

Easter 4

Morning Prayer A

First Lesson: Job 19:21-27a

Second Lesson: John 12:44-50

Homily

Job complained, and who could blame him?

He had a lot to complain about.

You know the story:

His kids died.

He lost all his wealth.

His health failed.

There he sat, covered with boils,

itching and in pain,

penniless and childless.

He'd always been faithful to his God,
and now?

And now there's nothing left
to praise Him for.

Job's wife told him to

"Curse God and die".

That sounds like an invitation to suicide, doesn't it?

But he didn't do that;

he just kept on complaining.

It wasn't to people that he complained.

It wasn't the devil that he criticized.

No, it was God.

---- Why was that?

He was discouraged and perplexed,
but he never lost his faith.

He knew that God is the source of everything.

He knew that God is good.

He knew that his hope was still in God,
no matter how bad things looked.

He complained,
but his complaining led to this remarkable statement,
pulled out of the depths of his being,
in the very midst of all his troubles:

*"I know
that my redeemer liveth,
and that he shall stand at the latter day
upon the earth:
And though after my skin
worms destroy this body,
yet in my flesh shall I see God:
Whom I shall see for myself,
and mine eyes shall behold,
and not another."*

Remember, Job did not know the whole story.
 This was centuries before the coming of Our Lord,
 but it's clearly about Him,
 and very clearly
 about the events we remember in this season.

Christ is risen. Alleluia!
 He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

As St. John wrote:

*"Jesus cried and said,
 He that believeth on me,
 believeth not on me, but on him that sent me.
 And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me.
 I am come a light into the world,
 that whosoever believeth on me
 should not abide in darkness."*

We all have troubles, don't we?
 We all get discouraged, don't we?
 We all complain, don't we?
 Maybe our difficulties don't compare with Job's,
 but does that really matter?
 They are quite bad enough for us, aren't they?
 Job is depicted as a good man,
 a lot better a man than any of us here.

His complaint was rich with, "Why me?",
 and we certainly tend to echo that question,
 but, if you read on, you discover
 that God wasn't having any of that.
 The complaint wasn't accepted,
 but the mercy never ceased either.

Our troubles are less than his,
 and our goodness is less than his,
 and "Why me?" is even more meaningless for us.
 But if we only open our eyes,
 if we only look up to our God,
 we can join the triumph
 he proclaimed at his lowest point.

*I know
 I know
 I know
 that my redeemer liveth,*

He rose.
 He lives.
 He is among us.
 He feeds us with His own Body and Blood.
 He speaks our names at the Father's throne.

And he calls, always,
"Come unto me,

*all ye that labour and are heavy laden,
and I will give you rest.*

Let us pray.

O most loving Father, who willest us to give thanks
for all things, to dread nothing but the loss of thee,
and to cast all our care on thee, who carest for us;
Preserve us from faithless fears and worldly
anxieties, and grant that no clouds of this mortal life
may hide from us the light of that love which is
immortal, and which thou hast manifested unto us in
thy Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Easter 4

Morning Prayer B

First Lesson: Ezek 37:1-14

Second Lesson: Acts 3:1-21

Homily

*"Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more;
death hath no more dominion over him."*

*"Christ is risen from the dead,
and become the firstfruits of them that slept."*

These words from St. Paul,
as used in our Easter Day services,
nicely sum up the heart of the promise,
the center of the Paschal message.

The oldest enemy of all,
the most feared of them all,
death itself,
has been defeated.

Where the Hand of God has touched,
where the breath of God is breathed,
where the Savior's feet have trod,
there is life,
life more abundant,
unconquerable, everlasting.

Sin brought about death.

Death was answered by the willing gift
of the Redeemer's life upon that Cross,
and death proved too weak to hold Him,
and a lifeless body lived again.

Ezekiel's vision foreshadows the tremendous reality.
It's a vision of the world as it really is,
defeated, dramatically defeated,
without life, without hope,
a valley full of dry bones.
What could be more depressing?

What could seem more like a final destruction
of all the desires and goals of a people?

Can these bones live?

There seems no earthly reason to think so,
and that's the point.

There isn't.

But they can and they will.

The word of God is spoken.

The breath of God is breathed.

The life of God is manifest,

and the dead arise,

and truly live, as they have never lived before.

"Thus saith the Lord GOD;

Behold, O my people, I will open your graves,

*and cause you to come up out of your graves,
and bring you into the land of Israel.
And ye shall know that I am the LORD,
when I have opened your graves, O my people,
and brought you up out of your graves,
And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live,
and I shall place you in your own land:
then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken it,
and performed it, saith the LORD."*

Where the Lord moves, there is life.

In the Acts we find another example.
There's a man who has been crippled all his life.
He's sitting on the Temple steps, begging.
That's all he is able to do for a living.
Here comes a man who is full of the Holy Spirit.
God dwells in him and walks in him,
and fills his path with life,
and when God is moving, things change.

*"Silver and gold have I none," says Peter.
("You aren't going to get what you think you need"
That's what that really meant.)
"But such as I have give I thee.
In the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth,
Rise up and walk!"*

And life flowed into those dead feet,
and the cripple stood,
"walking and leaping and praising God."

Sometimes we're so discouraged
that we're just like those dry bones,
seemingly dead,
unable even to ask for help,
without hope, without joy,
and He moves, and we move,
and life returns,
and everything changes.

Sometimes we ask and we ask,
and every hope seems to fail,
and still we ask, and still we hope,
and at last God moves,
and life returns,
and everything changes.

We may not have what we thought we needed.
We may still have a great deal of work ahead.
It may never get easy on this earth,
but because He lives, we shall live also.

The crucified Lord.
the risen Lord,
the ascended Lord,

the coming Lord,

the Lord who dwells within us,
who leads, guides, and calls us,
who leads us through all our troubles
into everlasting life.

Let us pray.

Risen Lord, fill us with life. Amen.

Easter 4

Evening Prayer A

First Lesson: Dan 12:1-4, 13

Second Lesson: 1 Thess 4:13-18

Homily

Are you a bit puzzled by the Scripture lessons today?

Really, you should be.

People who claim to understand passages like this have bedeviled the church with a whole lot of foolishness.

Both passages deal with the same question:

"After this, what next?"

We're subjected to a constant barrage of speculations about prophecies of coming events, speculations often presented as if they are absolute fact.

There's endless wrangling over the "rapture" and the "tribulation",

over which nation is to be identified with which reference in the prophetic books, even bumper stickers proclaiming,

"In case of rapture this car will be driverless."

Well, the speculation can be fun, but it remains true

that we know neither the times nor the seasons,

and that Scripture discourages attempts to know them.

So what are we to make of these readings?

What is the purpose of all these strange prophecies?

Well, to start off with, both passages (along with the whole body of future-oriented prophecy), look at reality in a completely different way from the way we ordinarily think of it.

What these passages describe is outside the time in which we live, outside the physical reality we know, and more powerfully real and alive than anything we have ever experienced.

The moment in which we live is all-important in our own lives. In this moment we can obey God. In this moment we can sin. And it is in this moment that we can repent, and call upon the Cross of Christ, and be forgiven and made clean.

But this moment shall pass, and be forever gone.

Though crucial in our personal life
and in our relationship with God,
the present moment
and the present scheme of things
matter very little in the light of eternity,

Out of sight,
yet reflected in the daily news,
and even in the events of our daily lives,
a colossal battle rages,
a struggle between the goodness of God
and the forces of darkest evil.
Daniel uses familiar Biblical images to describe it.
It is pictured as a war between Satan
with his legions of fallen angels and sinful men,
and Michael, the glory of God,
with clouds of angels and saints.

We are deliberately not given details,
at least none that we are capable of understanding,
but we are assured that the battle has an end point,
that there is certain victory
for the forces of God and his righteousness,
that, in the scheme of eternity,
the victory is already one.

As they chant,
over and over again this time of year,
in the Eastern Church:

*"Christ is risen from the dead,
trampling death by death,
and on those in the tomb bestowing life."*

We believe in the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come.

As Daniel reports:

*And at that time shall Michael stand up, ...
And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth
shall awake,
some to everlasting life,
and some to shame and everlasting contempt.*

And as St. Paul wrote:

*Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught
up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord
in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*

How will all that work?
We have no idea at all.

When will it all happen?

The Scripture says soon, but it is also written:
One day with the Lord is as a thousand years.
We don't know.

But this we do know:

Once

there was a great gulf between earth and heaven.

Once it was a gulf too vast to be crossed.

But Jesus has crossed that divide.

He has broken down the gates.

He has become the Way,

and we can walk it.

Because He lives, we can live also.

Let us pray.

Risen Lord,

as we walk in the valley of the shadow of death,

give us the hope and assurance

of thy Resurrection;

fill us with strength for the battle,

and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Easter 4

Evening Prayer B

First Lesson: Isa 60:13-22

Second Lesson: John 8:12-30

Homily

There's a lot of talk about "spirituality",
about "faith" or "belief",
and then there's that nice word, "sincerity",
and the constant shouting of "diversity".

A prominent bishop in another denomination
often spoke of something he rather strangely called,
"pluriform truth",
as if contradictory statements could both be truth.

It's become unfashionable to talk
about such things as
"winning the lost" or
"bringing unbelievers to Christ."
Supposedly Christian clergy shout angrily
at folk who want to convert Muslims,
or Buddhists, or Jews, or you-name-it
to Christianity,
or even to pray for such conversions.
In supposedly Christian pulpits

one often hears brilliant and thoughtful
poets and writers like Rumi or Gibran,
or Buddha or the Dalai Lama quoted,
as if they had equal authority to Christ,
perhaps in opposition to words of Scripture,
and this is applauded.

It's considered terribly narrow-minded
to object to any of that,
and, just as it was during the Roman persecution,
serious-minded and committed Christians
are accused of being opposed to the common good,
and deliberately divisive.
If you are faithful to God's revelation in Christ,
they will say that about you.
Don't be offended.
From a Satan's-eye view it's true.

The common knowledge,
what "everyone knows",
is quite sufficient to lead one astray,
to guide one effectively on a pleasant road
that leads over the cliff into a chasm,
that is to say, into hell itself.

The words of Our Lord that we heard today
are extremely, even uncomfortably, precise
on just this point.

*"Ye are from beneath; I am from above:
ye are of this world; I am not of this world.
I said therefore unto you,
that ye shall die in your sins:
for if ye believe not that I am he,
ye shall die in your sins."*

Whew! Those are strong words!

C.S. Lewis looked at words like that with awe.
He commented
that such statements completely destroy
the common notion that Jesus was a great teacher,
or a philosopher, or a moral leader,
or perhaps a revolutionary.
It all falls apart under his oft-repeated claims to be
"the way and the truth and the life"
to be the ultimate authority
to whom one must listen,
to be the one who must be believed
if one is to be saved,
to be, in fact, God.

*"if ye believe not that I am he,
ye shall die in your sins."*

Those are strong words.
Lewis commented

that one who would say such things
can only be one of three things himself.
Perhaps a liar,
proclaiming what he does not believe.
Perhaps a lunatic, believing falsities to be true.
Or, as He claimed, and Christians believe,
exactly what He claimed to be: "LORD".

*"Then said Jesus unto them,
When ye have lifted up the Son of man,
then shall ye know that I am he,
and that I do nothing of myself;
but as my Father hath taught me,
I speak these things."*

He was lifted up by sinful men on the Cross.
He was raised up by the Father
into resurrected life.
He was taken up to His Throne in Heaven.

He is lifted up in the Holy Mass.
He is lifted up in the lives of changed sinners.
He is lifted up in the proclaiming of His Word.
He is Lord!

Yes,
we can learn a great deal from all these others.
They did find enough from God

to be helpful in searching for Him,
and living with Him.
But they cannot give us the light
that leads us to salvation,
because they do not know Him.
He is that Light.

As Isaiah put it:

*"The sun shall be no more thy light by day;
neither for brightness
shall the moon give light unto thee:
but the LORD shall be unto thee
an everlasting light,
and thy God thy glory.
Thy sun shall no more go down;
neither shall thy moon withdraw itself:
for the LORD shall be thine everlasting light,
and the days of thy mourning shall be ended."*

Let us pray:

Lord of all power and might, who art the author and
giver of all good things; Graft in our hearts the love
of thy Name, increase in us true religion, nourish us
with all goodness, and of thy great mercy keep us in
the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.