Joy (April 20 – May 4)

Easter Sunday, April 20

Moved to Greater Love concludes with the desire for joy. Having prayed to join ourselves with Jesus’ vision as he moved toward Calvary, we now share the joy that the Risen Lord brought to those first witnesses of his abiding presence. Joy cannot remain within us; it compels us to share the good news we have received. As Pope Francis wrote, “…an evangelizing community is filled with joy; it knows how to rejoice always. It celebrates every small victory, every step forward in the work of evangelization.” (Evangelii Gaudium, #24)

During these two weeks, we pray that Easter joy fills us and binds us together as co-workers for the Reign of God.

Today’s Grace

I ask for the grace to experience the risen Jesus bringing joy and peace.

Scripture/Reading

Reading via the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops website: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/042014.cfm

Jn 20:1-9
On the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark, and saw the stone removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them, “They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don’t know where they put him.”
So Peter and the other disciple went out and came to the tomb. They both ran, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and arrived at the tomb first; he bent down and saw the burial cloths there, but did not go in. When Simon Peter arrived after him, he went into the tomb and saw the burial cloths there, and the cloth that had covered his head, not with the burial cloths but rolled up in a separate place. Then the other disciple also went in, the one who had arrived at the tomb first, and he saw and believed. For they did not yet understand the Scripture that he had to rise from the dead.

Reflection Questions

1. I sit in the empty tomb with Peter and the Beloved Disciple and reminisce with them about our best memories of Jesus — and now this empty tomb. What best memories of Jesus do I share with them? What do I say about the empty tomb? What do I feel as we talk?

Reflection

From the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops website:
http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/042014.cfm

This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad. Alleluia. The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. By the LORD has this been done; it is wonderful in our eyes. This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad. Alleluia.

Other Resources

View the daily readings at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops website:
http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/042014.cfm

Image via Creighton University’s Online Retreat Photo Gallery:
http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/photos30.html

Exsultet from Easter Vigil:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0FRtv_qdFFU
Easter Monday, April 21

Today’s Grace

I ask for the grace to encounter the risen Jesus, to embrace him and be embraced by him.

Scripture/Reading

From Pope Francis’ homily at the 2013 Easter Vigil, held in St. Peter’s Basilica:

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Newness often makes us fearful, including the newness which God brings us, the newness which God asks of us. We are like the Apostles in the Gospel: often we would prefer to hold on to our own security, to stand in front of a tomb, to think about someone who has died, someone who ultimately lives on only as a memory, like the great historical figures from the past. We are afraid of God’s surprises. Dear brothers and sisters, we are afraid of God’s surprises! He always surprises us! The Lord is like that.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us not be closed to the newness that God wants to bring into our lives! Are we often weary, disheartened and sad? Do we feel weighed down by our sins? Do we think that we won’t be able to cope? Let us not close our hearts, let us not lose confidence, let us never give up: there are no situations which God cannot change, there is no sin which he cannot forgive if only we open ourselves to him.

Jesus no longer belongs to the past, but lives in the present and is projected towards the future; Jesus is the everlasting “today” of God. This is how the newness of God appears to the women, the disciples and all of us: as victory over sin, evil and death, over everything that crushes life and makes it seem less human. And this is a message meant for me and for you dear sister, for you dear brother. How often does Love have to tell us: Why do you look for the living among the dead? Our daily problems and worries can wrap us up in ourselves, in sadness and bitterness ... and that is where death is. That is not the place to look for the One who is alive!

Reflection Questions

1. I think of a time when a close friend or family member shared with me some wonderful news — falling in love, having a baby, getting a job, being declared cancer-free, etc. What
was it like to listen, ask questions, sit together in silent joy and gratitude, break out some wine and celebrate? Now the risen Jesus enters and shares his story of victory with me? How do we share and celebrate his good news?

**Reflection**

From the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops website: [http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/042114.cfm](http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/042114.cfm)

Keep me safe, O God; you are my hope. Alleluia.

Therefore my heart is glad and my soul rejoices, my body, too, abides in confidence; Because you will not abandon my soul to the nether world, nor will you suffer your faithful one to undergo corruption.

Keep me safe, O God; you are my hope. Alleluia.

You will show me the path to life, fullness of joys in your presence, the delights at your right hand forever.

Keep me safe, O God; you are my hope. Alleluia.

**Music: “I Know that My Redeemer Liveth” from Handel’s “Messiah”**

[http://youtu.be/4Q0qho_hKEg](http://youtu.be/4Q0qho_hKEg)

**Other Resources**

View the daily readings at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops website: [http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/042114.cfm](http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/042114.cfm)
Easter Tuesday, April 22

Today’s Grace

I ask for the grace of experiencing the risen Jesus giving energy to my life throughout this day.

Scripture/Reading

St. Irenaeus of Lyons famously wrote that the glory of God is the human fully alive. In our ministerial life, there are always the tasks we do because we have to, true. But we accept them as necessary supports to what we would rather do naturally and joyfully. In our personal lives, we encounter discouragement, losses and setbacks, true. But we also find ourselves surprised by simple joys — a thoughtful note from an old friend, a former student reaching out to say thanks or a consoling bit of news that fills our sails with renewed energy and joy.

In his apostolic exhortation Evangelii Gaudium, Pope Francis writes, “I can say that the most beautiful and natural expressions of joy which I have seen in my life were in poor people who had little to hold on to. I also think of the real joy shown by others who, even amid pressing professional obligations, were able to preserve, in detachment and simplicity, a heart full of faith. In their own way, all these instances of joy flow from the infinite love of God, who has revealed himself to us in Jesus Christ.” (Evangelii Gaudium §7)

Reflection Questions

1. I think of a time when I was fully engaged in doing my apostolic work — teaching, counseling, celebrating Eucharist, working in an office, praying for others — performing “at the top of my game.” Now I think of a simple joy I have experienced recently in my personal life. Jesus walks in and invites me to talk to him about these things that have given me renewed life and joy. What do I say? How does Jesus react? What perspective does Jesus give me to face the unpleasant tasks and realities in my work and life?
Reflection

From the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops website: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/042214.cfm

The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord. Alleluia.

See, the eyes of the LORD are upon those who fear him, upon those who hope for his kindness, To deliver them from death and preserve them in spite of famine.

The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord. Alleluia.

Music: “Gloria” by Antonio Vivaldi http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hlR5p0ibdoY

Other Resources

View the daily readings at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops website: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/042214.cfm
Easter Wednesday, April 23

Today’s Grace

I ask for the grace to recognize Jesus walking with me through each day.

Scripture/Reading

Reading via the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops website:
http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/042314.cfm

Lk 24:13-35

That very day, the first day of the week, two of Jesus’ disciples were going
to a village seven miles from Jerusalem called Emmaus,
and they were conversing about all the things that had occurred.

And it happened that while they were conversing and debating,
Jesus himself drew near and walked with them,
but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him.

He asked them,
“What are you discussing as you walk along?”

They stopped, looking downcast.

One of them, named Cleopas, said to him in reply,
“Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem
who does not know of the things
that have taken place there in these days?”

And he replied to them, “What sort of things?”

They said to him,
“The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene,
who was a prophet mighty in deed and word
before God and all the people,
how our chief priests and rulers both handed him over
to a sentence of death and crucified him.

But we were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel;
and besides all this,
it is now the third day since this took place.

Some women from our group, however, have astounded us:
they were at the tomb early in the morning
and did not find his Body;
they came back and reported
that they had indeed seen a vision of angels.

“La cena de Emaús” by Diego Velázquez
who announced that he was alive.
Then some of those with us went to the tomb
and found things just as the women had described,
but him they did not see.”
And he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are!
How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke!
Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things
and enter into his glory?”
Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets,
he interpreted to them what referred to him
in all the Scriptures.
As they approached the village to which they were going,
he gave the impression that he was going on farther.
But they urged him, “Stay with us,
for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over.”
So he went in to stay with them.
And it happened that, while he was with them at table,
he took bread, said the blessing,
broke it, and gave it to them.
With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him,
but he vanished from their sight.
Then they said to each other,
“Were not our hearts burning within us
while he spoke to us on the way and opened the Scriptures to us?”
So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem
where they found gathered together
the Eleven and those with them who were saying,
“The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!”
Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way
and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Reflection Questions

1. I place myself in today’s Gospel story of Emmaus. A friend and I are walking and talking
about our disappointments, those things that rob us of hope. As we are venting, I sense a
presence approaching from behind — Jesus — and invite him into our conversation.
Without censoring my frustrations, what does Jesus have to say in response? Can I entrust
these difficulties to Jesus in prayer?

Reflection

Music: “Ode to Joy”
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8R1f8d1oLI

Other Resources

View the daily readings at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops website:
http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/042314.cfm
Easter Thursday, April 24

Today’s Grace

I ask for the grace to rejoice in the love Jesus has for me when I see his wounds.

Scripture/Reading

Reading via the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops website:
http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/042414.cfm

Lk 24:35-48
The disciples of Jesus recounted what had taken place along the way, and how they had come to recognize him in the breaking of bread.

While they were still speaking about this, he stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be with you.”
But they were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost.
Then he said to them, “Why are you troubled? And why do questions arise in your hearts?
Look at my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you can see I have.”
And as he said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.
While they were still incredulous for joy and were amazed, he asked them, “Have you anything here to eat?”
They gave him a piece of baked fish; he took it and ate it in front of them.

He said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and in the prophets and psalms must be fulfilled.”
Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.
And he said to them, “Thus it is written that the Christ would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins,
would be preached in his name
to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.
You are witnesses of these things.”

Reflection Questions

1. I see myself in the upper room with Jesus’ disciples. I know how crucifixion totally destroys a person. How do I respond to these reports of Jesus being alive?
2. Jesus says to us: Look at my hands and feet; touch me and see. Do I touch him? Do I touch his wounds? He invites me to speak. What do I say?
3. Jesus says: You are witnesses of these things. What things? How do I witness to these things? How do I witness to his aliveness, to his wounds? I speak to Jesus about how he can help me in my witnessing.

Reflection

Music: “Sing to the Mountains” by Bob Dufford, SJ
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HikI2dLRMCc

Other Resources

View the daily readings at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops website:
http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/042414.cfm
Easter Friday, April 25

Today’s Grace

I ask for the grace to show in my words and actions the deep-down hope that comes from the Resurrection.

Scripture/Reading

Reading via the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops website:
http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/042514.cfm

Acts 4:1-12
After the crippled man had been cured, while Peter and John were still speaking to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple guard, and the Sadducees confronted them, disturbed that they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. They laid hands on Peter and John and put them in custody until the next day, since it was already evening. But many of those who heard the word came to believe and the number of men grew to about five thousand.

On the next day, their leaders, elders, and scribes were assembled in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly class. They brought them into their presence and questioned them, “By what power or by what name have you done this?” Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, answered them, “Leaders of the people and elders: If we are being examined today about a good deed done to a cripple, namely, by what means he was saved, then all of you and all the people of Israel should know that it was in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead; in his name this man stands before you healed. He is the stone rejected by you, the builders,
which has become the cornerstone. There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved.”

Jesus makes Peter, a timid fisherman who betrayed Jesus, the cornerstone of his Church. With Easter joy, Peter writes, “Now who is going to harm you if you are enthusiastic for what is good? But even if you should suffer because of righteousness, blessed are you. Do not be afraid or terrified with fear of them, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts. **Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope.**” (1 Peter 3:13-15)

In his apostolic letter, Pope Francis challenges us to consider what tempts us away from this Christian hope: “One of the more serious temptations which stifles boldness and zeal is a defeatism which turns us into querulous and disillusioned pessimists, ‘sourpusses.’ Nobody can go off to battle unless he is fully convinced of victory beforehand. If we start without confidence, we have already lost half the battle and we bury our talents. … The evil spirit of defeatism is brother to the temptation to separate, before its time, the wheat from the weeds; it is the fruit of an anxious and self-centered lack of trust.” — *Evangelii Gaudium* §85

**Reflection Questions**

1. I consider what my “default settings” are in handling bad news or unwelcome information: about politics, the Church, superiors, etc. How do I tend to respond to it: with cynicism and despair, or with confidence and trust in Christ’s promise? At home and work, do I relish the role of cynical gadfly, or do I offer Christ-like hope?

2. Do my words and actions attract others to follow Christ? I ask for light to consider — and renew — the sources of my hope. Like St. Peter, I ask for God’s grace and perseverance to overcome any attitudes which do not bear good fruit.

**Reflection**

**Music:** Violin Concerto 2 in E, BWV 1042 – 1. Allegro:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B56njjw1qtk

**Other Resources**

View the daily readings at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops website:
http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/042514.cfm
Easter Saturday April 26

Today’s Grace

I ask for the grace to remember the gifts of joy and peace that Jesus brings even long after these days of prayer have finished.

Scripture/Reading

Reading via the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops website: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/042714.cfm

1 Pt 1:3-9
Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in his great mercy gave us a new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you who by the power of God are safeguarded through faith, to a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the final time. In this you rejoice, although now for a little while you may have to suffer through various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that is perishable even though tested by fire, may prove to be for praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Although you have not seen him you love him; even though you do not see him now yet believe in him, you rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, as you attain the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Reflection Questions

1. I am sitting alone in the empty tomb. It reminds me of the empty places in my life, the dead places that take away my joy or that rob me of hope when I look to the future. The risen Jesus enters and asks me what I have been thinking about. What do I say? How does the presence of Jesus make a difference?

2. I look back over the prayer materials from this past Easter week. What sticks out from my own prayer and reflection? Where did I feel alive and joyful? What led me to feel like I “was not there yet?” I talk with my God about this past week.
Reflection

Music: “Jesus the Lord” by Roc O’Connor, SJ
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=13CLSLTKJ50

Other Resources

View the daily readings at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops website:
http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/042614.cfm
Sunday, April 27

Today’s Grace

I ask for the grace to receive the Holy Spirit and be sent out as evidence of God’s love for the world.

Scripture/Reading

Reading via the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops website: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/042714.cfm

Jn 20:19-31

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.”

Thomas, called Didymus, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples said to him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nailmarks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

Now a week later his disciples were again inside and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, although the doors were locked, and stood in their midst and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe.”

“The Incredulity of Saint Thomas” by Caravaggio
Thomas answered and said to him, “My Lord and my God!”
Jesus said to him, “Have you come to believe because you have seen me?
Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.”

Now, Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples
that are not written in this book.
But these are written that you may come to believe
that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,
and that through this belief you may have life in his name.

How do we make a case for God in our world? Dozens of Jesuit scholastics in the United States have
had a class or two with Dr. Paul Moser, the chair in the philosophy department at Loyola University
Chicago. A sharp analytic philosopher by training, Moser went through a long period of agnostic
doubt about God. Like doubting Thomas in today’s Gospel passage, a younger Moser was looking for
more convincing evidence of God’s existence and work in the world. To paraphrase Bertrand Russell,
if a morally perfect God does exist, he has not given us enough evidence. Many bright, ethical people
have given up on religious belief for similar reasons.

But Moser began to challenge his own assumptions about how a God worthy of worship would act,
if such a God does exist. Moser’s conclusion was that a God worthy of worship would not be content
with easy proofs, because then we could observe God as mere spectators, like disinterested
scientists in a lab. At the same time, a God worthy of worship would not co-opt the free will of those
who claim God by forcing their hands to do good. Rather, this God would invite humans to become
living evidence (not conclusive proof) of a good God. This invitation could only be heard by those who
are disposed to listen for that interior call. The challenge is that responding to God’s call requires a
change of heart, such that people no longer live for themselves but for others. “Such non-coercive
empowering of what we may call ‘agape transformation’ would aim for cooperative divine-human
fellowship,” that models, however imperfectly and briefly, God’s morally perfect character (Paul
Moser, “Evidence for God,” 215). Put simply: to our modern world, the most compelling evidence for
God is a life well-lived by those who claim God.

Reflection Questions

1. I consider Moser’s claim that God desires an ongoing “agape transformation” in my heart. I
look to the people around me who model selfless love, who generously give of themselves
with little concern for their own well-being. Do they reflect joy and attract others? I ask for
Jesus’ perseverance in this Christian life, that I may be living evidence of Christ’s joy and
mercy in the world today.

Reflection

Music: “Worthy is the Lamb” and “Amen” from Handel’s “Messiah”
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mRR6fSLLiw

http://jesuits.org/greaterlove
Other Resources

View the daily readings at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops website:
http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/042714.cfm
Monday, April 28

Today’s Grace

I ask for the grace to carry on the work of Jesus in touching, embracing, forgiving and uniting the people in my life.

Scripture/Reading

Reading via the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops website: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/042714.cfm

Acts 4:23-31
They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one’s need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

From “Jesus of Nazareth” by Gerhard Lohfink (Liturgical Press, p. 353):

Jesus does not portray a utopian “realm of freedom,” but he leads those who follow him into freedom. He does not describe the condition in which all alienation will be miraculously overcome, but he says, “Those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it” (Luke 9:24). This is how Jesus projects society under the rule of God. He sets no preconditions: the reign of God is already beginning; its powers are already at work; it gives a new way of being together, even a new society, but not one that needs to be dreamed up. It takes place in the daily companionship of the one table, in common discipleship, in daily reconciliation. It happens out of joy in what God is doing. And it is by no means the case that this coming of the reign of God happens purely within. No, sick people are being healed, demonic forces are being overcome, the hungry are being filled, and enemies are being reconciled.
Reflection Questions

1. Are these two readings simply “over the top”? Do I see any evidence of communal life growing? Is there daily companionship of the one table? Is there common discipleship? Is there daily reconciliation? Is there joy in what God is doing in this world? I speak to Jesus about this.

2. Is my hope different from simple optimism (everything will work out)? Paul says hope is not hope if the object is seen. What do I hope for? What do I long for? What do I desire to see that I don’t see yet? I speak to God about this.

Reflection

Other Resources

View the daily readings at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops website: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/042814.cfm
Tuesday, April 29
(Memorial of Saint Catherine of Siena, Virgin and Doctor of the Church)

Today’s Grace

I ask for the grace to rediscover the simple joy of Easter in my daily work, school, recreation, family and community.

Scripture/Reading

What do I love? St. Catherine of Siena wrote that love transforms us into what we love. How I choose to direct my time and energy — at work or at home — will inevitably inform what I begin to desire, for good or ill. Even for Jesuits, it can be easy to get caught up looking for distractions in secondary things — new books, clothing or shoes; another vacation; the latest piece of technology. With free evenings, it can become easy to glut ourselves on food and drink, constant socializing or Netflix. In moderation, these things may help us to unwind and forget about work for a while. But as with all created things, they risk becoming idols that diffuse our good desires and weaken communal life and apostolic witness. Pope Francis, in a July 2013 address to seminarians, brothers and sisters in formation, cautioned about the danger of seeking joy in things:

“There is joy. But where is joy born? … Some will say: joy is born from the things one has, and so, the search for the latest model of the smartphone, the fastest scooter, the car that attracts attention … But I tell you, true joy doesn’t come from things, from having, no! … Joy is born from the gratuitousness of an encounter! And from hearing it said: ‘You are important to me,’ — not necessarily in words…

In calling us God says to us: ‘You are important to me, I love you, I count on you.’ Jesus says this to each one of us! Joy is born from here, the joy of the moment in which Jesus looked at me. To understand and to feel this is the secret of our joy. To feel loved by God, to feel that for Him we are not numbers, but persons; and to feel that it is He who calls us.”
Reflection Questions

1. I consider my internal disposition to God’s call. In a letter, St. Catherine advised, “Let us enter into the house of knowledge of ourselves.” I ask for the grace of better knowledge of myself: where am I tepid, sluggish or distracted from the deeper joy of a relationship with God? Where do I need to ask for God’s light and aid to rekindle Christ-like joy?

2. I consider a thought experiment: What if I were to die today, and someone came to clean out my bedroom? What would they learn about me, based on what is in my room? With my mind’s eye, I consider my room and personal items. Which of these things distracts me from a Christ-like simplicity? What are two to three concrete things that I can get rid of, so I can better encounter the living God? “Love follows knowledge,” wrote St. Catherine of Siena, and “love does not stay idle.”

Reflection

Music: “Nulla in mundo pax sincera (RV 630)” by Antonio Vivaldi
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G_ETroHLPGk

Other Resources

View the daily readings at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops website:
http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/042914.cfm
Wednesday, April 30

Today’s Grace

I ask for the grace to reach out to people around me who seem alienated, disillusioned or hopeless.

Scripture/Reading

Reading via the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops website: [http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/043014.cfm](http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/043014.cfm)

**Jn 3:16-21**

God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him will not be condemned, but whoever does not believe has already been condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God.

And this is the verdict, that the light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light, because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come toward the light, so that his works might not be exposed. But whoever lives the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God.

**Pope Francis had these stirring words to say to the bishops in Brazil during World Youth Day 2013:**

Let us read once again, in this light, the story of Emmaus (cf. Lk 24:13-15). The two disciples have left Jerusalem. They are leaving behind the “nakedness” of God. They are scandalized by the failure of the Messiah in whom they had hoped and who now appeared utterly vanquished, humiliated, even after the third day (vv. 17-21). Here we have to face the difficult mystery of those people who leave the Church, who, under the illusion of alternative ideas, now think that the Church — their Jerusalem — can no longer offer them anything meaningful and important. So they set off on the road alone, with their disappointment.

Perhaps the Church appeared too weak, perhaps too distant from their needs, perhaps too poor to
respond to their concerns, perhaps too cold, perhaps too caught up with itself, perhaps a prisoner of its own rigid formulas, perhaps the world seems to have made the Church a relic of the past, unfit for new questions; perhaps the Church could speak to people in their infancy but not to those come of age. It is a fact that nowadays there are many people like the two disciples of Emmaus; not only those looking for answers in the new religious groups that are sprouting up, but also those who already seem godless, both in theory and in practice.

Faced with this situation, what are we to do?

We need a Church unafraid of going forth into their night. We need a Church capable of meeting them on their way. We need a Church capable of entering into their conversation. We need a Church able to dialogue with those disciples who, having left Jerusalem behind, are wandering aimlessly, alone, with their own disappointment, disillusioned by a Christianity now considered barren, fruitless soil; incapable of generating meaning.

Reflection Questions

(From our different age perspectives)

For those of us in our golden years:

1. Do the words of Pope Francis help me to look back with pride and joy on my life and ministry in the Church, Society of Jesus and its institutions? Or do I feel like somebody has changed the rules or “moved the goalposts,” leaving me feeling empty and useless when I look back? I speak to God about this.
2. Do the pope’s words fill me with energy to reach out to those who have become alienated or disillusioned? Or do I feel confused and lacking the tools to take on this task, not even knowing where to begin relating to people in today’s culture? I speak to God about this.
3. Is the Resurrection of Jesus Christ part of my conversation with God about these things?

For those of us in the midst of our apostolic life:

1. How do the words of Pope Francis encourage me to reach out to my disillusioned contemporaries? Or do I find myself at a loss for how to reach out to the margins of the Church? I speak to God about this.
2. At my core, what is the central piece of good news that energizes my life and which I wish to share with today’s culture? What setbacks and struggles in my own life has God already been using to make me a better minister of His mercy and love?
3. Is the Resurrection of Jesus Christ part of my conversation with God about these things?

Reflection

Song: Jeff Buckley sings Leonard Cohen’s “Hallelujah”
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y8AWFf7EAc4

Other Resources

View the daily readings at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops website:
http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/043014.cfm
Thursday, May 1

Today’s Grace

I ask for the grace to be open to new opportunities both within and beyond my current work.

Scripture/Reading

Reading via the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops website:
http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/050114.cfm

Ps 34:2 and 9, 17-18, 19-20
I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall be ever in my mouth. Taste and see how good the LORD is; blessed the man who takes refuge in him.

The Lord hears the cry of the poor. Alleluia.

The LORD confronts the evildoers, to destroy remembrance of them from the earth. When the just cry out, the LORD hears them, and from all their distress he rescues them.

The Lord hears the cry of the poor. Alleluia.

The LORD is close to the brokenhearted; and those who are crushed in spirit he saves. Many are the troubles of the just man, but out of them all the LORD delivers him.

The Lord hears the cry of the poor. Alleluia.

From Jesuit Father General Adolfo Nicolás’ De statu Societatis, a 2012 summary of the state of the Society of Jesus in the world:

I am happy to say that, from my observations and from your reports, it seems there has been a widespread rediscovery of the universal dimension of our vocation in the Society. In many parts of the Society, there is a renewed awareness that we enter the Society, not a province, and so, especially among our young men, there is an increased willingness to be sent for mission anywhere where there is need in the world. There is increased inter-province and inter-conference cooperation, and there is much generous sharing of resources and manpower.
Behind the reports on apostolate and community, one discerns signs of spiritual health in the Society. Jesuits, on the whole, work hard, with dedication to mission. The growth of the sense of universal vocation, of availability for mission in any place where there is need, particularly in challenging missions, is an encouraging sign of spiritual freedom and apostolic zeal in the Society. *The courage and the creativity to begin new apostolic initiatives to serve the poor and to share the Gospel; the perseverance of Jesuits in difficult situations of poverty, war or violence, religious persecution or discrimination; daily, joyful fidelity to prayer, to the Eucharist, to the vows and the greater commitment to community life: all these are indicators of good spiritual health that I find in your reports.* [emphasis added]

**Reflection Questions**

1. I consider my experiences working directly with the poor. I recall the names and faces of people whose lives and concerns have touched my own. I call to mind the feelings — positive and negative — that arise within me. I speak to Jesus, whose special love of the poor ignored social conventions and defied expectations. Without glamorizing poverty, what have I learned from the poor?
2. From my own attractions and resistances, what have I learned about how I relate to the poor? Is God calling me to consider working more directly with the poor?

**Reflection**

*Music: “The Cry of the Poor” by John Foley, SJ*
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1FYWUv9dTyQ

**Other Resources**

View the daily readings at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops website:
http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/050114.cfm

**Image via Catholic News Service/Vincent West, Reuters**
Friday, May 2

Today’s Grace

I ask for the grace to rejoice at the opportunities to imitate Jesus in the sufferings of everyday life.

Scripture/Reading

Reading via the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops website:
http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/050214.cfm

Acts 5:34-42

A Pharisee in the Sanhedrin named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, respected by all the people, stood up, ordered the Apostles to be put outside for a short time, and said to the Sanhedrin, “Fellow children of Israel, be careful what you are about to do to these men. Some time ago, Theudas appeared, claiming to be someone important, and about four hundred men joined him, but he was killed, and all those who were loyal to him were disbanded and came to nothing. After him came Judas the Galilean at the time of the census. He also drew people after him, but he too perished and all who were loyal to him were scattered. So now I tell you, have nothing to do with these men, and let them go. For if this endeavor or this activity is of human origin, it will destroy itself. But if it comes from God, you will not be able to destroy them; you may even find yourselves fighting against God.” They were persuaded by him. After recalling the Apostles, they had them flogged, ordered them to stop speaking in the name of Jesus, and dismissed them. So they left the presence of the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they had been found worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name. And all day long, both at the temple and in their homes, they did not stop teaching and proclaiming the Christ, Jesus.
As our team sat with the Mass readings for each day to prepare these reflections, we looked for those Scripture passages that best spoke of Easter joy. And what could be more joyful than a good post-Resurrection flogging?

We have all sat through a homily or two where the preacher tiptoes around an unpleasant reading involving wrath, grinding of teeth or violence. Our team was similarly tempted to skip this reading from Acts, in which the Apostles are flogged for living out their faith in Christ. But life is rarely sunshine and roses, and pain — in mind, body or spirit — invites a mature response from us who claim the cross as our sign of salvation.

The Catholic writer Heather King writes, “Pleasure is shallow, but joy has pain in the middle of it. Pleasure comes and goes, but joy has eternity in it.” On Tuesday of this week we reflected on the distractive pleasures that are in our control; but Christian joy is a gift that we cannot give ourselves. It comes from without, often enough as the fruit of pain and quiet suffering.

Reflection Questions

1. I sit with Jesus and consider an experience in my life of great pain and anguish. It might be the death of a loved one, a friendship that has soured or enduring an assignment that seemed to drain me of life. I talk with Jesus about this experience — and ask for light to see the graces that were available to me in the midst of it. I pray for the grace to receive even pain as an opportunity for growth and insight.

Reflection

The Uses of Sorrow
by Mary Oliver

(In my sleep I dreamed this poem)

Someone I love once gave me
a box full of darkness.

It took me years to understand
that this, too, was a gift.

Music: “This Alone” by Tim Manion
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-VA2-juTiTA&feature=kp

Other Resources

View the daily readings at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops website:
http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/050214.cfm

Image via http://helensjournal.wordpress.com/2013/07/21/a-box-full-of-darkness/
Saturday, May 3

Today’s Grace

I ask for the grace to follow Jesus who is my way and my truth and my life.

Scripture/Reading

Pope Francis to the bishops of Brazil, July 27, 2013:

Today, we need a Church capable of walking at people’s side, of doing more than simply listening to them; a Church which accompanies them on their journey; a Church able to make sense of the “night” contained in the flight of so many of our brothers and sisters from Jerusalem; a Church which realizes that the reasons why people leave also contain reasons why they can eventually return. But we need to know how to interpret, with courage, the larger picture.

I would like all of us to ask ourselves today: are we still a Church capable of warming hearts? A Church capable of leading people back to Jerusalem? Of bringing them home? Jerusalem is where our roots are: Scripture, catechesis, sacraments, community, friendship with the Lord, Mary and the apostles … Are we still able to speak of these roots in a way that will revive a sense of wonder at their beauty?

Many people have left because they were promised something more lofty, more powerful, and faster. But what is more lofty than the love revealed in Jerusalem? Nothing is more lofty than the abasement of the Cross, since there we truly approach the height of love! Are we still capable of demonstrating this truth to those who think that the apex of life is to be found elsewhere? Do we know anything more powerful than the strength hidden within the weakness of love, goodness, truth and beauty?

Reading via the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops website: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/050314.cfm
Ps 19:2-3, 4-5
Their message goes out through all the earth. Alleluia.

The heavens declare the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.
Day pours out the word to day;
and night to night imparts knowledge.

Their message goes out through all the earth. Alleluia.

Not a word nor a discourse
whose voice is not heard;
Through all the earth their voice resounds,
and to the ends of the world, their message.

Their message goes out through all the earth. Alleluia.

Reflection Questions
I look back over the prayer materials from the last two months.

1. What sticks out from my own prayer and reflection? Where did I feel alive and joyful? What led me to feel like “God was not finished with me yet”? 
2. I talk with my God about this prayer experience. 

Reflection

Music: “Take, Lord, Receive” by John Foley, SJ
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UrX_T5QLBXQ&list=RD-VA2-juTiTA

Other Resources
View the daily readings at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops website:
http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/050314.cfm
Sunday, May 4

Today marks the final day of *Moved to Greater Love*, the first digital communal prayer experience for the Society of Jesus in the United States. The Jesuit provincials who conceived of the project invited participants to “consider how God’s love burns away fear and opens us up to respond generously and wholeheartedly.” Over these nine weeks, we have explored the themes of gratitude, spiritual freedom, vision and joy, and we have kept the provincials’ hopes very near by challenging ourselves to respond to God’s call with greater spiritual depth and freedom.

Today, we invite you to pray in retrospect on the *Moved to Greater Love* experience. Ignatian prayer uses the “Examen” as a way of reviewing the activity of God over a period of time – a meeting, a day, or longer. It is essentially a process of asking God to help one see the graces that have been present in moments ordinary and extraordinary.

For those new to this way of praying, three ways of praying the Examen are linked below. Today you are invited to use the material of *Moved to Greater Love* and your experiences during this time as your prayer.

**Scripture/Reading**


*Lk 24:30-32*

And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the Scriptures to us?”

**Reflection Questions**

1. *Moved to Greater Love* comes from a phrase regarding spiritual graces from the *Memoriale* of St. Peter Faber, a companion of St. Ignatius Loyola and one of the early Jesuits. During these nine weeks, what has “moved” me most deeply? Which scripture passages, poems, music, readings still resonate with me? Bring two or three of them back to mind and pray over them again, letting the graces of then and now be present. I speak with God about this.

http://jesuits.org/greaterlove
2. During these nine weeks, how have I experienced “greater love”? Have I shared greater love with others? Received it from others? Received greater love from God? Shared it with God? Bring one or two of these moments back to mind and pray over them, letting the graces of then and now be present. I speak to God about this.

3. How am I now moved to greater love? What am I called to do in my own life? In my relationship with God? In my ministry or job? I speak to God about this.

4. For Jesuits and colleagues in Jesuit ministries: What effect has Moved to Greater Love had on my perspectives of my ministry? How can the gifts of gratitude, freedom, vision and joy shape the ministry I am a part of? What would be important for the director of my ministry and/or the provincial to hear about the ministry in light of Moved to Greater Love? I speak to God about this.

Reflection

A Poetic Rendering of The First Principle and Foundation Of Ignatius Loyola
By Christine Rodgers

Love made me —
Love sustains me —
Love leads me forth.

For this I sing praise,
bow low, and put
my life at the disposal
of Love.

Every tree — every
single star in the sky
points back toward
the Beloved.

May nothing pull me
away from Love— no
small wish of mine
next to the immensity
of the Beloved.

With the Beloved
may I shine.

Music: “But Thanks be to God, Madrigale” from Handel's “Messiah”
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uOnDaUMHkCw

Music: “Give Thanks with a Grateful Heart” by Fatima Soriano
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bk_7wUR2Wdg
Music: “Perfect Day” by Lou Reed
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pgviDNeXQ2w

Examen Texts:

“Rummaging for God” by Dennis Hamm, SJ (From America Magazine, May 14, 1994)
http://jesuits.org/Assets/Publications/File/RummagingforGod.pdf

The Daily Examen by James Martin, SJ
http://jesuits.org/Assets/Publications/File/The_Daily_Examen.pdf

Examen from U.S. Jesuit Vocation Brochure

Other Resources

View the daily readings at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops website:
http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/050414.cfm

Note: You will receive a final email tomorrow with an opportunity for feedback and suggestions for next steps.

Moved to Greater Love contributors: