



ST. ELIZABETH EPISCOPAL CHURCH

St. Teresa of Ávila was a Spanish Carmelite nun, mystic and Teacher of the Faith. In 1577, she wrote “The Interior Castle” as a guide for spiritual development through service and prayer. She was inspired by a vision of the human soul as a diamond in the shape of a castle containing seven mansions that she interpreted as the journey of faith through seven stages, ending with union with God.

“Let us now imagine that this castle,” she wrote, “...contains many mansions, some above, others below, others at each side; and in the center and midst of them all is the chiefest mansion where the most secret things pass between God and the soul....We ourselves are the castle, and it would be absurd to tell someone to enter a room when he was in it already! But you must understand that there are many ways of ‘being’ in a place.”

The door into this castle is prayer and meditation. Teresa also taught us not to envision these mansions all arranged in a neat row, one behind another. She advises instead that we fix our attention on the center as if it were a heart of palm – the inner core of a palm tree that is edible once you peel away several outer rinds. “Just so,” she says, “around this central room are many more, as there also are above it.”

Each room or “mansion” represents a level of God-consciousness. When a person gains stability of being-with-God within a particular mansion, the next mansion begins to entice. Often, the practices that once served become dry and the mansion begins to grow dark. With perseverance and openness, the soul begins to explore and adopt a larger way of being-with-God that encompasses more truth and an expanded awareness of God. This unsettling process unfolds again and again throughout life as we, like “newborn infants [longing] for the pure, spiritual milk...may grow into salvation,” as Peter wrote. This is the pattern by which “like living stones,” we let ourselves “be built into a spiritual house,” at home with the Uncreated Light of Christ.

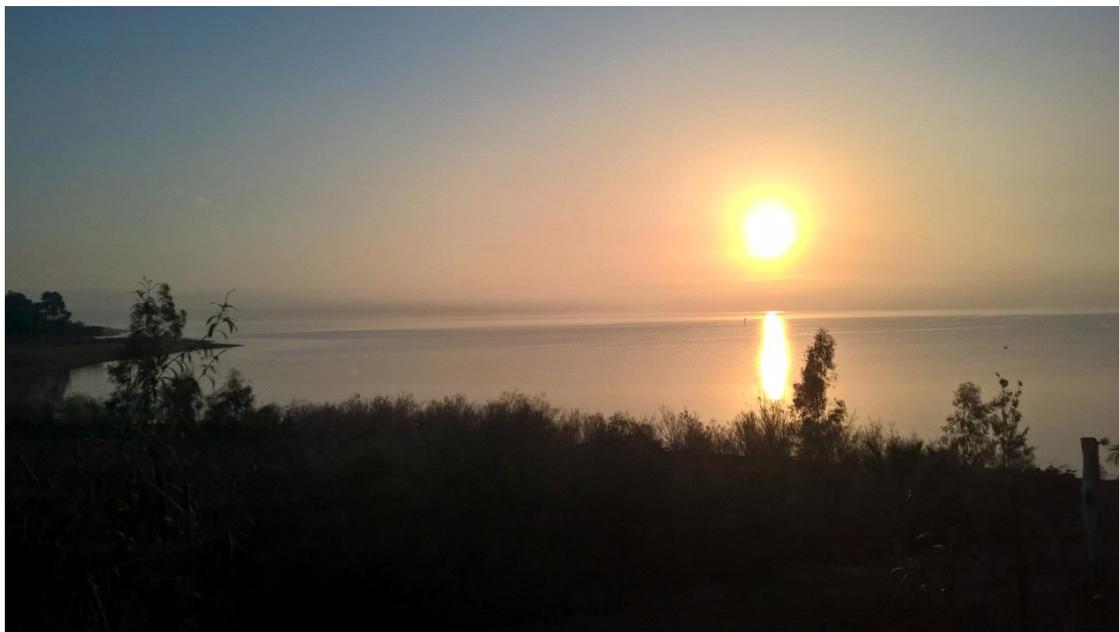


Preparation

Some Christians celebrate Easter and Christmas, and then return to a familiar pattern of hymns, readings and sermons. Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Orthodox Catholics and many other denominations keep some version of the Great Fifty Days of Pascha, the season that lasts until Pentecost on May 31st this year. If we were gathered at church, we would have our finest vestments on the altar, which would be surrounded by beautiful flowers and bearing new beeswax candles. The new Paschal candle would be lit and standing in a place of prominence right between the lectern and the baptismal font. We would light our best incense and sing some of our favorite hymns. We'd gather at the table to celebrate with our best port and some home-made bread.

While we are temporarily separated (and then, only physically so), consider taking this as an opportunity to bring some of that intention home. Home worship is the oldest form of Christian worship with more than a little Jewish influence. And so, if you can, invite the Risen Christ into your home with a white tablecloth and a new white candle on the table or desk where you are collected. You might set out a favorite cross or rosary and spend a moment summoning up a sense of gratitude and forgiveness with friends or family by phone or through social media. Offer it with loved ones no longer living or saints that you admire. You might want to listen to some liturgically appropriate music before or during prayer. I recommend [youtube.com/watch?v=rY0CUhv61rM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rY0CUhv61rM) or for something a bit shorter, you might enjoy [youtube.com/watch?v=IwdeqVmXlHk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IwdeqVmXlHk) or this lush rendering of "Love bade me welcome" at [youtube.com/watch?v=mBkuNwIlaDc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mBkuNwIlaDc)

And, as always, please notice that our worship is voiced in the plural – "we," "us" and "our" – because we may be temporarily apart, but we are also always bound together in Christ.



Fifth Sunday of Easter
10 May 2020

Centering

Make the sign of the cross as the leader says: May the light of Christ in glory rising scatter the darkness of heart and mind. (+) Alleluia! Christ is risen.

All respond: Alleluia! Christ is risen.

The leader prays: Almighty God,
your son Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life.
Give us grace to love one another
and walk in the way of his commandments,
make us perfect in every good work to do you will,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

The Word of God for the Fifth Sunday in Easter

The Gospel is the primary reading of the day and should always be read.

A reading from Acts: Filled with the Holy Spirit, Stephen gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, "I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he died.

Reader: The Word of the Lord

Response: Thanks be to God

(The response: Prayed together or by alternating verses) Psalm 31: 1-16

A song of David for strength

YHWH, in You I find my refuge;
let me not be humiliated for trusting You.

Let Your fairness save me;
be my stronghold, my fortress
where I can find refuge,
because You are my Rock, my Fortress.

Therefore, for the sake
of Your Reputation,
guide me and lead me;
Get me out of the trap
they have set for me.
Because You give me strength,

I trust my spirit into Your hand.
You, YHWH, true God,
have made me free.

I have been disappointed
by those who promise help
but don't come through.
YHWH, I place my trust in You;
I find my joy and my happiness in Your grace,
knowing that You are aware of my troubles.

You have known the depression I feel in my soul.
You have not allowed that enemy overtake me;
instead You set my feet on an even path.
So now be kind to me again.
Again I'm in trouble;
my eyes have grown dim
from frustration
and my guts hurt.

My days have been swallowed by sorrow;
I kept sighing for years.
The very marrow of my bones grew tired;
so much shame was heaped upon me
by oppressors who I thought
were my good neighbors.

My acquaintances avoided me;
seeing me in the street,
they turned away from me,
like one who died long ago.
People have forgotten me
as if I were a broken, discarded jug;
I heard what the rabble
gossiped behind my back.

I'm enclosed by a fog of fear;
there is a plot being hatched against me.
They seek to take my life,
but I trust You YHWH, God.
I keep affirming that You are my God;
the terms of my life are in your hand.

Rescue me from enemies
who pursue me;
let the light of Your Face
shine on me, Your servant.



A reading from the first letter of Peter: Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation— if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in scripture:

“See, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious;
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe,

“The stone that the builders rejected
has become the very head of the corner”,
and

“A stone that makes them stumble,
and a rock that makes them fall.”

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Once you were not a people,
but now you are God's people;
once you had not received mercy,
but now you have received mercy.

Reader: The Word of the Lord

Response: Thanks be to God



Read the gospel aloud without rushing. Allow the images to enter your awareness and find a home within.

A reading from John: [Jesus said] “Do not let your heart be troubled; have faith in God and have faith in me. In my Father’s house there are many places of rest. Would I otherwise have told you that I am going to make a place ready for you? And if I go and make a place ready for you, I am coming again and will take you along with me, so that where I am you might be also. And you know the way to where I am going.” Thomas says to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How do we know the way?” Jesus says to him, “I am the way the truth and the life; no one comes through the Father except through me. If you had known me you would also have recognized my Father. From this moment you know and have seen him.” Philip says to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and for us that suffices.” Jesus says to him, “I am with you for such a long time, Philip, and you have not known me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I utter to you I do not speak from myself; but the Father, abiding in me, performs his works. Have faith in me, that I am in the Father and that the Father is in me; or else have faith on account of the works themselves. Amen, amen, I tell you, whoever has faith in me, the works I perform he will perform also, because I am going to the Father. And whatever you request in my name, this I will do, so that the Father might be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything of me in my name, I will do it.”

Sermon:

Here at the Last Supper, the apostles are anxious. Jesus has just told them that he would soon be leaving them and that Peter would deny him. What lies ahead is uncertain and unsettling. Maybe you know a little of what they are feeling. “Do not let your hearts be troubled,” Jesus says to his friends, “have faith in God and have faith in me.”

Even so, they are distressed about losing their friend and teacher, and disoriented by the way Jesus talks in puzzles. What Thomas wants is a map and directions to where Jesus is going. What he gets is a baffling reply that he already knows the way, *and* the truth and the life.

For some time now, John's Jesus has been telling his followers who he is and where he is going, but he speaks with the voice of Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity. Jesus claims the name YHWH used when Moses wanted to know YHWH's unpronounceable name: "I am who I am," YHWH said to Moses, or "I am what I am," "I will be what I will be" or even "I create what I create."

It's easy to be confused. "Christ" is not Jesus' last name. He is Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Mary and if he used a last name, it would have been something like Jesus bar-Joseph. Here, he is speaking as the Anointed, the Christ, as he did when he said: "I am the bread of life." "I am the light of the world," "I am the good shepherd", and now, "I am the way, the truth and the life."

Jesus the Anointed is clarifying for his followers that God is already present. Jesus the Christ, the Word made Flesh, makes that presence known in a way that can be seen, touched and heard. Christ is God who *transcends* time and Jesus is a manifestation of God *in* time; they are not two things, and not one thing and not three.

The focus on the historical Jesus is fine as long as we don't let our preoccupation overshadow some awesome implications. It is the Anointed Second person of the Trinity claiming God's name, "I am," and then expanding that name. "*I am* the way, the truth and the life." And *then* he says: "No one comes to the Father, except through me."

Now, at the very heart of the life, death and resurrection of Christ Jesus is the message that God loves creation by uniting with what God creates. God's love flows through the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. And so when Jesus the Anointed says "except through *me*," he is saying something far more expansive and uniting than we may be used to hearing: "No one comes to the Father, except through the way, the truth, and the life."

These are words of reassurance, not judgment; of comfort, not conditions; words of unity, not exclusion.

"If you have known me," Jesus says to his followers, implying of course that, in fact, they *have* known him, "you would also have recognized my Father." And then, as if to drive the point home, Jesus says: "From this moment you know and have seen him."

Philip still can't quite do the math and once again asks for tangible evidence, like we all do or have done. What Philip wants is for Jesus to show him what God looks like. What he gets is a response that makes no logical sense. "Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?"

If Jesus is a little annoyed here, I can't blame him. Every sign, every encounter, every conversation he has had has been to make the presence of God known by being the presence of God. Knowing that he is soon to be crucified, Jesus is telling his followers that he will soon no longer be the Word made physical flesh in the world.

His followers will be that.

Even now, the Risen Christ lives resurrected life in us, continuing to pour out life and love, and inviting all creation, all people, into the relationship that is their birthright. It's

down to us with one reminder: we are not alone. We carry with us the love of the Anointed; the teaching of Jesus the Christ.

We are united with the rest of the world in a pandemic, and yet we carry a message for the world from the One Creator of us all: “Do not be afraid.” Not because Magic Jesus will make suffering go away, but because we are participating in the glory of the Creator who goes by many names and beyond all naming. Not because we get it right and everyone else wrong, but because we trust and believe into the Great “I am.”

And as more of us recognize our bond with Christ and with each other, a new unity shows itself more clearly – a unity that includes suffering even as it rises above suffering. Our lives become flowing streams because where we are, Christ is.

We come as “living stones,” to use St. Peter’s evocative image, precious in God’s sight. We consent to let ourselves be built into a spiritual house. And the first step in participating in the Divine nature involves coming to a true self-acceptance and self-knowledge until we are stable enough to transcend that sense of ourselves.

Love of ones’ self is not simple for those who have been shamed, abused or discounted. It is, however, the foundation of any individual “spiritual house.” We are all children of God and always will be, even when we don’t trust that – even when parts of the church try to tell us otherwise.

Learning to love ourselves is necessary so that we can love one another.

Once our isolated self becomes strong enough to connect in love, we move from individual to community; from Jesus to Christ. Most of the Western “Latin” church calls this process “salvation.” The Eastern “Greek” church has a better word: *theosis*. It means “divinization.”

We can relax about becoming perfect individuals because we are “saved” through Christ, or better yet, we are made increasingly divine *as* Christ. Each of us is a living stone, and together we make up a spiritual house, the real church united in all her distinctions, a holy people chosen to openly proclaim the virtues of the One who called us out of darkness into light. Together, we *are* the whole living, breathing Body of Christ who is the way, the truth and the life.

Recognizing that, why should our hearts be troubled?

Silence and stillness

The Nicene Creed

Leader: Let us reaffirm our faith in the words of the Nicene Creed:

We believe in one God,

the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,

the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.

Through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:

by the power of the Holy Spirit

he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.

On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.

With the Father and the Son he (or “she” or no pronoun) is worshiped and glorified.

He (she/who) has spoken through the Prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead,

and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Prayers for the church, the world, and all who are in need

These intercessions may be used, adding others in each household:

Leader: God the Father, your will for all people is health and salvation.

All: We praise and bless you, LORD.

Leader: God the Son, you came that we might have life, and might have it more abundantly.

All: We praise and bless you, LORD.

Leader: God the Holy Spirit, you make our bodies the temple of your presence.

All: We praise and bless you, LORD.

Leader: Holy Trinity, one God, in you we live and move and have our being.

All: We praise and bless you, LORD.

Leader: In the Anglican Cycle of Prayer, we pray for the Anglican Church of Kenya, the Most Reverend Jackson Ole Sapit, Primate and Archbishop of All Kenya.

In the Diocesan Cycle of Prayer, we pray for All Saints, Tacoma, Christ Church, Tacoma. We pray for our neighbors at Navos, for Neighborhood House, for Hospitality House, for Operation Nightwatch, and for the safety of those in military service, for the safety and stamina of healthcare workers, for first responders and for their families. We pray for those on our long-term list.

Let us pray for our own needs and those of others, offered silently or aloud.

Leader: Lord, grant your healing grace to all who are sick, injured or disabled, that they may be made whole.

All: Hear us, LORD of life.

Leader: Grant to all who are lonely, anxious or depressed, a knowledge of your will and an awareness of your presence.

All: Hear us, LORD of life.

Leader: Grant to all who minister to those who are suffering wisdom and skill, sympathy and patience.

All: Hear us, LORD of life.

Leader: Mend broken relationships, and restore to those in distress soundness of mind and serenity of spirit.

All: Hear us, LORD of life.

Leader: Sustain and support those who seek your guidance and lift up all who are brought low by the trials of this life.

All: Hear us, LORD of life.

Leader: Grant to the dying peace and a holy death, and uphold by the grace and consolation of your Holy Spirit those who are bereaved.

All: Hear us, LORD of life.

Leader: Restore to wholeness whatever is broken by human sin, in our lives, in our nation, and in the world.

All: Hear us, LORD of life.

Leader: You are the LORD who does mighty wonders.

All: You have declared your power among the peoples.

Leader: With you, LORD, is the well of life

All: and in your light do we see light.

Leader: Hear us, LORD of life:

All: heal us, and make us whole.

Let us pray.

A period of silence follows, and then:

Leader: Hear the prayer we offer for all your people. Remember in your mercy those for whom we pray: heal the sick, raise the fallen, strengthen the fainthearted, protect those who serve, and enfold in your love the fearful and those who have no hope.

In the fullness of time complete your gracious work. Reconcile all things in Christ and make them new, that we may be restored in your image, renewed in your love, and serve you as sons and daughters in your kingdom.

Through your anointed Son, Jesus Christ, our LORD, to whom with you and the Holy Spirit we lift our voices of thanks and praise:

All: Blessed be God, our strength and our salvation, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Pater Noster/Our Father/The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;

thy kingdom come; thy will be done;

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation;

but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,

for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Prayer of spiritual communion

Most Holy Christ, we trust that you are truly present in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar.

We love you above all things, and we long for you in our souls. Since we cannot at this

moment receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into our hearts. We embrace you

as though you were already there and we unite ourselves entirely to you. Never permit us to

be separated from you. *Amen.*

Concluding Prayer

God of mercy,
We no longer look for Jesus among the dead,
for he is alive and has become the Lord of life.
From the waters of death you raise us with him
and renew your gift of life within us.
Increase in our hearts and minds
the risen life we share with Christ,
and help us to grow as your people
toward the fullness of eternal life with you,
through Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever. Amen.

Blessing

Make the sign of the cross as you say: May Christ, (+) who by death has destroyed death, give us
all courage and joy in believing. Amen.

Giving Thanks at Table

Come, Lord Jesus,
be our Guest
and let these gifts to us be blessed.
Blessed be God who is our bread,
may all the world be clothed and fed. Amen.



“Realization of our oneness in Christ is the only cure for human
loneliness.”

~ Caryl Houselander

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