



Bringing Home the Word

Fifth Sunday of Easter (A)

May 7, 2023

What Is God Really Like?

By Sr. Dianne Bergant, CSA

That is a very profound question, asked by children and adults alike. Answers range from the image of an old man in a white robe with a beard; the all-seeing eye on the back of the dollar bill; “the big guy up there.” Such answers seem frivolous when we think about the dynamic force behind the Big Bang from which evolved everything in the billions of galaxies that we know exist. What is such a God really like?

The disciples were probably not thinking of astrophysics when they asked Jesus about God. Their questions

flowed from Jesus’ constant reference to God as “Father.” That title in itself tells us something about God. It tells us that God, like a father, is the source of Jesus’ being and existence.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus tells the disciples that he is about to return to his Father. He also assures them that they also will have a place with the Father. However, like us, they still are not sure what this Father is like. Jesus responds to their lack of understanding and suggests: “Look at me!” His life is lived for others. He is one who cares for those in need rather than walks past them, who forgives rather than condemns, who endures misunderstanding without retaliating, who tolerates the pettiness of others without being snide. Why is it so hard for us to realize that this is what God is really like?

The disciples want to know what God is like. Jesus says, “Look at me!” †

Sunday Readings

Acts 6:1–7

The word of God continued to spread, and the number of the disciples in Jerusalem increased greatly.

1 Peter 2:4–9

Come to him, a living stone...and, like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house.

John 14:1–12

Jesus said to him, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

**Want to see God?
Observe Jesus.**



A Word from Pope Francis

One could summarize the diaconal spirituality...of service... ready to say yes, docile, without making life revolve around one’s own agenda; and...looking at everyone, especially those left out, those who feel excluded... To receive not only the needy, but those who have pain.... I entrust this to you.

ADDRESS TO THE PERMANENT DEACONS OF THE DIOCESE OF ROME, JUNE 19, 2021



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- How do I imagine God?
- How do I feel about people who think differently about God?

Ministries Grew from Needs of People

By Paige Byrne Shortal

"As the number of disciples continued to grow, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution."

Acts 6:1

The Acts of the Apostles is the story of the early church struggling to survive its infancy. Jesus didn't leave instructions about what to do when there were Greek members and Hebrew members who came from cultures so different that communication was painfully difficult. Greek meets Jew was as much of a clash of cultures as Midwest meets Mayan. But they were all believers, all on fire with the Spirit, all filled with the excitement of participating in something new, something right and just.

Jesus' plan for us?
Pray. Discern. Act.

"So the twelve called together the community of the disciples



and said, 'It is not right for us to neglect the word of God to serve at table. Select from among you seven reputable men, filled with the Spirit and wisdom, whom we shall appoint to the task....'"

Acts 6:2

The first deacons
(Diakonos: Greek for "service")

For a while, the ministry of deacon died out and became only a rank or stopping place on the way to priesthood.

We still have vestiges of this in the title transitional deacon. Vatican II restored the diaconate, and those we now call permanent deacons are not "mini-priests," but men with their own unique call to service.

As the Church grew, so did the need for people with different gifts to minister to the community. While the early Church was a small group of outlaws, worshiping in secret for fear of their lives, there wasn't much need for ministries like lector, catechist, cantor, minister of the Eucharist, greeter, or usher. Nor were there pastoral councils or commissions for finance, liturgy, social services, and education. These ministries all arose out of need as the Church grew.

The Spirit's work within the Church continues, calling men and women to ministries never imagined in the infancy of the Church. The plan remains: PRAY—fervently! DISCERN—carefully! ACT—courageously! †



Lord Jesus, when there is conflict within our family or community, send your Spirit to guide us to reconciliation and unity, we pray. Amen! Alleluia!

The Redemptorists

Jesus reveals to us a God who is as close to us as the poorest person is. I keep marveling at the radicality as well as the simplicity of Jesus' message. He breaks right through all the questions about what to do in order not to offend God and places the poor in front of us, saying, "This is me...love me." How radical and how simple!

From *Sabbatical Journey* by Henri Nouwen
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WEEKDAY READINGS

May 8–13

Monday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 14:5–18 / Jn 14:21–26

Tuesday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 14:19–28 / Jn 14:27–31a

Wednesday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 15:1–6 / Jn 15:1–8

Thursday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 15:7–21 / Jn 15:9–11

Friday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 15:22–31 / Jn 15:12–17

Saturday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 16:1–10 / Jn 15:18–21

Bringing Home
the **Word** 

May 7, 2023

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Bringing Home the Word

Sixth Sunday of Easter (A)

May 14, 2023

What Is Your Hope?

By Sr. Dianne Bergant, CSA

We have hopes for ourselves and others. We hope for good health, for fulfilling work, for settled lives for our children. As valuable as such hope might be, that is not what Peter is referring to in today's second reading. He is talking about religious hope: not hope that, but hope in. Not hope that God will give us what we ask, that God will supply what we cannot accomplish, that God will reward our faithfulness. That is also valid hope, but it is still not religious hope.

Genuine hope for those who believe in God is hope or trust in God. Period. Trust in God when we have no idea what the future might bring. Trust in God when all our best plans crumble before us. Trust in God when we face the terrors of illness and death. This is a trust or hope for which we do not provide God plans to follow so our needs get met as we think they should be. It is a hope that enables us to place ourselves into the hands of God.

This kind of hope asks for nothing and expects everything. Why? Because we are convinced that God loves us with a passion we can't possibly imagine and, therefore, wants what is best for us. This might seem like an impossible hope, but the reading goes on to list reasons to hope. God's love is exemplified by Jesus Christ, who "suffered for sins...that he might lead you to God" (1 Peter 3:18). Who could ask for more?

This kind of hope asks for nothing and expects everything... because God loves us with a passion we can't possibly imagine and, therefore, wants what is best for us. †

For those who believe in God, hope can be defined as trust in God.

A Word from Pope Francis

To have a healthy family, three words need to be used: please, thanks, sorry. We say "please" so as not to be forceful in family life... We say "thank you" (yet) how many days go by without uttering this word...? And sorry. We all make mistakes.... Don't ever let the sun set without reconciling.

ADDRESS, PILGRIMAGE OF FAMILIES, ROME, OCTOBER 26, 2013



REFLECTION
QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS
REFLECTION

- Do I hope and trust in God?
- In what circumstances do I need to try harder to hope in God?

Sunday Readings

Acts 8:5-8, 14-17

Unclean spirits, crying out in a loud voice, came out of many possessed people.

1 Peter 3:15-18

Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope.

John 14:15-21

[Jesus said,] "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth... You know it, because it remains with you."

Sharing a Cup with the Queen of Angels

By Emily Blasik

I run a lifestyle blog for women called *Her Story Goes* in which I occasionally interview inspiring women in my community. While the conversation typically centers around their passions, accomplishments, and daily rituals, I always end on the same question: “If you could have coffee with one woman, living or dead, who would it be?”

I chose this question because the answer can tell you a lot about a person’s values and aspirations, and the array of names I get are always fascinating—varying from current celebrities to sixteenth-century saints to legendary authors, adventurers, and trailblazers. It’s a hard question for some, but for me, the answer is easy.

I’ve always wondered what it might be like to have coffee with the Blessed Mother. It seems kind of trivial to picture Mary in that context, doesn’t it? The Queen of Angels sitting opposite of me with a warm mug in her hand, softly smiling as I share my innermost thoughts and ask my most burning questions. But somehow, I get the sense that she’d like us to think of her that way: like an old friend with a listening ear, a confidant to lean on during times of sadness or stress, a mother to guide us when we’re lost.



If I could talk to Mary in the flesh, if I could ask her anything I wanted—what would I say? What would I ask? At first, I’d be speechless—in awe of her holiness, as visible as the crown of roses upon her head. But eventually I’d start to relax, to open up, to engage in genuine conversation with our Lady about everything under the sun. I’d embrace her like a long-lost daughter who has finally found her way home: with joy, curiosity, and perhaps a tinge of sorrow at not having met her sooner.

How many hours going forward would I seek her company, knowing full well the infinite amount of love, comfort, and wisdom she’d have to give? Most of

my life, I imagine, would be spent in her presence, if I had anything to say about it. And it occurs to me now, as I write this, that I do. We all do.

Mary might be the Mother of God, perfect in love and kindness and purity, but she’s still a woman who walked this earth like the rest of us. And I have a feeling that she simply wants to be the person sitting across from us at the end of the day, sharing secrets and struggles and hopes and dreams over coffee. †

Our Blessed Mother sits opposite of me with a warm mug in her hand, softly smiling as I share my innermost thoughts and ask my most burning questions.



Lord Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, inspire us to lead holy, faith-filled, generous lives. Amen! Alleluia!

The Redemptorists

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WEEKDAY READINGS

May 15–20

Monday, Easter Weekday:

Acts 16:11–15 / Jn 15:26–16:4a

Tuesday, Easter Weekday:

Acts 16:22–34 / Jn 16:5–11

Wednesday, Easter Weekday:

Acts 17:15, 22–18:1 / Jn 16:12–15

Thursday, Easter Weekday:

Acts 18:1–8 / Jn 16:16–20

Friday, Easter Weekday:

Acts 18:9–18 / Jn 16:20–23

Saturday, Easter Weekday:

Acts 18:23–28 / Jn 16:23b–28

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Bringing Home the Word

Ascension of the Lord (A)

May 21, 2023

Where Are You Looking?

By Sr. Dianne Bergant, CSA

Are we, like the disciples, looking in the wrong direction? As they looked up to heaven, they probably realized what they had lost. Jesus was no longer in their midst. But then, the Easter stories all tell us that they never really understood his risen presence with them. And so they were asked: “Why are you standing here looking at the sky?” (Acts 1:11).

Are we also looking up to heaven when we should be looking out to the world? Of course, it is right that we reflect on Jesus’ ascension. However, today’s understanding of the universe

helps us realize that the biblical account of Jesus’ ascension into heaven may be a way of saying that he is glorified with God. As Paul says, he has been granted the place of honor at God’s right hand, “far above every principality, authority, power, and dominion” with “all things beneath his feet” (Ephesians 1:21–22). Jesus, now with God, radiates the full splendor of his resurrection.

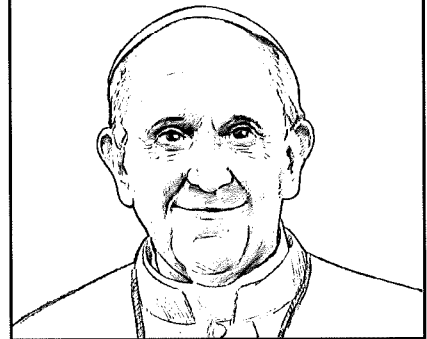
We must turn to the Gospel passage to get the fullness of the story of the ascension. Jesus did not say: “Watch what is going to happen.” Instead he told them to go out: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). We might know these words so well that we miss their forcefulness. In effect, Jesus is telling them: go out to the whole world and tell them what you have seen and heard. I did what it was for me to do; now it is up to you to do the rest. Don’t worry, “I am with you always” (Matthew 28:20). Look where you’re going, not where I went. †

**Turn to the Gospel
passage in Matthew
to get the fullness of the
story of the ascension.**

A Word from Pope Francis

We must ask the Lord...to grant us the gift of wisdom, that wisdom of God that teaches us to see with God’s eyes, to feel with God’s heart, to speak with God’s words. And so, with this wisdom, let us go forward, let us build our family, let us build the Church...

GENERAL AUDIENCE, ROME,
APRIL 9, 2014



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS REFLECTION

- Have I ever missed a blessing because I was too busy looking elsewhere?
- Do I turn my blessings into burdens?

Sunday Readings

Acts 1:1–11

As they were looking on, [Jesus] was lifted up, and a cloud took him from their sight.

Ephesians 1:17–23

And he put all things beneath his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church.

Matthew 28:16–20

[Jesus said,] “Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit.”

A Formula for Contentment

By Fr. Byron Miller, CSsR

Next week we celebrate Pentecost Sunday. On the day of Pentecost, the giddy disciples of Jesus were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak about the mighty acts of God in various tongues. “They were all astounded and bewildered, and said to one another, ‘What does this mean?’ But others said, scoffing, ‘They have had too much new wine.’ Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice, and proclaimed to them, ‘You who are Jews, indeed all of you staying in Jerusalem. Let this be known to you, and listen to my words. These people are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning’” (Acts 2:12–15).

Alleluia! The word itself is so peculiar it sounds like we’re either speaking in tongues, babbling like a child, or inebriated. *Hallelujah* is a transliteration of two Hebrew terms meaning, “Praise the Lord!” It’s an attempt to express our inexpressible happiness after a sobering Lenten season. “In the presence of the mystery that we celebrate on Easter, the mystery of our redemption, our usual intelligible vocabulary is inadequate; when faced with the super abundant mercy of God we can only stammer in amazement like children,” wrote



Balthasar Fischer in *Signs, Words, and Gestures* (Pueblo Publishing Co., 1981).

Yet, the sheer repetition of *Alleluia* throughout the Easter season won’t instill happiness in the one uttering it, if a personal experience of God’s profound love and mercy is lacking. How can our ecstatic hearts keep from singing *Alleluia*, if to know God is to feel elation? This, of course, begs the question: What makes us happy?

On a trip to Tokyo in 1922, Albert Einstein discovered he was without money to tip a bellboy. Sensing the gravity of the faux pas, he scribbled a formula for happiness on a piece of paper—not as famous as his $E = mc^2$ —but isn’t it all relative? His handwritten

note read: “A calm and modest life brings more happiness than the pursuit of success combined with constant restlessness.” Last year, the note sold for \$1.56 million at an auction in Jerusalem.

Is there a secret formula for happiness? According to Earnie Larsen, “The two deepest desires most people have are: to love and be loved and to believe they are worthwhile and know someone else believes that also. In other words, to be happy we need someone to love, something to do, and something to look forward to.” Happiness, then, isn’t winning a few bucks in the lottery. It’s playing ball with your grandson. Happiness isn’t determined by our number of friends on Facebook, but in befriending our Redeemer who tied a towel around his waist, poured water into a basin, and washed his disciples’ feet. After performing this service, the master-turned-attendant tipped us with a formula for contentment: “I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do” (John 13:15). †

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, show us where to look for you and open our eyes to recognize your presence among us, we pray. Amen! Alleluia!

The Redemptorists

This article was previously published in Liguorian, a bimonthly magazine published by the Redemptorists. To subscribe or purchase a gift subscription, visit Liguorian.org or call 866-848-2492.

WEEKDAY READINGS

May 22–27

Monday, Easter Weekday:

Acts 19:1–8 / Jn 16:29–33

Tuesday, Easter Weekday:

Acts 20:17–27 / Jn 17:1–11a

Wednesday, Easter Weekday:

Acts 20:28–38 / Jn 17:11b–19

Thursday, Easter Weekday:

Acts 22:30; 23:6–11 / Jn 17:20–26

Friday, St. Philip Neri:

Acts 25:13b–21 / Jn 21:15–19

Saturday, Easter Weekday:

Acts 28:16–20, 30–31 / Jn 21:20–25

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May 21, 2023

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Bringing Home the Word

Pentecost (A)
May 28, 2023

Look What Blew into Town

By Sr. Dianne Bergant, CSA

Did it really happen the way the story is told? Who would not give anything to have been there? But maybe we have been there. Maybe we have met people who were so open to the mysterious power of the Spirit of God that they were able to accomplish things they never thought they could. Maybe at times even we, too, have been so moved by that mysterious Spirit. Is it possible that we are mistaken about what is truly mysterious or Spirit-driven? Is it possible that we fail to see the mystery of God in everyday life?

This is not to say that nothing extraordinary happened on that Pentecost day. It certainly did! People who kept a low profile out of fear of facing the same deadly fate as their leader seemed to rush out onto the street and proclaim that leader's mighty acts. What has happened to them? How is such a reversal of behavior to be described? It happens that when something wondrous occurs we often use exaggerated images and superlative language in an attempt to capture the astounding character of the event. To embellish language does not mean that the event was not amazing. It means that it was so amazing that we are at a loss to describe or explain it. We are, after all, talking about the dynamic Spirit of God that can completely change people. This is the same Spirit we received at baptism. Are we open to have it change us? †

Sunday Readings

Acts 2:1-11

Suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and...Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire.

1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13

As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ.

John 20:19-23

[Jesus] breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

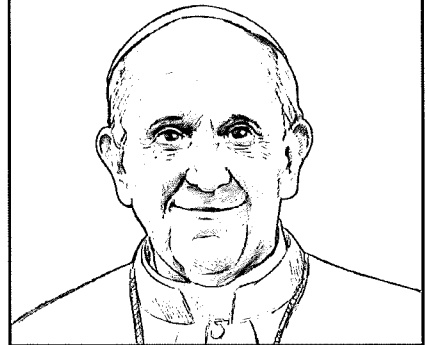
Do we fail to see the mystery of God in everyday life?



A Word from Pope Francis

We can say that the Holy Spirit... knows how to bridge distances; he teaches us how to overcome them. It is he who connects the teaching of Jesus with every time and every person. With him Christ's words are not a memory, no: Christ's words, by virtue of the Holy Spirit, come alive today!

REGINA CAELI, ROME, JUNE 5, 2022



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- What if I look upon every person I encounter as someone introduced to me by Jesus himself?
- Have I missed knowing a wonderful person? If so, who?

Community in the Spirit

By Paige Byrne Shortal

Today is the last Sunday of the Easter Season, or Pentecost, a Greek word meaning fiftieth day. Pentecost has been called the birthday of the church. (I remember once, back in the experimental seventies, actually singing “Happy Birthday” as part of the opening hymn. Hmm.)

Today’s first reading describes a gathering of “devout Jews from every nation.” They were celebrating Pentecost, the fiftieth day after Passover and a day on which tradition held that the law was given to Moses. Suddenly there is wind and tongues of fire and people speaking in different languages and understanding each other. After all this occurred, Peter stood up to explain and, at the end of his preaching, about three thousand professed their faith in Jesus Christ and were baptized.

It is the Spirit’s work to make community out of individuals. And not just individuals from the same family or the same neighborhood or even the same race, class, or language. We’re talking strange people! We’re talking people we wouldn’t give a second glance. The Holy Spirit creates community out of those who are unlike us; people we don’t want to be lumped with.

Our church community is not always



what we want it to be. We may be too slow to respond or too quick to change. Our leaders may be too conservative, too liberal, too worldly or too out-of-touch. Our gatherings may be too much about all that fellowship stuff or too cold and inhospitable.

Here’s the thing: nowhere in the gospels is there a suggestion that the Christian life is something we can do alone. Nowhere does it suggest that the church is a comfortable club of likeminded people. The church is messy and annoying and absolutely necessary to the Christian life.

That being said, a community formed by the Holy Spirit is an amazing experience. Usually we seek out like-minded people, folks who look like us,

talk like us, think like us. Even for the most gregarious and open-minded folks, a few hours in the company of people whose ways are foreign to us is a strain, leaving us with fixed smiles and blank stares and a desire for solitude. At least that’s what it does for me.

But there’s an experience of community in the Spirit when you want to come back for more. I find it among the women of different congregations in Church Women United. I find it in a group we call Neighbors United—Undoing Racism. I find it in my parish choir, where folks of every economic and educational background meet and sing and pray and find themselves commiserating about their children, bringing meals when someone is sick, and laughing about...nothing. Just laughing because it is precious to be together and know this is what is meant by “community.” Community in the Spirit will keep you young, give you courage when you are afraid, companionship when you are lonely, and help you find God in all things. †



So that we may know what is good, speak about the good, and do what is good, we pray, Come, Holy Spirit! Amen! Alleluia!

The Redemptorists

Participating in a Church community is good for all individuals.

WEEKDAY READINGS

May 29—June 3

Monday, Blessed Virgin Mary:

Gn 3:9–15, 20 or Acts 1:12–14 / Jn 19:25–34

Tuesday, Weekday:

Sir 35:1–12 / Mk 10:28–31

Wednesday, Visitation of Blessed Virgin:

Zep 3:14–18a or Rom 12:9–16 / Lk 1:39–56

Thursday, St. Justin Martyr:

Sir 42:15–25 / Mk 10:46–52

Friday, Weekday:

Sir 44:1, 9–13 / Mk 11:11–26

Saturday, St. Charles Lwanga

and Companions: Sir 51:12cd–20 / Mk 11:27–33

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