

“FIRST IMPRESSIONS” 2<sup>ND</sup>. SUNDAY OF EASTER (B)

Acts 4: 32-35 Psalm 118 I John 5: 1-6 John 20: 19-31

By Jude Siciliano, OP

Dear Preachers:

Today’s gospel passage was the original ending to John’s gospel—along with some final verses that include 19:35. (Chapter 21 was added later, some think to deal with Peter’s role in the early community.) John’s Easter morning accounts focus on three people: Mary Magdalen, Peter and the disciple Jesus loved. As we saw last Sunday, the “beloved disciple” was the first to believe (20:8). There is unfinished business in these accounts: Peter sees what the beloved disciple saw but shows no reaction. Jesus appears to Mary, who recognizes Jesus as her “teacher.” More is still needed to complete the story and so we have today’s passage. There are two accounts of Jesus’ appearance to the disciples in the upper room; today’s is the second. The disciples are again gathered behind locked doors. Today we learn the implications of accepting Jesus’ resurrection; his wounds will be the place we recognize him. This passage, close to the end of the original gospel, closes with the testimony of the author, “What he has seen he has testified....”

There is a strong accent on forgiveness in Jesus’ resurrection appearances. He returns to visit and encourage the faith of those who had abandoned him. Today he makes a second visit to reassure Thomas, who doubted he was alive. I wonder why Thomas wasn’t with the group when Jesus first appeared to them? Was he just too afraid or just despairing? I have always been grateful for Thomas. Thank God for this doubter! Modern political, business and church life leave plenty of room for doubt and skepticism in us. I wonder if my trust in people and certain institutions is grounded in reality or naivete? Will the trust I have invested bear the test of time and trial? Or, am I being hood-winked? So, I’m glad Thomas missed the first appearance; that he wasn’t convinced by the ecstatic disciples; that he, like me, wanted “solid evidence”—to see, touch and converse with the risen Jesus. The question, “Is it all true?” goes back a long way; all the way to the original Christian community. They certainly weren’t expecting Jesus to stop in for a visit. The community was afraid and hiding behind locked doors. Thomas doubted. That sounds real to me; I would have been with them, or maybe, like Thomas, just not showed up at all.

When Jesus wants to give proof to Thomas, he points to his wounds. This sounds

like the Jesus of Matthew's Last Judgement parable (25: 31-46). In that parable Jesus points to his presence in the hungry, thirsty, naked, etc. He is among the "wounded." When Jesus enters the room, it is not with a fanfare of trumpet and a flash of blinding light. I am sure Hollywood special effects people would have had a field day planning this scene with computer animated dazzle. Instead, Jesus enters the room quietly and points to his wounds for the one asking proof.

We have seen our share of wounds in our lifetime: our own, those of loved ones and the wounds of our world. "Embedded reporters" have shown us the wounded on both sides in Iraq. We are especially moved by what the warriors call, "collateral damage"; the innocent caught in the crossfire. I am haunted these Easter days by the image of that young Iraqi boy who had his entire family killed and his own arms blown off by an American bomb. In Iraq, the hospitals are overflowing with the wounded, there is a lack of medication and hospitals have been pillaged. Each time I see another image of a wounded adult or child, today's gospel passage is super-imposed over it and I see Jesus pointing to the wounds. They are his wounds too. He invites me to "put your finger here." He also is inviting me to put my mind and voice there too. What can I do to prevent such wounds from happening again? How can I support church and charitable organizations in their work to heal those wounds? Do I hide out in fear and avoid the confrontation that may come when I speak out against such violence?

What does the believing and new community do with its faith in the risen Jesus? They live differently. Our reading from Acts suggests the difference. Granted it is an idealized picture, to be sure, but there had to be something unique in the way they were with one another, for they attracted many to join them. This early community of ordinary people lived in such an extraordinary way; the resurrection had deeply transformed them. The verses describe "the great power" with which "the apostles bore witness." One wonders what "great power" this was? The preceding and following verses certainly give some examples, for they describe being of "one heart and mind and the sharing of possessions and care for the needy." Were these the great signs that attracted large numbers to the early community?

We might feel, in the light of contemporary church divisions, problems and scandals that we are a long way from the original Christian community of the Acts of the Apostles. But note that Luke does not say they all thought the same or practiced their faith in exactly the same way. A further reading of Acts will bear

this out. Luke does name the first sign of this community---he says they were of “one heart and mind.” Something holds them together; something that is the foundation of their church life. The gospel suggests what that “something” was—the risen Jesus was with them, speaking words of peace and forgiveness and empowering them to proclaim these same realities to one another and to the world.

Another sign of “great power” was their care for the needy in their midst. These are financially strapped times for parishes and church-based programs. As budgets tighten it is important that we keep the early church community as our example. I was with a few parish council members recently and they lamented that their parish had decided to cut their contributions to social programs to make up the shortfall in parish income. The temptation to cut outreach and help for the poor is strong, especially if they are not part of our immediate community. Government budget cuts tend to affect the poor and those without political clout first (cf “Justice Notes” below). This can’t be the way descendants of the first community of believers behave. Especially if we believe that the risen Lord is in our midst, pointing out his wounds as a sign of his presence.

The early church community had many martyrs. Rather than staying behind locked doors, celebrating their “togetherness” and worshipping the risen Christ, they left their safe haven and went out in all the directions of the compass. They died for the faith in those places where they shared the good news of what had happened to them in the upper room in Jerusalem. But the Acts reading reminds us that there are other ways of giving our lives for the resurrected Christ and that is to live as a Christian community, united in mind and heart by our faith in Christ in our midst and tending to his needs as we see them among our members and in the world.

## JUSTICE NOTES

### **Gregory reminds Congress of its obligations to "most vulnerable"**

In a March 21 letter to the members of the U.S. Senate, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' President Most Reverend Wilton D. Gregory, Bishop of Belleville urged Senators to remember the most vulnerable as they worked on the upcoming fiscal budget, balancing the costs of war with Iraq with ongoing domestic needs in the U.S.

1. "Our nation is confronting war and terrorism, seeking greater security for our people, and facing higher unemployment and rising deficits. . . . I write to make a simple plea—do not overlook or neglect the needs of the poor and

the vulnerable in the federal budget.

"The federal budget is more than a fiscal plan," Gregory wrote, "It reflects our values as a people. Your budget choices have clear moral and human dimensions. In these tough times, with war, the struggling economy and persistent unemployment, mounting deficits, and the demands of homeland security, our Conference could not support a budget plan that neglects the needs of the 'least of these' in our nation and world.

Gregory wrote to remind U.S. leaders that a "fundamental moral measure of our nation's budget policy is whether it enhances or undermines the lives and dignity of the most vulnerable members of our society."

"Preserving an adequate safety net for the poor and vulnerable may not command as much attention as homeland security, tax cuts, and military expenditures, but it is a fundamental moral obligation of a responsible society," Gregory added.

"We want to work with you to secure adequate resources to address hunger and homelessness, the needs of the jobless, and those trying to escape welfare, educate their children, or gain health care coverage. We also want to work with you to increase substantially international development assistance, to improve dramatically our nation's response to the health and food crises in Africa, to provide additional relief for the poorest people of the earth, and to provide assistance and protection to increasing numbers of refugees worldwide."  
—quoted on the Claretian webpage, "Salt of the Earth".

## 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:.....

Vincent M. Wooten      #0453231    (On death row since 4/29/94)

- John R. Elliott      #0120038    (5/4/94)
- Robbie J. Lyons      #0252465    (5/6/94)
- Wade L. Cole      #0082151    (6/14/94)

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

## READER'S RESPONSE

[Two weeks ago] Jesus said that when "he is lifted up" he will not only draw all to him, but that which is contrary to him and his way will be exposed for the evil it is. In light of His cross and His way we in this country stand in great judgement right now and we do not want to hear that. We want to hear just the opposite. We want to hear that we are the good people, the right people, the chosen people to rid the world of evil and danger and to make it safe for democracy. We want justification and legitimization for our actions and feelings. We want to hear that God is on our side and that He/She has ordained us to do what we are doing. I understand why preachers have opted to go with a much more spiritualized, personalized and psychological message...To do otherwise is too hard and scary and costly....One of the worst things that's happened is that our country and leaders (government and some Xns) have cloaked, blessed, justified and legitimized what we are doing nationally in the name of Jesus' God. And I don't hear the outcry, the demonstrations against this.... I don't know this God, I don't know this Jesus nor, I believe, do the scriptures. All this violence, domination, arrogance and eye for an eye approach in the name of the Prince of Peace who chose a completely different way and commanded his followers to as well. "Have this mind among you"..... It's an abomination and, the bible is clear, it will not stand (to coin a phrase) and I (we?) must stand up and say this however we say it to whomever we've been called to say it no matter how difficult it is..... This is nothing new to you. You know this, have/are preaching and living it.

-----Jim Dickerson

## POETRY ANNOUNCEMENT:

### On the Wings of An Angel Poetry & Art Festival Guidelines

1. Open to anyone
2. Poems / Artwork must be unpublished / or never shown publicly
3. No more than 25 lines in length per poem
4. Deadline May 5, 2003
5. Any theme is acceptable. Works may be explicitly religious. However, this is not a requirement. Works may be implicitly "spiritual". In other words, poems and artworks may not be explicitly religious but are spiritual in nature in that they are about friendship, peace, tolerance, family, recovery, etc.
6. The name of the poet / artist MUST NOT be included on the poem and / or artwork.
7. The poet's / artist's name MUST be written on the entry form and placed inside

an envelope. The title of the poem / artwork MUST be written on the outside of the envelope.

8. Up to three poems / artworks may be submitted for consideration

9. Categories: a. Adult b. Children Elementary: 1st – 2nd grade / 3rd – 4th grade / 5th – 6th grade

Middle School High School

10. Artwork categories: a. Black & White Artworks—maybe in pencil, ink and / or charcoal on paper at least 8 1/2 x 11 paper but no larger than 17 by 22 inches. An artist may enter up to three artworks. Computer graphics and b& w photos are acceptable.

Journal Cover—entrants may submit one artwork in color for consideration to be published as the cover of “On the Wings of an Angel—a journal of spiritual poetry and art.” Entries may be done in ink, pastels, pencil, watercolor and / or acrylic on paper at least 8 1/2 x 11 but no larger than 17 by 22 inches. Computer graphics are acceptable. The selected entry will be incorporated into the journal’s first cover

Entry Form

Name of Poet / Artist

\_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_  
Zip code \_\_\_\_\_

Email address \_\_\_\_\_

Category: (Circle one) Adult; Elementary: 1st-2nd grade, 3-4, 5-6; Middle School; High School.

If under 18 years of age, Name of Parent(s)

\_\_\_\_\_

I certify that the work(s) submitted are my own creation and have never been published or exhibited. If selected, I give permission to St. Bernard Church to publish and / or exhibit my selected works. I release St. Bernard, any of its workers / festival judges / volunteers of any responsibility and / or liability for any loss or damage incurred to my submitted works.

Poet’s / Artist’s Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

If under 18 years of age, Parent’s signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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Mail to St. Bernard Art Festival, 2500 W. Avenue 33, Los Angeles, CA 90065

-----Submitted by: Armando P. Ibanez, O.P., On the Wings of an Angel  
Festival Director.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

Our webpage addresses: <https://www.PreacherExchange.com>

"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, [Click Here](#).

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Thank you.

“Blessings on your preaching”,

Jude Siciliano, OP

[FrJude@JudeOP.org](mailto:FrJude@JudeOP.org)