bright guitar,
With xylophone and organ pipe,
With bagpipe and sitar,

With drums and rattles, tambourines,
 Whatever can make a sound,
 Oh sing ye loud, who stand around,
 Join in the joyful noise,
 With clamor strong the praiseful song
 That fills the universe.

*"Holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty,
 which was, and is, and is to come."*

*"Thou art worthy, O Lord, our God,
 to receive glory and honour and power:
 for thou hast created all things,*

*and for thy pleasure
 they are and were created."*

*"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain
 to receive power, and riches,
 and honour and glory, and blessing."*

*"Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power,
 be unto him that sitteth upon the throne,
 and unto the Lamb for ever and ever."*

(Revelation 4 & 5)

While songs still rise, before the eyes
 Of all the heavenly throng:

"The Lamb, the Lamb, behold the Lamb,

"Behold the Lamb arise!"

He's on His feet before the throne,
 And there falls a solemn hush,

A hush, all eyes on the Lamb alone,
 The Lamb with eyes that brightly shine,
 With eyes that flash with sacred fire,
 And yet that melt with love and hope,
 And dance with joy divine.

Those eyes, they look, with piercing gaze,
 Toward heaven's gates which shortly raise,
 And there ...

The long awaited one,

The one He loved and called to Him,
 For whom He paid the price.

*"Yea, I have loved thee
 with an everlasting love:
 Therefore with lovingkindness
 have I drawn thee."*

(Jeremiah 31:3)

*"Rise up, my love, my fair one,
 and come away.*

*For, lo, the winter is past,
 The rain is over and gone;
 The flowers appear on the earth;*

*The time of singing is come,
 And the voice of the dove
 is heard in our land;*

*The fig tree puts forth her green figs,
 And the vines of grape give a good smell.
 Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away."*

(Song of Solomon 2:10-13)

The bride, behold the bride!
 Today is the wedding day!
 The marriage of the Lamb has come,
 And there she stands in spotless white,

Appearing in the gates,
 In His view,
 And He ...

... Stretches forth His nail-scarred hands,
 Beckons her to come,
 And with those eyes fastened on her,
 With rapt attention full,
 He ...

... Opens His mouth and song pours forth,
 The lovesong of the Lamb,
 A song of praise to the holy bride
 From the One who gave her life,
 Who wanted her until He died,
 To lead her out from sin and strife,
 Who was Himself the certain way
 To endless bliss in endless day.

*"The Lord thy God in the midst is mighty
 The Lord is mighty to save,*

*Rejoicing with joy because of thee,
 And resting in His love,
 Rejoicing with joy because of thee,
 Rejoicing in thee with singing."*
 (Zephaniah 3:17, paraphrased)

The lovesong
 Of the Lamb!
 The song!
 The song!
 Hear the song!
 Feel the song!
 Breathe the song!
 Live in the song!
 The lovesong!
 The lovesong
 Of the Lamb!
 The song!
 The song!
 The song!

The voice begins, a still small voice,
 A voice heard barely within,
 A voice,
 The voice,
 The voice all creation knows,
 The voice that spoke and time began,
 The voice that called the worlds to be,

The voice that calls from eternity,
 And warms the sun,
 And lights the stars,
 And fills the earth with living things,
 The voice that speaks, and what is, is.
 Without the voice the darkness reigns,
 And emptiness,
 And nothing is.

The voice that made and holds it all
 Now is raised in song.
 Creation moves as the song goes forth,
 Atoms dance the melody,
 Lightbeams join in harmony,
 Its rhythms carry the stars in space,
 The universe now moves in grace,
 Responding as it ever must
 To the lovesong of the Lamb.
 It's a song that swells and grows and fills
 Whatever can be filled, and more,
 A song that's heard and seen and felt,
 That's deeply tasted, strongly smelt,
 That fills each heart and yet contains
 Within itself each part.

The song!
 Soft song!
 Loud song!
 Lively song!

Solemn song!
 Deep song!
 Holy song!
 The song that words cannot describe,
 Nor minds imagine,
 Nor emotions grasp.
 The song!
 The song!
 The lovesong
 of the Lamb!
 The song!

He sings!
 She comes!
 He takes her hand,
 He takes her, loves her, and ...

He turns and leads her from that space,
 And to the doors of a secret place,
 And leads her in,
 and shuts the door, and ...

*"... there was silence in heaven
 about the space of half an hour."
 (Revelation 8:1)*

And then ...

*"The heavens declare the glory of God;
And the firmament shows his handwork.
Day unto day utters speech,
And night unto night shows knowledge.
There is no speech, there is no tongue,
Where their voice cannot be heard. ...
In the deep has he set a place for the sun,
As a bridegroom to come from his chamber ...
Going forth from the end of heaven,
Circling everywhere. ...*

(from Psalm 19, paraphrased)

The joy!
The ecstasy!
The consummation!
Of all things
Forever.

Easter 1

Evening Prayer B

First Lesson: 2 Esdras 2:33-end

Second Lesson: Rev. 1:4-18

Homily

*"I am he that liveth, and was dead;
and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen;
and have the keys of hell and of death."*

Remember Christmas?

We were thinking of an ordinary-looking baby,
born to an undistinguished poor family
in an obscure part of the world.

This carpenter's son grew up, as everyone does,
learned a trade and practiced it.

He was a man among men, ate and drank,
got weary, showed emotion,
just like us in every way but sin,
and, even though he did not sin,
he was often accused of it.

Remember Good Friday?

He suffered just like any man
who was tortured as he was,
and he died, just as we all do,

and was buried, and that was that --
or was it?

Even his closest friends thought so.
Sure, he was a special man,
when he preached hearts were touched,
he healed the sick,
even the weather seemed to obey him,
but he was a man, and he died.

But it was not the end.

He was as much a man as any of us,
but he was not only a man,
in him dwelt the fullness of Almighty God.
He broke the bonds of death.

He got up from that grave,
and walked the earth once more.

He walked with his friends.

He spoke with them.

He ate with them.

He touched them and breathed upon them,
He was a man, as he has always been, but ...
Something had changed.

Something of the glory of God was seen.

Awe began to be felt by the Apostles.

Thomas cried out, "My Lord and my God!"

Shortly they saw Him carried up into the heavens,
where, even though He is always with us here,
He reigns in everlasting glory.

Today we hear St. John's vision.
 He saw the Lord in all His glory,
 so powerful, so overpowering a glory,
 that he fainted at His feet.
 A glowing hand touched him,
 and a huge, glorious, and yet gentle voice said,

*"I am he that liveth, and was dead;
 and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen;
 and have the keys of hell and of death."*

This is Jesus, at the same time our brother in the
 flesh
 and our God,

*"... Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending
 ...
 which is, and which was, and which is to come,
 the Almighty. "*

Is it any wonder
 the venerable Apostle was overcome?
 But this is He that comes to us when we pray,
 when we read and hear His Word,
 and most especially in the Holy Eucharist.
 This is He that dwells within us,
 that will never leave nor forsake us,
 that walks with us

in the valley of the shadow of death.
 He, the Almighty, has called us,
 and made us His own --
 And who are we?

Esdras wrote of
*"... a people that shall come;
 which not having heard of me yet shall believe me;
 to whom I have shewed no signs,
 yet they shall do that I have commanded them. "*

We are unworthy, strangers, outsiders.
 None of us have physically walked with Him
 as the disciples did.
 We haven't sat at his feet to hear his preaching.
 Whatever we know of Him had come to us,
 perhaps sometimes through a deep inner knowledge,
 but primarily through His Word and His Church.

Ah, yes, we can know Him.
 It can be a very real and rock-solid knowledge,
 but we do not have the absolute proof
 that St. Thomas sought,
 nor do we need it.
 That, after all, is outside us.
 We have faith, and He inhabits that faith.

If we listen, he speaks,

as Esdras says, through the Prophets,
and through the Apostles,
and in the sacraments,
and in that still small voice within.
He lives, and He is with us.

Let us pray.

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Risen Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.