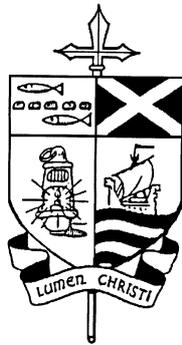


REFLECTIONS  
ON THE  
LECTIONARY for EASTER  
2011

THE YEAR OF MATTHEW



Rt. Rev. Christopher Budd  
Bishop of Plymouth

## INTRODUCTION

Each year the Church unashamedly spends 50 days celebrating the Lord's victory over those terrible twins, sin and death and setting us on the way to eternal life. Death is no longer our destiny. Our mortality is still 'alive and well' and threatening.

We still live in a mortal state, but this state can now be a vehicle of a loving life (a gift of the Spirit) and that love because it is of God cannot be snuffed out by death. It is more powerful than death, because we love in union with Christ. We are empowered by the Spirit, the gift of the Risen Christ, to live a life that leads to life, because it is shaped by love.

*"Through the resurrection of his Son God has granted us healing. May he fulfil his promises and bless you with eternal life."*

May God bless you all.

✠ Christopher

Bishop of Plymouth

# EASTER SUNDAY

---

## ALLELUIA

*John 20: 1-9*

It is useful to pause with Mary of Magdala. She is full of a loving duty – coming to the tomb to mourn, to continue paying respects to her Lord and Master. Her astonishment when finding the tomb empty is predictable. The possibility that her Lord would not remain a prisoner of death had not yet entered her mind. “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we do not know where they have put him”. Grave robbers? The authorities? But not a definitive intervention of God into human affairs!

John and Peter follow up – not expecting a resurrection but puzzled by the news.

John starts the faith trail. He entered the tomb and the penny dropped – “he saw and he believed”. The penny dropped because he realised for the first time the meaning of scripture “that he must rise from the dead”.

Faith, as in “the penny dropping”, is a fun definition. Not seeing becomes seeing; not believing becomes believing. It is worth pondering: “this is the day which the Lord has made let us rejoice and be glad in it”.

Pray for an Easter Faith

## SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

---

**“YOU ARE ALREADY FILLED WITH A JOY SO GLORIOUS,  
THAT IT CANNOT BE DESCRIBED.”**

*Acts 2, 42–47; 1 Peter 1, 3–9; John 20, 19–31*

As each year, the liturgy of the Church brings us into the upper room to meet again with the eleven and in particular Thomas.

Why this fascination?

Acknowledging the reality of the Risen Christ enables us to receive his gifts – peace and the process that brings peace, reconciliation. The disciples both receive peace and reconciliation and are empowered to offer it to others.

The drama around Thomas will always exercise an attraction – the struggle with belief and disbelief is perennial and will remain. The process of Thomas's conversion is interesting: “convince me if you can” is his first instinct.



Then Jesus comes on the scene and takes the “convince me if you can” of Thomas seriously. In the meeting with Jesus, Thomas’s criteria for acceptance became irrelevant and their place is taken by the presence of Jesus, which overwhelms and convinces. The natural outcome is that lovely prayer, “My Lord and my God”.

The effect of these new converts of the Risen Jesus is captured by our text from Acts, “(they) remained faithful to the teaching of the Apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of bread and to prayers”.

How accurate would that be of our Catholic communities today?

*Pray for an active faith*

## THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

---

**“SO THAT YOU WOULD HAVE  
FAITH AND HOPE IN GOD.”**

*Acts 2, 14; 22-28; 1 Peter 17-21; Luke 24, 13-35*

Another Easter story that the liturgy of the Church puts before us often (every Wednesday in Easter week; Easter Sunday evening as an option; and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter every 3 years) is the journey to Emmaus. It is a drama of coming to faith, rather like the Samaritan woman and the man born blind.

The presence of Jesus has the same effect on these two disciples, the Samaritan woman and the man born blind, as he had on Thomas. There is one difference. The penny drops at the breaking of the bread. They come to faith in Jesus, really Risen, but no longer visible in the normal way.



It is worthwhile considering the stages of the journey:-

- Belonging to Jesus' company – Calvary
- Disillusionment
- Revisiting the Scriptures – the story
- Letting your heart burn in you
- Being challenged by Jesus
- The breaking of bread
- Recognising Jesus in his Risen state
- A new life – a mission to tell others

What a marvellous journey of prayer and faith that we all need to undertake time and time again, especially at Easter.

Pray that we may undertake the Emmaus journey  
as often as needed

## FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

---

**“YOU HAVE COME BACK TO THE SHEPHERD AND  
GUARDIAN OF YOUR SOULS.”**

*Acts 2, 14; 36-41; 1 Peter 2, 20-25; John 10, 1-10*

Jesus is safe and it is safe to be in his company. But life is not just about being safe. It is about having access to eternal life and to have that securely. We yearn for that deep down in our hearts. We are made for that and we will be restless until it happens.



There is a tendency these days to persuade people that living without final hope is a braver and more courageous stance towards life than the opposite. It is not really as brave as suggested. To live without hope, when deep down we yearn for a life that will not let us down in death, strikes me as verging on the foolish.

Quite often the atheist life, full of actions inspired by hope and love, has a very different feel to the profession of atheism. The Christian has a hope that is not to be professed and exploited aggressively but needs to be shared.

Christ as shepherd or gate is not molycoddling, but guaranteeing our truth. We are made for eternal life – that life is a possibility because of Easter and Jesus will take us there if we let him.

We can enter that life only through Jesus. He is the secure entrance. Others have a different agenda, not necessarily for our benefit.

Jesus goes before us as our reliable shepherd. He knows us, calls us and we can follow him with confidence. His one purpose is that we have life and have it to the full.

Pray that we accept Christ's promises and allow  
them to shape our lives

# FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

---

## JESUS SHARES WITH HIS DISCIPLES

*Acts 6, 1-7; 1 Peter 2, 4-9; John 14, 1-12*

Today we are taken back to a section of that final discourse of Jesus makes with his disciples. In John's Gospel the section leading into his passion, death and resurrection contains the riches about Jesus' person and message that he can only share with his friends. But even they find it difficult to get it right. Their questions show that even after such a long time with him they still have not "got it".

Jesus' invitation to them is always worth hearing time and time again, "Do not let your hearts be troubled, trust in God still, and trust in me." And yet we do let our hearts be troubled as our confidence in Jesus can waver.

Jesus reassures us of his reliability, but we do not hear. Thomas and Philip's questions will always be ours. Jesus' self designation, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life", is not one that we find easy to accept and allow ourselves to be reassured by.

Nevertheless it is true. Jesus is the Way. No other path will lead to our final destiny. The path takes us through Calvary to the glory of the resurrection.

There is no other path that we can take and that can lead us to places desirable to go.

Christ is the Truth. He is the truth of God. Philip, in common with us, has not got the message. God is Truth and the Truth of God is Christ. In our brief formula "Jesus is truly God and truly man", we acknowledge that the truth which is God is totally in Jesus.

We do not need to see the Father as a separate experience from God, if we have seen Jesus. As Jesus puts it: "I am in the Father and the Father is in me."

Because Jesus is the Way and the Truth, only he can lead to life. Only in Jesus do we find a life that is not subject to death and destruction. Jesus' achievement for us in his death and resurrection is that we now have access to a life that is really alive and is no longer in danger of being snuffed out. We were originally made for eternal life and in Jesus we can again have access to it.

As 1 Peter puts it, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a people set apart to sing the praises of God, who called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light."

Pray that we can believe more firmly in Jesus  
and what he stands for

# SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

---

## **OUR HOPE – THE GIFT OF THE SPIRIT**

*Acts 8, 5-8; 14-17; 1 Peter 3, 15-18; John 14, 15-21*

If Jesus is the one we have identified as the way, the truth and the life, it is because we have received the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the gift of the Risen Christ. It may sound a bit circular, but we can only recognise the Risen Lord because we have received the gift of the Spirit.

The Samaritan Disciples became believers in the Lord Jesus, but they only became “fully fledged” when the Spirit was given to them. They had been evangelised by Philip, but on receiving the Spirit through the Apostles laying on of hands they receive the power to become missionary with conviction.

Jesus must return to the Father, but he does not leave a group of orphans behind, but a group of disciples, who have received the Spirit of Truth. The Truth will always be God our Father and the Truth of God is totally enshrined in Jesus.

The Spirit of Jesus can be no other than the Spirit of Truth, who enables the disciples of Jesus to come to the full truth about him, not just as an

academic exercise, but as a practical following of the Lord.

This is wonderfully expressed in the Gospel – “On that day you will understand that I am in my Father and you in me and I in you.”

By living the commandments, the disciple shows that the love of Christ is truly active in him and if the love of Christ is truly active in him, the love of the Father is also truly active in him.

“Anyone who loves me will be loved by my Father and I shall love him and show myself to him.”

Pray for the gift of the love of Christ

# ASCENSION OF THE LORD

---

## WHY ARE YOU LOOKING INTO THE SKY?

*Acts 1:1-11; Ephesians 1,17-23; Matthew 28,16-20*

The Feast of the Ascension is the second great climax of Easter. On Easter Day, the Lord of life exposes death to be a fraud, when subject to his power and presence. The tomb is empty and will remain so for all the Lord's faithful disciples. Easter Day is the moment of Christ's victory over death and its twin, sin. Both have lost their power over those who put their faith in God and His Christ.

The Feast of the Ascension is the following through of Easter Day. Christ enters into his glory: he returns to the Father, but not now empty-handed. He has acquired a people and he takes those people with him to the house of his Father.



*“He (the Father of Glory) has put all things under his feet, and made him, as the ruler of everything, the head of the Church; which is his body, the fullness of him who fills the whole creation.”*

Christ's return to the Father empowers him to empower us to be his witnesses as he sends his Spirit to us. In the power of that Spirit, we will be his witnesses to the ends of the earth – from Jerusalem outwards.

We are mandated: “to make disciples”; “baptise them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit”; “teach them to observe the commands” (the new Moses) and unlike Moses, he would be with us always until the end of time.

This permanent presence of Christ with us is called the gift of the Holy Spirit and is celebrated by the separate and closely linked Feast of Pentecost.

In the days leading to Pentecost,  
pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit

# PENTECOST

---

## **THE SPIRIT THAT JOINS US TOGETHER**

*Acts 2, 1-11; 1 Corinthians 12, 3-7.12-13; John 20, 19-23*

The permanent presence of Christ, which he promised as he returned to the Father, is established in our history by the gift of the Spirit. Where the Spirit is Jesus is; where Jesus is the Spirit is; and where Jesus and the Spirit are, there is the Father. As Jesus said to Philip, “to have seen me is to have seen the Father”.

The coming of the Spirit among us is the final “coup de grace” of sin. Sin may be powerful (and we would be unwise to ignore its power), but Grace is more powerful, because Grace is of God.

Sin, on the surface, is easy (this is an illusion), but Grace comes with a cost. The cost is the cross, but it is no longer the cross of torture and death, but the cross of love. The Spirit of God enables what is broken and scattered to be reconnected.



In the Pentecost reading, the Spirit enables people alien to each other, to start understanding each other and forming community (sin will always scatter and tear apart).

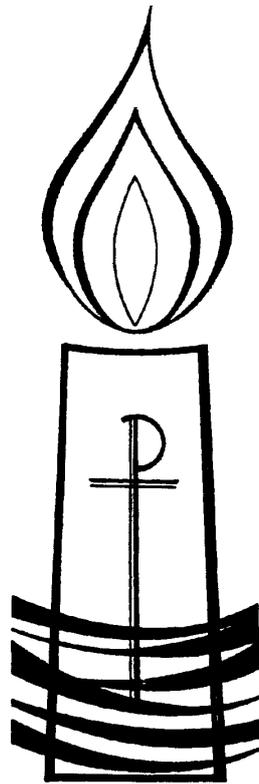
In the room where the disciples are waiting in prayer, fear gives way to joy and peace and in that context the Apostles are empowered to a ministry of reconciliation.

This overall aim will underpin all the work of the Church. She is always there to bring the Lord's reconciliation to all nations. Whatever work she undertakes will always attempt, wherever possible, to bring people to reconciliation with God in Christ and thus to make disciples.

Our celebration of Easter leaves us with a mission that will always be implied in our discipleship. We can be accused of being seekers of disciples for Christ and we would need to plead guilty to that. But we are not doing this by violence or any underhand methods. What we are must be what people see.

We are called to so live the Gospels that it will exercise its own inherent power to attract others to its author, Jesus Christ.

Pray for the Spirit of appropriate mission



*This booklet is made available for use by groups and individuals for prayer and faith-sharing.*

*Do feel free to photocopy it for your parishes.*



Bishop's House  
Plymouth