

[Readings: Isaiah 43:16-21; Ps. 126; Phil. 3:8-14; John 8:1-11]

The theme for today's homily could be: "I Saw What You Did and I Know Who You Are!" Because all three readings today focus on our sinful past. Isaiah has been lamenting the infidelity of the people of Israel who continued to sin and turn away from the Lord and are now in exile. There seems to be no hope for those who stubbornly and deliberately refuse to turn back to the Lord and follow His commands.

In spite of this, at this point in our First Reading passage, Isaiah gives a message of hope for that faithful remnant left behind in Jerusalem, in captivity in Babylon and for those who have not been faithful to God anywhere in the world.

The key words of his message today are, "Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago, consider not."

How many times do we play the same tapes over and over in our heads? You know which ones I mean. Not the ones of happier times and loving moments, but those tapes that remind us of our mistakes, our shortcomings, our sins and our weakness? I'm still playing tapes that are 40, 50 years old. Shame on me!

Isaiah says, "He knows what you did, and He knows who you are," but then Isaiah says, "And He wants to forgive you, and for you to forgive yourself." It takes a lot of energy to harbor resentment, bitterness and regret, both against others and more importantly against ourselves. It keeps us from being healthy and whole. Isaiah says, let it go. As the Lord has forgiven you and forgotten your iniquities, so you must do for yourself and for one another.

Now, let's listen to the words of St. Paul. A fanatical Jew who took his religion VERY seriously! Serious enough that he would arbitrarily break into houses of Christian believers and have them removed, tortured and killed while he watched. Can you imagine the field day St. Paul would have if he played THOSE tapes over and over? He probably would have driven himself insane.

Instead, he says, "By the grace of God, I am what I am, and His grace in me has not been in vain." God knows what we did, and God knows who we are.

"But by the grace of God, I am what I am, and His grace in me has not been in vain."

I would ask that you remember these words this week. "By the grace of God, I am what I am, and God's grace in me has not been in vain." Say it with me: "By the grace of God, I am what I am, and God's grace in me has not been in vain."

St. Paul admits that because of his conversion, his year-long retreat with St. Peter and the other Christians, his newfound fervor in preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ, that he considers all of his past life (before Christ) as loss and rubbish. The only thing that matters to him is where he is now -- in the power that comes with Jesus Christ and His Resurrection.

What impossible deeds has God performed in your life? What other impossible deeds would you like to see accomplished in your lifetime? What else do you and I need, if we are in a right relationship with Jesus Christ?

St. Paul also admits that he has not yet "attained perfect maturity." None of us can make that claim until we are six feet under,

and even then, maybe not.

Jesus Christ still has so much to work on in St. Paul, who says that he forgets what lies behind and strains forward to what lies ahead. This is a great philosophy of life for you and for me: forgive what lies behind and move forward. God has forgiven Paul, and Paul has forgiven himself. Isn't it time for God to forgive YOU and for YOU to forgive yourself?

Come to confession this Wednesday and next Wednesday at 7:45 PM. Come on Saturdays at 3 PM. Come experience God's compassion, forgiveness and reconciliation. If it has been a while since you have been to confession, consider this as my personal invitation to you to come and be reconciled with the Lord, the Church, yourself. This will be your last chance before Easter.

Then we come to that curious scene from today's Gospel, when Jesus invites those without sin to be the first to throw a stone at the woman caught in adultery. Then He begins writing in the dirt. There is silence for a moment.

What is He writing? Could it be simply, "God saw what you did!" and then after challenging those who think they are sinless, He continues writing, "And He knows who you are and where you live!"

And one by one, everyone realizes that they are NOT without sin. They drop their stone and leave, BEGINNING WITH THE ELDERS! That was a tremendous statement made by the crowd.

Those who are the most skilled in the law are the first to admit their sinfulness. That was an act of humility, humiliation and shame.

What are the compassionate words of Jesus to this woman? "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin

anymore." I like another English translation of this command: Go, and from now on, avoid this sin." Stay away from those near occasions – those persons, places and things – that will cause you to sin again.

Bottom line, my friends: Stop playing the negative tapes. Start playing the positive ones. Live in the present and prepare for the future. Most saints are sinners with a past, even more sinners are saints with a future! AMEN!

Readings: Isaiah 50:4-7; Psalm 22; Phil. 2:6-11; Luke 22:14 – 23:56]

Once upon a time, a little boy had a devastating blood disease but recovered. However, his sister was not so fortunate. She needed a blood transfusion and because the boy had the same rare blood type, the doctor asked him to donate his blood to his sister. He seemed stunned, but wanted to help his sister and agreed to do so. As the process began, he smiled at his sister bravely, but by the time it was over, he seemed tense and quiet. The silence was broken only when he looked up and asked, “Doctor, when am I going to die?”

He thought that giving his blood for his sister would mean giving ALL of his blood, which would kill him, so he was going to die. Yet even believing this, he had managed to say, “Yes.” Imagine that!

Palm Sunday is more accurately called Passion Sunday. In this context, Christians often assume that “passion” is the word for the suffering and anguish of Jesus’ death. However, the word first describes something felt deeply, powerfully, almost absolutely.

The story of the little boy, recounted by Robert Emerson Coleman in his book, *Written in Blood*, reminds us that a person can love so passionately that she or he would be willing to give up life itself out of love for another. The solemnity of this day and the reading of the Passion of Christ means most when we realize it’s not just about the pain. It’s about the love (meditation by *Father Larry Janowski*.)

If Holy Week had ended on Good Friday, we might call it Unholy Week.

It would describe only too closely the path of Isaiah's faithful and suffering servant, who comes to rouse hearts, yet endures a brutal reception as his words fall on deaf ears. Passages from prophecy and psalms like bitter Psalm 22 warn us down through the centuries that being just and innocent in no way guarantees success.

We like to think of religion as spiritual life insurance. If we walk the moral line, God will protect us from harm, keep our children safe, fend off disease, spare us evil times. But Scripture reminds us repeatedly that it doesn't work that way. The most obedient man who ever lived was arrested, humiliated, tortured, and killed by a means that would make the delicate person look away in horror.

If we learn anything from Passion Week, it's that being good is no inoculation against suffering. But this isn't the only takeaway lesson of Holy Week. Through it all, we catch glimpses of the merciful Father in whom Jesus put the deepest kind of trust. We see this mercy in the meal Jesus transforms from a simple supper to an everlasting promise of life. We hear the tinkling bell of hope in the assurance Jesus gives Peter, that despite an initial failure to respond with courage, he will find the grace to be strong in time.

Jesus restores the ear of His enemy's servant damaged during His arrest, as if He didn't have more pressing concerns to worry about. Though Jesus shows such attention to a servant, He ignores the powerful people who stand before Him that day: the governor from Rome and the king of Judea, either of whom could have spared His very life.

Jesus consoles the mourning women, intercedes for the forgiveness of His executioners, and welcomes a repentant criminal

into Paradise. The Way of the Cross, we come to recognize, is not primarily an avenue of suffering but the path of God's mercy.

What is your "Way of the Cross" in your lives today?

Where do you most gather your strength in faith? What causes the greatest doubts?

St. Luke assures us in today's Gospel that we are not alone in our suffering. Have you found that to be true in your own life?

Unite YOUR Way of the Cross, your Via Dolorosa, your Way of Sorrows, with that of Jesus Christ and His Blessed Mother, Our Lady of Sorrows. It is the safest journey any of us in history can take. Let us take it with Him this week (meditation by *Alice Camille*).

And let us remember that this is NOT the "End of the Story." Christ is Risen from the dead with Easter Joy. And in my wild imagination, I picture Jesus deciding that the first place He will make His Resurrected appearance is to His Blessed Mother:

There He is standing inside the front door.

"Mom, I'm home!" AMEN!

[Readings: Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14; Psalm 116; 1 Cor. 11:23-26; John 13:1-15]

This is a special day in the Christian world. As we begin the Easter Triduum, we celebrate the gift of Eucharist, priesthood, and the call to ministry and service. Part of tonight's liturgy should involve the symbolic washing of feet, but because of health concerns, we were cautioned not to do it. What were the cautions? If Deacon Marion and I had to bend down and stand up 12 times, we may not get up again for the rest of the Mass!

Jesus washing the feet of the apostles teaches us about power and humility. We can never say that we are too good for any act of service to another person. Nothing falls beneath our dignity. No act becomes too unimportant for us to worry about. Nothing is a waste of our talents. Jesus lays claim on us. That claim is to offer the washing of forgiveness, helping people find the refreshment of release from guilt. We offer the washing of service, cleaning off the dirt of poverty, hunger, suffering, violence, hopelessness and despair.

Why do we do this tradition two thousand years later? For three reasons. First, feet are smelly and unattractive. Washing each other's feet represents the power of love. It is not always easy to love one another. We allow others to love those parts of us that are not very loveable, and I do the same for you. We love every part of the Body of Christ, warts and smells and all.

Second, Christ asks us not to place conditions on our love. Christ loves us not because we deserve it, because you and I need loving. As we receive Eucharist tonight, we see that Christ asks us to love each other fully – without reserve or conditions, and to love as He loves us, where love is most needed.

Finally, we must be willing to receive Christ's love. Hold nothing back. We give Him every part of ourselves, even the parts that bring us shame. On this special night, let us taste Christ's desire that everyone may share in the desire to be Christ for one another in here, and out there.

The Eucharist makes present to us the whole of the saving work of Jesus. We remember and celebrate everything that Jesus did, taught and suffered for our salvation, until He comes again in glory.

His self-giving at the Last Supper was an act that looks backward and forward. His self-giving looks ahead to Good Friday, when it would be completed by His sacrificial death on the cross. By giving us the Eucharist, His Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity, Jesus anticipates His self-offering even unto death on the cross, His final act of complete obedience to the Father, made for love of us.

It was love for us that led the Son of God to share our life in the Incarnation – the Word Made Flesh. It was love for us that led Him to destroy our sin and death in the Crucifixion.

It is that love that is Christ's farewell and eternal gift to us in the Eucharist. But that love we receive at this table is not only for us gathered here. Our communion in the Body and Blood of Christ requires us to serve others as He did – throughout life, even unto death. As we receive Christ's gift of love, we are to proclaim His death by becoming one with Him in His sacrifice.

The Last Supper was the most intimate moment in the life of Jesus. It is the most intimate moment in the life of His Church. This is the night when people who are personally close to Jesus know that He does not want to eat alone. Tonight, of all nights, He wants someone to talk to, someone to be with.

When He gathers His friends into a safe circle of concern, He washes their feet. As a kindness, because they are tired; as a courtesy, because He is their host; as a sign that in the long run, service to them is more to the point than teaching or leading or saving them.

Then He gives them bread and wine. As a kindness, because they are hungry; as a courtesy, because it brought them together; as a sign of His Body and Blood, and a promise that whoever lived in His memory would never die.

Tonight, Jesus invites us to His supper. He will serve us, extend His peace to us, and give us His Body and Blood. As a kindness, because we desperately need His peace; as a courtesy, because we are His awkward servants; as a sign, because we need to clean ourselves and each other.

AMEN!

[Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Psalm 31; Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9; John 18:1-19:42]

As Jesus had often gathered his disciples together to pray in the garden, so we are together right now as we enter into this passion. And, we all have a passion in our own lives. We all have a cross in our own lives. We don't have to go out and seek a cross, it's given to us. I want you to think about that right now. What is the cross that you've been asked to carry in your own life?

Now, our natural or our human nature has a tendency to want to fight or flee. That's our natural response when we encounter suffering – to either enter into a fight with it or to flee from it. That's our natural response, but Jesus shows us a supernatural response. Jesus shows us that when we encounter suffering, when we experience the cross, we don't need to fight. We don't need to flee. We simply need to stand.

And so, I was praying with this idea. As I went through the passion myself, I realized there is a lot of movement, a lot of motion. I was just going through some of that litany of movement and motion. It helped me to see that, during it all, the one that stands the entire time neither fighting nor fleeing is Jesus. He calls us to do the same with our own cross... not to fight it or to flee from it – but to stand by it and to work through it.

Maybe your cross for you is your marriage, and He's calling you right now not to fight anymore, not to flee from it, but to simply stand.

Maybe your cross is conflict with your children or with your parents, with your brother or sister, and He's calling you right now not to fight it, not to flee from it but to stand.

Maybe your conflict is at work with your boss or your employees, and right now He's telling you not to fight it or to flee from it but to stand. Maybe God right now is asking you to give up something in your life or to let go of something – to stop fighting, to stop fleeing and to stand and accept.

Maybe there's some suffering in your life – some illness, be it spiritual or physical or emotional. Perhaps we have been fighting or running from something all of our lives – and right now, Jesus is just telling you to stand and accept it.

Judas fled, Peter fought, Jesus and the women simply stood.

This Good Friday, whatever is going on in your life, whatever your cross is, whatever your suffering is – know that we're not called to fight it, or to flee it – but simply to stand with it. And to realize that HE is standing right next to us, taking it from us, and laying upon it once more. AMEN!

[Gn 1:1-2:2; Ex 14:15-15:1, Is 54:5-14; Rom 6:3-11; Lk: 24:1-12]

Last Thursday evening, we concluded our forty-day journey through Lent. If we were faithful to the discipline of Lent, we are probably a little thinner, a little poorer in the wallet, and a little richer in spirit. As we journeyed through this Holy Week, we were reminded of our connection to that first Holy Week. Tonight we stand at the empty tomb, like a butterfly getting ready to emerge from its cocoon.

We heard the stories of struggle and obstacles. The struggle of creation breaking forth out of nothing; the struggle of an enslaved people given their freedom; the struggle of those who are thirsty for fulfillment and who come to the Lord in their poverty. The struggle of God's Word being sent down from the heavens and not returning until it has achieved its purpose. The struggle of Jesus Himself through the death of sin and decay to the life of Resurrection.

Our catechumen (Cassieann), now called the elect, and our candidates for ongoing conversion (Laura, DuWayne, and Joseph stand at the edge of tomb, ready for transformation. So do all of us.

You see, you and I are spiritual butterflies. Some of us are still nestled safe, secure and small in a cocoon, which may be too hard for us to crack open. There are monsters under our bed, skeletons in our closets and secrets in our hearts that we still have not brought forth and allowed into the light of the Risen Christ. We are afraid, terrified, of some public or private demon, some fear that still terrorizes us. The fear that I will run out of time, that I will never be loved genuinely by anyone, that I will be hurt again, that what I believe and trust most will leave me shattered.

And yet, if we are willing to face our fears -- sometimes with the help of an angel -- we can break the shackles of the fears that enslave us and discover a newness in our lives. We might be like that butterfly -- struggling to find our new selves in Christ, but only with a little “window of opportunity” to help us.

Or, God bless us, we might be that fully-emerging new creation we celebrate tonight. Our “old selves” buried in the waters of baptism and our “new selves” emerging healthy, whole and holy! What a grace that would be!

Once upon a time, a teacher asked her second grade class what each student wanted to be. After all the usual professions were shouted out, little Timmy said, “I want to be possible.” The teacher asked, “What do you mean, possible?” And little Timmy responded: “Well, my mom is always telling me that I’m impossible. So when I get big, I want to be possible!”

My friends, Easter is a time of possibilities. In his rising from the dead, Christ enables us to make possible in our own lives all that he taught and lived throughout his brief life among us. The empty tomb is a sign of perfect hope -- that in Christ, all things are possible.

Our story and our lives do not end at the grave, sealed in a tomb blackened by darkness and sin. Our story and our lives continue. We become the angels -- the messengers -- of the Resurrection in every act of kindness, compassion and forgiveness extended to us and which we, in turn, extend to others.

The fluid of Christ’s Body and Blood, which we receive in this Eucharist, gives strength to our wings and enables us to soar to new heights. The power of the Holy Spirit outpoured in the Sacrament of

Confirmation gives us the wisdom, the courage, the right judgment and the holiness to walk with angels. The best is yet to be!

It is all here – the promises of God and the legacy of hope even as we live in a world often seemingly without hope. So many stories. So many flourishes of promise. So many anxious hearts waiting to hear Good News.

The Risen Jesus quiets those fears. Darkness yields to dawn. Now there is life where there was death. It's all about the goodness of being re-born into a new creation through water, and of being anointed and confirmed in the faith by the anointing of the Holy Spirit. We peer into the tomb to find only wrapping clothes. Shrouds, once symbols of death, now laid carefully aside, become new symbols of life. You, dear elect and candidates, do not run away from what is given to you tonight!

Walk out of your cave, stretch out your tired and weakened spiritual muscles and take a deep breath of fresh Holy Spirit air. There IS reason to hope and to celebrate a Happy Easter! THAT is worth celebrating and calling it Resurrection Sunday. And then, healed, raised and cleaned off, we can become the Divine Word News Service, and share that Good News with those who need to hear it. "Tell us, what did you see?" "Let me tell you!"

We pray this evening for your prayers so that they may be the catalyst for those here present who are still stuck in their tombs. We pray that one day all of us can move from the darkness of death and the tomb into the Easter light of Resurrection glory and new life. Let us make our prayer the one from the book "Rediscover Jesus" and

pray that we may experience in all ways and always, the beautiful and transforming gift of God's beautiful mercy:

Loving Father, here I am.

I trust that You have an incredible plan for me.

Transform me. Transform my life. Everything is on the table.

Take what You want to take and give what you want to give.

Transform me into the person You created me to be,

I hold nothing back; I am 100 percent available.

How can I help?

Alleluia! And AMEN!

[Acts 10:34a, 37-43; Ps.118; Col 3:1-4 or 1 Cor. 5:6b-8; John 20:1-9]

What do YOU find when you look into the empty tomb of Easter? What is there? Shock, despair, or outrage are all typical responses to an empty room -- or to an empty tomb. Standing within the emptiness, we realize how full our lives were and how great is our loss. But our loss also makes us acutely aware that our most precious asset – love -- is always with us.

Do you look into the tomb and find your faith? That is the Good News of Easter. That is what we celebrate today.

Where had Jesus gone? It seems He chose to walk the earth again for a while before ascending to the right hand of God.

And -- let's hope -- Jesus Christ continues to walk in each of our lives. Easter Day begins an octave, eight days that remind us that every day is Easter and that we are a people of the Resurrection who believe in love, joy, forgiveness, and life in all forms -- including the eternal variety.

Show that you believe in what the risen Christ stands for by freely sharing love, mercy, and kindness in generous portions these eight days and beyond. It's not enough to have faith: our faith must be an action verb, attracting others to Jesus Christ and His Church.

The word Easter literally means "the feast of fresh flowers". It reminds us that everything is new; that Jesus has risen. In this weekend's first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, St. Peter shares his experience with the Risen Christ. He ate and drank with Him after Jesus rose from the dead. Peter invites us to bear witness to Jesus by our exemplary lives.

In today's Gospel, the Risen Lord reveals His glory first to an ordinary woman. She was blessed to become the first evangelizer of the Risen Lord. The Risen Lord sends Mary to evangelize His Apostles. Mary proclaims her personal experience, "I have seen The Lord!" Have YOU seen the Lord?

What's still in YOUR tomb? Are you still in it? Our dishonesty. Our hypocrisy. Our pettiness. Our selfishness. Our resentment. Our traumatic memories. Our unemployment. Our grudges. Our poisoned relationships. Our pessimism and gloomy despair. When I put it that way, the cave isn't very empty, is it? What IS in your cave?

Now chew on this: Because Jesus has nailed all of our sins on the cross with Him, because Jesus is buried with our sins – no matter how great or how small – because Jesus has triumphed over sin and death, and illness and disease and pain, we can leave all of that ugly stuff in the tomb, and roll the stone across the entrance. ALLELUIA!

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ gives us the power to do this. We can even leave in the cave the greatest of all fears – the fear of death itself. The message of Easter is that nothing can destroy us, our pain, suffering, and even death. Because Christ has conquered all these, we too can conquer all these if we commit ourselves to Jesus Christ. Come out of your tombs.

Do you need someone to accompany you? Do you need a lifeguard to guide you out? Ours walks on water!

Most of us are familiar with Mary Stevenson's poem, "Footprints in the Sand" which she wrote in 1939.

I came across a different version of that poem, called "Butt Prints in the Sand." Its author is anonymous. You will see why!

Someone gave it to me when I was recovering from my heart attack and triple by-pass back in 2010. Laughter is the best medicine!

Butt Prints in the Sand

One night I had a wondrous dream,
One set of footprints there was seen,
The footprints of my precious Lord,
But mine were not along the shore.
But then some stranger prints appeared,
And I asked the Lord, "What have we here?"
Those prints are large and round and neat,
"But Lord they are too big for feet."
"My child," He said in somber tones,
"For miles I carried you alone.
I challenged you to walk in faith,
But you refused and made me wait."
"You disobeyed, you would not grow,
The walk of faith, you would not know.
So I got tired, I got fed up,
and there I dropped you on your butt."
"Because in life, there comes a time,
when one must fight, and one must climb.
When one must rise and take a stand,
or leave their butt prints in the sand."

My Mama, who also had a wicked sense of humor like mine, often said that 5 was her lucky number. She was born on October 5. Here are 5 things that you can put in your Easter Basket this year:

Don't ruin a good today by thinking about a bad yesterday.

Let it go.

Wisdom is knowing some of the best days

have not happened yet.

Don't compare your life to others; you have no idea

what the details of their life journey have been.

When it rains, look for rainbows; when it's dark, look for stars.

Adopt the 5 by 5 rule: If it won't matter in five years,

don't spend more than 5 minutes worrying about it.

Christ is Risen! Alleluia! Happy Easter!

[Acts 5:12-16; Ps. 118; Rev.1:9-11a, 12-13. 17-19; John 20:19-31]

The pending death of Pope Francis was no surprise. But, one day, Easter Sunday, Pope Francis appears in the central balcony of St. Peter's Basilica to give his Urbi et Orbi blessing to the City of Rome and to the World and then is driven around St. Peter's Square in the Pope Mobile. The next day, he dies in the morning hours of Easter Monday, within 24 hours. That is a shock!

We are now in a whirlwind of change – from single, isolated parishes to a “Family of Parishes,” with a new Archbishop of Detroit, with a new President of the United States, and soon, with a new Pope.

In a way, this present scenario of massive change resembles the massive changes that take place in Jerusalem thousands of years ago. In the new fledgling Christian Church. In the hearts and lives of the Apostles, disciples and Mary, the Mother of Jesus. All this following His Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension to the Father that took place during that first Holy Week and Easter so long ago.

During these turbulent days of transition and change, let us hold on to the rock and anchor of our faith, as pilgrims of hope, as joyful, missionary disciples of love. Like the Apostles in the Early Church, we may not have silver or gold, but let us offer what we do have. The ability to, as Pope Francis said so many times, “accompany one another” as Jesus does with the disciples on the Road to Emmaus. Jesus Christ is Risen! He is truly Risen!

Jorge Mario Bergoglio was baptized into Jesus Christ, the Risen Lord. Pope Francis dedicated his whole life to preaching this message. A message of inclusion and mercy. Now we pray for the rest and peace of his eternal soul. Eternal Rest grant unto Pope Francis, O Lord,...

In drama, conflicted characters generally are more interesting. If Hamlet had had a clear conscience, a definite sense of purpose, then the tragedy would have ended quickly. In fact, it wouldn't have been a tragedy. Perhaps it's our fascination with such conflict that draws our attention to the figure of St. Thomas on the Second Sunday of Easter.

Thomas isn't there when Christ appears to the disciples on the first Easter Sunday, bestowing peace. One could imagine the conflict that he experiences. Why did Jesus appear without me present? Are my friends just making this up? He is more than a "Doubting Thomas" here. He is a "Pouting Thomas." Jesus has mercy on Thomas in his affliction. Our Lord appears a week later. To show mercy to Thomas. Now Thomas believes. Now, he is a "Shouting Thomas!" He will proclaim the Christian Faith all the way to India. And it will cost him his life.

How are we conflicted just like Thomas? Have we not longed for some consolation from God in the midst of our suffering? In the doubts we've experienced about God's very existence and life itself? But let's look again. In Acts, we hear about that first Christian community in Jerusalem. Gathered together in unity. One heart. One voice. Sharing all things in common, because they have been gathered together by the same love made manifest in the wounds of Our Lord.

God knows your needs: He desires to bring you closer to Himself, and He will do so as long as you keep striving and stumbling towards Him.

God is only as far away as we place Him, and never as far away as we think. For it is in Him that we live, move and have our being.

So run with Thomas to the side of Christ. Run, don't walk.

And don't forget your ABC'S of God's Divine Mercy:
Ask for mercy. Be merciful to others. Completely trust in God.