

**First Impressions** 6<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY OF EASTER -C-

Acts 15:1-2, 22-29 Psalm 67 Revelation 21: 10-14, 22-23 John 14: 23-29

By: Jude Siciliano, OP

Dear Preachers:

It is hard to leave a place where you have been for a period of your life, especially when you have formed close ties. Someone said to me recently, “I hate goodbyes. I find them very difficult.” She said it in a way that suggested this was unique to her and not what almost everyone feels. Who doesn’t “hate goodbyes?” Unless a person is glad to get out of a destructive relationship, or a very difficult situation, I don’t know anyone who finds farewells easy. Most of us look forward to them with sadness and dread. Even people I have known who are moving to a promising future---marriage, a better job, a new home—still feel pain about packing up and leaving. They know they are leaving a known world behind for an uncertain future. Anyone who has invested themselves in friends and place knows the poignancy of saying “farewell.”

When the time comes for parting we try to soften the pain of the moment. “I’ll visit when I can.” “I’ll call you often.” “We’ll spend vacation time together.” “You’ll have to visit the first chance you get.” Though we do intend to do just what we say, we often have a fear that time and distance will make it hard to maintain the close ties with family and friends we have known. We will do our best to adapt to new circumstances and relationships and in doing that we may have to let go of at least some of what once was. It’s dreadful! One positive note, though: those we have loved in our past make it possible for us to leave and give us the courage to set down roots again.

In today’s gospel Jesus and his disciples are at table. It is the Last Supper and we are in the midst of the Last Discourse (chapters 13-17). From what Jesus has been telling them the disciples can’t miss the solemnity, indeed the heaviness, of the moment. He is going away and they will no longer have him with them in the ways they have become accustomed . He says he is going “to prepare a place for you” (14:3). Just before today’s passage Jesus reassures them, “I will not leave you orphans; I will come back to you.” When we say our farewells we try to assure the ones we are leaving that we will stay in touch. And we do our best to do just that. We don’t want to lose those we love.

Jesus is expressing the same kind of sentiment; but he will keep his promise to “stay in touch” in ways the disciples cannot imagine at this point. “The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you.” Jesus doesn’t want us to have to rely just on his disciples’ recollections of him---who he was for them and what he taught them. He knows that being the mere humans they and we are, these memories will fade and weaken over time, especially when life tests our faith and hard times threaten to break our ties with him.

Jesus is saying a very unique goodbye. He is leaving his beloved band of followers, but promises to be with them in the future in a new way. He has to go, he tells them but, “...I will come back to you.” Jesus isn’t just saying, “Cheer up, things won’t be so bad.” Actually things are going to get quite bad for him and them. But he is assuring them that the coming of the Holy Spirit will keep their relationship vibrant because the Spirit will be the bond that holds them together in love with him and his Father.

The Revelation reading says something similar in its description of the new Jerusalem. The Romans had destroyed the old Jerusalem in 70 CE. The new city won’t be where the old one was. Instead, God will be coming to dwell among the people, so that where they gather, God will be. Jesus is telling his disciples a similar thing, he and his Father will make their dwelling with them. This new Jerusalem will be marked by love among its inhabitants and that will be proof that God dwells with them. Indeed, each believer, each lover of God, will be a locus for God on earth. “Whoever loves me will keep my word...and we will come to him/her to make our dwelling with him/her.”

When will Jesus return? Isn’t that the question long-suffering Christians have asked through the ages? Who knows how and when he will. But in his farewell to his disciples he assures them that he will return and he so he does, because God sends them the gift of the Holy Spirit. This Spirit, Advocate and Comforter brings Christ’s presence to us, helps us understand who he is, what he is doing among us and what he expects of us. Jesus promises that God will send the Spirit and what Jesus was to them, the Spirit will be to the Church. Jesus taught his disciples much; the Spirit will continue teaching the Church. Jesus showed his disciples how to love; the Spirit will make that love possible among them. Jesus’ words are in danger of being forgotten; the Spirit will “remind” the disciples of what Jesus

taught and continue to teach them in succeeding generations.

What is extraordinary about Jesus' farewell is his gift of peace to his disciples. The disciples are not having an ordinary meal together; nor is Jesus bidding them, "Good night. Peace, I'll see you tomorrow." Instead he offers them peace in the light of the chaos about to enter their lives with his capture and death. He says he doesn't give them the peace the world offers. That's good because when things fall apart the world can give us nothing to sustain our spirits and calm our fears. Jesus' peace take a very specific form: he will return to be with them. His Holy Spirit will strengthen them for what they are about to face and what we, their descendants, will face in the ages to come.

We know the kind of peace we need these days and it is a peace only Jesus' Spirit can confer. We need wise leaders who can bring God's peace despite the failures at peacemaking we are encountering in the world. We need the Spirit to bring healing to our troubled and wounded Church. We need a peace-rendering Spirit to draw together our parishes that are divided by arguments large and small. We need a Spirit that will renew our conviction that our Savior is the Prince of Peace, so that we can bring his peace into our families, schools and workplaces. We also need the Spirit's vision to appreciate the peacemaker and non-violent folks in our midst whose voices and actions are often ridiculed as being naive or ignored because their ways seem "impractical in our modern world."

No, we don't have Jesus' physical presence with us the way the first disciples did who sat around the table, witnessed his washing their feet and listened to his reassuring promises. His farewell to them was a true farewell. He would no longer be with them as he had been. But they and we would have to believe that he is present in a different way with us in the Holy Spirit, God's gift to us, just as Jesus promised. If we can trust in the Spirit's presence with us now, then we will have peace in whatever turmoil we or the church face. Easier said than done! This peace is not something we can manufacture for ourselves. It is a gift, or inheritance from Jesus who doesn't want to "lose touch" with us. Can we be open to that Spirit now and receive the gift that keeps our ties with Christ strong? That's something we pray for at this Eucharist and in these days leading up to Pentecost.

The Risen Christ is with us at table, just as he was with his disciples. The meal we share is his life given for us. It is also a "promise kept" for we celebrate the gift he

promised—the Spirit. This Spirit keeps his memory alive for us, not as a reminiscence from the long-gone past, but as Christ’s living presence guiding and comforting us, just as he did for his original disciples.

### **PAX CHRISTI Statement of Purpose•**

Pax Christi USA strives to create a world that reflects the Peace of Christ by exploring, articulating, and witnessing to the call of Christian nonviolence. This work begins in personal life and extends to communities of reflection and action to transform structures of society. Pax Christi USA rejects war, preparations for war, and every form of violence and domination. It advocates primacy of conscience, economic and social justice, and respect for creation.

Pax Christi USA commits itself to peace education and, with the help of its bishop members, promotes the gospel imperative of peacemaking as a priority in the Catholic Church in the United States. Through the efforts of all its members and in cooperation with other groups, Pax Christi USA works toward a more peaceful, just, and sustainable world.

—Pax Christi is a national Catholic peace movement. For more information on Pax Christi go to their webpage <http://www.paxchristiusa.org/index.asp>

### **ONE GOOD BOOK FOR THE PREACHER**

De Bona, Guerric, OSB., **FULFILLED IN OUR HEARING: HISTORY AND METHOD OF CHRISTIAN PREACHING.** New York: Paulist Press, 2005, ISBN 0-8091-4359-3

Begins with an overview of the history of preaching and homiletic method, traces trends and focuses on preachers who have contributed to Christian preaching. Then addresses contemporary issues preachers face; modern technology, multiculturalism, feminism, etc. This is also an excellent book for those who want to catch up on what has been happening in preaching in recent years.

(For a fuller review of this book go to: <Http://www.preacherexchange.com> and then to “Book Reviews.”)

### **QUOTABLE**

Ministry and preaching on a multicultural environment must involve the language

of hospitality. Ministry to Latino peoples is not a crisis to be solved but a blessing to be treasure. The open door is an effective and universal language without words. The church, its ministers, and its peoples welcome the Hispanic community with joy. Those who preach can extend the welcome of hospitality through God's Word, creating a safe shelter within an often discriminatory and racist culture.

----De Bona, page 144.

## **JUSTICE NOTES**

**“Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him.”** (*John 14: 23*)

### **Bishop Burbidge's letter to Congress on Immigration**

“As the Catholic Bishop of the Diocese of Raleigh in eastern North Carolina I write you on an important issue for our communities and our nation - comprehensive immigration reform. I urge you once again to support the enactment of comprehensive immigration reform in 2007. Now is the time to enact a law that is humane and provides security for our nation.

In our eastern part of North Carolina we witness the human consequences of a flawed immigration system. In our social service programs and churches we see families separated and immigrants who suffer exploitation and abuse. Immigration is a moral concern impacting the human dignity and human rights of every person.

Because we witness this suffering, I stand with my brother Bishops and strongly believe that only a comprehensive approach to immigration reform will create a system that respects human rights, protects human life and provides security for our country.

This reform needs to include:

An earned legalization program for the undocumented population that is workable and includes a fair and achievable path to citizenship;

A future worker program that permits migrant workers to enter safely and legally and one that includes worker protection and an option for future citizenship;

Family-based immigration reform that reduces backlogs and waiting times for family reunification;

The restoration of due process protections for immigrants taken away by the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act (IIRIRA); and

Policies that address the root causes of migration from developing and poor countries.

North Carolina has been blessed with hard working immigrants who have contributed to the economy and the diversity of our state. They have blessed our state with their positive family values and deep faith.

I urge you to support such legislation that will help build the strength and good of all people in the nation and especially in North Carolina”

(Submitted by Anne and Bill Werdel, from the parish bulletin of Sacred Heart Cathedral, Raleigh, NC)

### **Prayer Before Beginning to Prepare a Homily**

*Father, You created me and put me on earth for a purpose.*

*Jesus, You died for me and called me to help complete Your work.*

*Holy Spirit, You help me to carry out the work for which I was created and called.*

*In Your presence and in Your name – Father, Son and Holy Spirit –*

*I begin my reflection. May all my thoughts and inspirations have their origin in  
You*

*and be directed to Your glory.*

*Come Holy Spirit, and illuminate the Words of Scripture for me.*

*I want to see Jesus and fall more deeply in love with Him.*

----submitted by Deacon Richard Calkins, St. John of the Cross Catholic Church, Lacombe, LA

### **POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES**

***"It is time to abandon the death penalty -- not just because of what it does to those who are executed, but because of how it diminishes all of us... We ask all Catholics--pastors, catechists, educators and parishioners -- to join us in rethinking this difficult issue and***

***committing ourselves to pursuing justice without vengeance. With our Holy Father, we seek to build a society so committed to human life that it will not sanction the killing of any human person.***

-----("Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice," U.S. Catholic Bishops, Nov. 2000,)

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:.....

Angel Guevara #0506556 (On death row since 6/20/96)

David K. Williams #0440399 (7/23/96)

Thomas C. Walic #0405380 (8/9/96)

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

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### 1. Two new CDs Available:

**"First Impressions Preaching Reflections: Liturgical Year C."** Begins in Advent and contains **three** reflections for almost all the Sundays and major feasts of the year. It also has book reviews and additional essays related to preaching.

**"Liturgical Years A, B and C."** Reflections on the three-year cycle, with **Year C** updated.

If you are a preacher, lead a Lectionary-based scripture group, or are a member of a liturgical team, these CDs will be helpful in your preparation process. Individual worshipers report they also use these reflections as they prepare for Sunday liturgy.

You can order the CDs by going to our webpage: [www.preacherexchange.com](http://www.preacherexchange.com) and clicking on the "First Impressions" CD link on the left.

### 2. **"Homilias Dominicales"** —These Spanish reflections on the Sunday and

daily scriptures are written by Dominican sisters and friars. If you or a friend would like to receive these reflections drop a note to fr. John Boll, O.P. at [Jboll@opsouth.org](mailto:Jboll@opsouth.org) Or [jboll@preacherexchange.org](mailto:jboll@preacherexchange.org)

3. Our webpage: <http://www.preacherexchange.com>  
Where you will find “Preachers’ Exchange,” which includes “First Impressions” and “Homilias Dominicales,” as well as articles, book reviews, daily homilies and other material pertinent to preaching.

4. “First Impressions” is a service to preachers and those wishing to prepare for Sunday worship. It is sponsored by the Dominican Friars of Raleigh, N.C. If you would like “First Impressions” sent weekly to a friend, send a note to fr. John Boll, OP at the above email address.

## **DONATIONS**

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 payable to: Dominican Friars of Raleigh. Or, go to our webpage to make an online donation: <http://preacherexchange.com/donations.htm>

Thanks you and blessings on your preaching,  
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