



*Dear Friend of the Missions,*

This meditation begins the fourth year of the monthly meditations. I want to thank you for reading them, sharing them with others and praying for our missionaries each month. That prayer makes a big difference. The Solemnity of the Ascension and Pentecost are celebrated this month. The Ascension is on Thursday, May 17 in much of the North East, but in most other places it is moved to Sunday, May 20. Pentecost is on May 27. The Easter season ends with the celebration of Pentecost. There are two feasts I would recommend to you: May 10 is the feast of Blessed Damien of Moloka'i and May 31 is the feast of the Visitation. This

month is dedicated to Mary, the Mother of God and the Mother of the

Church. We also pray for all mothers, living and deceased on Mothers' Day, May 13. Thank you for your continued support of our missions, we are always grateful for your generosity and concern. Be assured of our prayers for you. Continue to remember that we are Easter people and we celebrate Easter for these full fifty days up to Pentecost and then every Sunday of the year.



*Right Up to Pentecost and Sunday after Sunday*

By Fr. Russell Becker, OFM

I am in a different parish almost every Sunday and it is always interesting to see how well the parish I am visiting is keeping Easter. Sometimes by the fourth Sunday the decorations have kind of gone back to usual and the music has been chosen from the ordinary time repertoire and not from the Easter hymns. But, we are supposed to be Easter people who celebrate Easter for fifty days from Easter to Pentecost and then every other Sunday of the year.

Sometimes it may seem difficult to keep up this Easter proclamation, but wherever we go we are charged with speaking the message of Easter. In good and happy times, in bad and sad times, we still say those words which remind us that God is with us and all things are possible, even rising from the dead: Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

This is not always about exuberant proclamation, but it is always about confidence even in the most difficult of times, even in the face of every deadly experience that comes our way. One of the ways that we can continue to share the Easter Message is by continuing to reflect on how it renews our lives and how we can help others to know that same renewal. I think one of the most blessed gifts of Easter is the knowledge that we are constantly being given a second chance and a fresh start. Let me share with you two very early images in Christian



art: the image of the Good Shepherd and the icon of the Resurrection.



### I am the Good Shepherd.

This image of the young man holding a sheep on his shoulders was found on a wall in the catacombs in Rome. The early Church experienced some very difficult persecutions.

Gathering each week was always dangerous and often filled with the sad news that members had been arrested and put to death. The bodies of the martyrs were buried with care in the catacombs. The early Christians felt that the bond of love was not even broken in death. When they brought the

bodies of the martyrs to lay them to rest, the first thing they would see was this image. The words of Scripture were easily recalled: **“I am the gate, whoever enters through me will be safe.”** They could breathe a sigh of relief and know that the Good Shepherd would lovingly watch over their beloved deceased for he **“came that we might have life and have it to the full.”** After they prayed and buried the martyrs, it was time to go back out into the open. The last thing they saw was the image of the Good Shepherd and they knew that there was nothing to fear. The promise of the Good Shepherd gave them strength: **“they shall never perish...No one shall ever snatch them from my hand.”**

The image reminds us that all are cared for, the weak are protected, and the lost will be brought back. Every Easter this image is recalled to give us confidence and peace.

### He descended into hell.

These words, which we speak when we profess the creed, are the subject of the Icon of the Resurrection.

Tradition says that Jesus went to the abode of the dead and freed all who were held captive by death. The gates of death are broken open and lay in the form of a cross. The



Risen Lord Jesus is lifting Adam and Eve from their graves, and bringing them redemption. Since they are the parents of all human beings, the message is very clear: redemption is offered to each and every one of us as symbolized by our first parents. The broken locks and keys are reminders of the sins which have imprisoned us and hold us in the throes of death. **Christ is risen from the dead, by death he conquered death and to those in the grave he granted life** (Byzantine Easter hymn). So we come to understand at Easter that if Adam and Eve can recover from their big mistake and sin, so can we!

These images can help us to keep Easter faith alive in us and in those we meet. We all face difficult times, we all are tempted to give up and wonder if being a Christian is worth the effort. Christ the Good Shepherd still cares for us. When it seems like the power of death looms very large and we have been brought low by our sins, other’s sins or some awful problem, remember who reaches down to raise us up and give us new life: Christ the Risen Lord! This we speak this right up to Pentecost and Sunday after Sunday.

## Reflection Questions

1. How have you noticed the power of Easter in your life?
2. How have you shared that good news with others?
3. St. Isaac of Nineveh says that the worst of all things is insensitivity to the resurrection. This makes it easy to refuse to work with God. Has this ever happened to you?

*Here is a little reflection that might help you to appreciate some of the ways Easter touches our lives. I do not know who compiled this, but whoever they are they deserve our gratitude.*

### The Church of the Second Chance

We are the Church of the Second Chance; for we have said: It is impossible. But God has replied: All things are possible. (For nothing is impossible with God. [Luke 1, 37] Things that are impossible for humans are possible with God. [Luke 18:27])

We are the Church of the Second Chance; for we have said: I am too tired. But God has replied: I will give you rest. (Come to me, all you who are weary and find life burdensome, and I will refresh you. Take my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart. Your souls will find rest, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light. [Matthew 11:28-30])

We are the Church of the Second Chance; for we have said: Nobody really loves me. But God has replied: I love you. (Yes, God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him may not die but may have eternal life. [John 3:16] & I give you a new commandment: Love one another. Such has been my love has been for you, so must your love be for one another. [John 13:34])

We are the Church of the Second Chance; for we have said: I can not go on. But God has replied: My grace is sufficient. (My grace is enough for you, for in weakness power reaches perfection. [II Corinthians 12:9] & He shall call upon me and I will answer him; I will be with him in distress; I will deliver him and glorify him. [Psalm 91:15])

We are the Church of the Second Chance; for we have said: I can not figure things out. But God has replied: I will direct your steps. (Trust in the Lord with all your heart, on your own intelligence rely not; in all your ways be mindful of him, and he will make straight your paths. [Proverbs 3:5-6])

We are the Church of the Second Chance; for we have said: I can not do it. But God has replied: You can do all things. (In him who is the source of my strength, I have strength for everything. [Philippians 4:13])

We are the Church of the Second Chance; for we have said: I am not able. But God has replied: I am able. (God can multiply his favors among you so that you may always have enough of everything and even a surplus for good works. [II Corinthians 9:8])

We are the Church of the Second Chance; for we have said: It is not worth it. But God has replied: It will be worth it. (We know that God makes all things work together for the good of those who have been called according to his decree. [Roman 8:28])

We are the Church of the Second Chance; for we have said: I can not forgive myself. But God has replied: I FORGIVE YOU. (But if we acknowledge our sins, he who is just can be trusted to forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrong. [I John 1:9] & There is no condemnation now for those who are in Christ Jesus. [Romans 8:1])

We are the Church of the Second Chance; for we have said: I can not manage. But God has replied: I will supply all your needs. (My God in turn will supply your needs fully, in a way worthy of his magnificent riches on Christ Jesus. [Philippians 4:19])

We are the Church of the Second Chance; for we have said: I am afraid. But God has replied: I have not given you a spirit of fear. (The Spirit of God has given us no cowardly spirit, but rather one that makes us strong, loving and wise. [II Timothy 1:7])

We are the Church of the Second Chance; for we have said: I am always worried and frustrated. But God has replied: Cast all your cares on ME. (Cast your cares on him because he cares for you. [I Peter 5:7])

We are the Church of the Second Chance; for we have said: I do not have enough faith. But God has replied: I have given everyone a measure of faith. (Thus in virtue of the favor given me, I warn each of you not to think more highly of himself than he ought. Let him estimate himself soberly, in keeping with the measure of faith that God has apportioned him. [Romans 12:3])

We are the Church of the Second Chance; for we have said: I am not smart enough. But God has replied: I give you wisdom. (God it is who has given you life in Christ Jesus. He has made him our wisdom and also our justice, our sanctification, and our redemption. [I Corinthians 1:30])

We are the Church of the Second Chance; for we have said: I feel all alone. But God has replied: I will never leave you or forsake you. (For God has said, 'I will never forsake you.' Thus we may say with confidence: 'The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid; what can anyone do to me? [Hebrews 13:5])

**Please pray for our friar missionaries  
who are celebrating their birthdays  
this month:**

May 4: Fr. Thomas Fox, O.F.M. (Brazil)

May 6: Bro. Gerald Hudson, O.F.M. (Home Missions)

May 17: Fr. Juvenal Leahy, O.F.M. (Brazil)

May 30: Fr. Stanislaus Widomski, O.F.M. (Japan)

*May God continue to bless them  
with energy and strength!*

**Also, please pray for our former  
missionaries who are ill:**

Fr. Thomas Fox, O.F.M. (Brazil)

Bishop Benedict Coscia, O.F.M. (Brazil)

Bro. Rosario Vieira, O.F.M. (Brazil)

Fr. Charles Finnegan, O.F.M. (Brazil)

Fr. Robert Nee, O.F.M. (Brazil)

Fr. Peter Sheridan, O.F.M. (Home Missions),

Fr. Arthur Murray, O.F.M. (Home Missions)

Fr. Clement Healy, O.F.M. (Jamaica)

Fr. Campion Lally, O.F.M. (Japan)

Fr. Finian Riley, O.F.M. (Africa)

*May God give them health, strength and peace!*