

“FIRST IMPRESSIONS” 7th SUNDAY OF EASTER (A)
(MOTHER’S DAY)

Acts 1: 12-14 Psalm 27 I Peter 4: 13-16 John 17: 1-11a

By: Jude Siciliano, OP

Dear Preachers:

Today’s gospel has us at the table with Jesus and his disciples. With them we listen to his prayer. The reason Jesus came into the world was about to be manifested. He fully shared life with us and “the hour,” about which he had spoken throughout John’s gospel, has come. The sense of drama has been building. Those wondering what the “hour” he has been speaking about meant, are about to find out. John sets the opening moments of the “hour” in a dramatic tone. Jesus is at table with his disciples, and he has begun to pray. We listen in on this prayer and learn that he and his Father are united in what is about to happen. What will happen will be a revelation of God to the disciples, as has each of the works Jesus has done throughout this gospel.

Jesus’ prayer to his Father reveals an intimate moment between two loved ones. His is a prayer of familiarity and habit. We are privileged to be allowed into this moment, and we observe that even in the face of death Jesus is calm and receptive, trusting God in what is about to happen. In this final prayer John doesn’t present Jesus in agony, as the other gospels do. Instead, as we glimpse into Jesus’ spirit, we see calm and trust. Jesus is not asking God to take away what he is about to endure. Rather, his concern is for his disciples, as he speaks about eternal life for them; not an endless life reserved till after death, but something they can share in now through Jesus.

Jesus’ last words and actions should not surprise us, after all, what he is doing during these last moments, he had been doing throughout his ministry. He is showing God’s love for us and assuring, by our faith in him, that this love can be trusted and drawn upon in our daily lives. As we edge closer to our own deaths, Jesus is also inviting us to trust the One he trusts, as he looks into the pit of death. No wonder in John’s gospel, when Jesus dies, he utters, “It is finished.” His work of revealing God is done and we are the beneficiaries of his revelation. At the supper we hear the summary of who Jesus has been and will be for his disciples—Jesus is the revelation of God’s wonderful work on our behalf.

What is the “glory” Jesus asks the Father to give him? “Now glorify me, Father....” Through his humanity Jesus has already given glory to God. Now he is finishing the work God sent him to do and as a result he is the source of eternal life for his disciples. Jesus says that he has revealed God’s name, a biblical way of saying he has revealed God’s identity to his followers. We too have come to know, through Jesus, God’s “name,” because each week we gather to hear the “words”—his works and words--- Jesus has spoken to us about God. And each week Jesus again gives glory to God by revealing God’s compassion, forgiveness, love and healing to us. It is what Jesus did and what he does for us again at this Eucharist. Coming to “know” God in this way is Jesus’ gift of eternal life for us now.

Jesus says, “I do not pray for the world but for the ones you have given me.” This sounds strange since John told us (in the Prologue 1:3) that Jesus is the Word through whom the world was created and that Christ was sent into the world because God so loved it (3:16). But Jesus may have something very specific in mind. At the world’s hands he is to be crucified, and he is leaving his disciples behind in that same world. After he is gone, the disciples are not to hide out and shelter themselves from that world, for after his resurrection Jesus tells them, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (20:21). The disciples, like Christ, will find themselves in a hostile world that will reject their message. So, at this point of his prayer Jesus is praying for them. Later (17:20) he will pray for all who believe in him because of the word of his followers. He anticipates the difficulties we face in living out his word and doing his deeds.

The spirit of trust Jesus reveals in this prayer doesn’t stop just with his Father. He also trusts his disciples. He doesn’t look back to a better time of former glory when he was enthusiastically received by the crowds, his “green years.” Instead, even as he faces his death, he expresses confidence in his insignificant band of followers. As we would say, “It’s a rough world out there.” He certainly has had plenty of evidence of their fragility, yet his words and spirit communicate his trust in them, despite the hardships coming for them.

Our lives reveal similar challenges. Haven’t we known our own limitations and lack of stellar performance as witnesses to Christ? But we can’t retreat into a cloistered environment. We aren’t called to merely live in the world. Rather, we must be witnesses to the Word we have received in Christ. And so, Jesus isn’t

locked into what was in the past, for in his prayer, he expresses hope in what is yet to come. We offer Eucharist today and we remember Christ, not just his past presence on the earth, but his presence with us in his Spirit. He has left us in the world--- but not alone.

I imagine proclaiming today's gospel passage from Jesus' "priestly prayer" with a tone of reverence and solemnity. I hope to communicate as we hear it, that we too are invited into a very personal space, not just in hearing Jesus' words to his Father, but into the very intimacy of their relationship. As we listen in we feel included because Jesus is praying about us. We hear his realistic appraisal of our situation" we are left in a world that rejects God and so we need God's loving protection.

We know that faithful disciples have faced hardship, even death, for their beliefs. (I write this on the feast of one of them, St. Mark, evangelist and martyr.) So, as we face the cross, Peter's words in the 2nd. reading speak soberly to us, "Rejoice to the extent that you share in the suffering of Christ.... If you are insulted for the name of Christ, blessed are you for the Spirit of glory and God rests upon you." As Jesus promised, we are not left orphans to face the hardships brought about by our faith in Christ. Instead, we celebrate Christ's Spirit with us, which is the focus of next week's Pentecost festivities.

I have friends in Boston who are still celebrating their baseball team's World Series victory. Here in North Carolina our college basketball team won the championship in the "March Madness" finals. We love the glory of being winners and we cheer gustily when we are. But when Jesus prays for "glory" today he is asking for God's presence to be felt in the world, and it isn't through conquest and victory parades that God's glory is experienced. Rather, Jesus' small band of followers will, through Jesus' prayer, be signs of God's glory on earth. By our living faithful, loving and sacrificing lives others will experience God's presence through us. People will know God's forgiveness, loving embrace, strength in their trials and courage under opposition, because we, Christ's disciples, will stand with them in their need. We will show the glory of God, an answer to Jesus' prayer, "I have been glorified in them."

This year is proclaimed the "Year of the Eucharist." We celebrate Christ's

presence on our altar in the sacrament. He is personally present in each of us as we receive the eucharistic bread and wine today. In the sacrament he is drawing us into deeper union with God and, at the same time, making us his real presence in the world. Having heard the Word, this Eucharist today reminds us that Jesus' prayer isn't just for his disciples, but for the world, for we are called to witness and transform the world by Christ's love. May today's Eucharist make us more effective witnesses to God's glory,—the presence of Christ in the world.

BLESSING PRAYER FOR MOTHERS DAY

God of Love

listen to this prayer.

God of holy People,

of Sarah, Ruth and Rebekah;

God of holy Elizabeth, mother of John,

of Holy Mary, Mother of Jesus, bend down Your ear to this request and bless the mother of our family.

Bless her with the strength of Your spirit, she who has taught her children
how to stand and how to walk.

Bless her with the melody of Your love,
she who has shared how to speak, how to sing and how to pray to You.

Bless her with a place at Your eternal dinner table. she who has fed and nurtured
the life that was formed *within* her while still helpless but embraced in
her love.

Bless her today,
now, in this lifetime,
with good things, with health.

Bless her with joy, love, laughter
and pride in her children
and surround her with many good friends.

May she who carried life in her womb
be carried one day to Your divine embrace:
there, for all eternity, to rejoice with her family and friends.

This blessing and all graces, we pray. descend upon the mother of our family:
in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES

Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I am posting in this space several inmates' names and locations. I invite you to write a postcard to one or more of them to let them know that: we have not forgotten them; are praying for them and their families; or, whatever personal encouragement you might like to give them. If you like, tell them you heard about them through North Carolina's, "People of Faith Against the Death Penalty." Thanks, Jude Siciliano, OP

Please write to:.....

James Hollis #0428143 (On death row since 7/19/01)

Bryan Christopher Bell #0592464 (8/24/01)

Clifford Ray Miller #0742512 (10/25/01)

-----Central Prison 1300 Western Blvd. Raleigh, NC 27606

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

I get notes from people responding to these reflections. Sometimes they tell how they use "First Impressions" in their ministry and for personal use. Others respond to the reflections, make suggestions and additions. I think our readers would benefit from these additional thoughts. If you drop me a BRIEF note, I will be happy to add your thoughts and reflections to my own. (Judeop@Juno.com)

Our webpage address: <https://PreacherExchange.com>

(Where you will find "Preachers' Exchange," which includes "First Impressions" and "Homilias Dominicales," as well as articles, book reviews and quotes pertinent to preaching.)

"Homilias Dominicales"-- these Spanish reflections are written by two friars of the Southern Dominican Province, Leobardo Almazan, Angel Del Rio, and three sisters, Regina Mc Carthy, OP, Doris Regan, OP and Sr. Anna Marie Reha, SSND.

Like “First Impressions”, “Homilias Dominicales” are a preacher’s early reflections on the upcoming Sunday readings and liturgy. So, if you or a friend would like to receive “Homilias Dominicales” drop a note to John Boll, O.P. at: jboll@opsouth.org.

"First Impressions" is a service to preachers and those wishing to prepare for Sunday worship. It is sponsored by the Southern Dominican Province, U.S.A. If you would like "First Impressions" sent weekly to a friend, send a note to John Boll at the above Email address.

If you would like to support this ministry, please send tax deductible contributions to Jude Siciliano, O.P., whose address is listed below. Make checks to: Dominican Friars of Raleigh.

Thank you.

“Blessings on your preaching”,

Jude Siciliano, O.P., Promoter of Preaching, Southern Dominican Province, USA
P.O. Box 12927, Raleigh, N.C. 27605, (919) 833-1893, Email: judeop@juno.com

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

1. CD Available: **“FIRST IMPRESSIONS: PREACHING REFLECTIONS ON LITURGICAL YEAR A.”** The CD contains two reflections for almost all the Sundays and major feasts of the year. In addition, there are helpful essays for preaching during the liturgical seasons (Advent, Lent, the Triduum, etc.), ten book reviews and essays on various aspects of preaching. The files are in three formats (Microsoft Word, WordPerfect and Adobe Acrobat Reader) so you should have no trouble opening them on your computer. To purchase go to:

<http://www.preacherexchange.com> click on the “Year A–CD” button on the right and follow the instructions.

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