

FIRST IMPRESSIONS 2ND SUNDAY OF EASTER -C-

Acts 5: 12-16 - Psalm 118 - Revelation 1: 9-11a, 12-13, 17-19 - John 20: 19-31

By: Jude Siciliano, OP

Dear Preachers:

Pre-note:

We now have four homiletic reflections on the daily scriptures posted on our webpage.

- [Daily Reflections](#) - by Fr. R. B. Williams, OP.
- [Daily Homilette](#) - by Fr. Carmen Mele, OP.
- [Daily Preaching](#) - audio homilies by Dominican women and men from around the world.
- [Daily Bread](#) - courtesy of "Celebration Publications."

Go to: www.preacherexchange.com

What were the disciples doing locked up in the upper room? Well, we are told they were afraid---they had reason to be. What the religious authorities had done to Jesus might be their fate as well. So, the small band of Jesus' followers gathered behind closed doors. They were afraid of the dark, the darkness that is death, the power that roams unchecked and unbidden into our world and into our lives. It is the enemy that seems to arrive with not apparent logic, at its own timing and place. Never the welcome friend, though sometimes people in great pain or anguish wish it would hurry up to claim them. Death is not our friend----life is. Life is the gift first given in Genesis and now renewed with Christ's resurrection. But let's not get ahead of the story. First John introduces to us the disciples huddled in fear. Let's reflect, for a moment, on where we are in the story John is telling us.

Last week the story had us staring into the empty tomb (20: 1-9). We were left with an invitation to join the beloved disciple and believe. The empty tomb proves nothing. It doesn't settle our incredulity. What we need is what the beloved disciple had, the eyes of faith. Then we will see the life that is present to us. After that episode, Mary returns to the tomb, meets the two "angels in white" and then meets Jesus, whom she mistakes for the gardener. She recognizes him when he calls her name. He sends her to tell the disciples the good news. This episode (20: 11-18) is left out of our lectionary sequence. Instead, this week we have the subsequent account of the fearful disciples huddled together behind locked doors.

Mary relays the news of meeting the resurrected Christ (20:16). So, besides being afraid of being caught and punished as Jesus' followers, the disciples have another feeling which may possibly be the occasion for their gathering: they may have some hope that what Mary told them is true. Otherwise, wouldn't they just have packed up, dispersed and fled back to their homes? Could what Mary said be true? What confusion, doubt, anxiety, fear----and hope---they must have felt. They would have felt the way we do when life has knocked us for a blow and we struggle to keep going, keep believing and keep hoping there will be light at the end of the tunnel.

Today's story isn't only about fearful and wondering individuals. It is about a community of Jesus' followers who are also struggling to believe. They have come together because that is what we do in the dark; we reach out for others who share our predicament. We lean on one another for support, hoping to draw strength from the strong people around us.

But there are no stronger members singled out in today's account. They are lumped together by John as being disciples who are afraid. As you traveled through this past Lent did you hear and share with others, as I did, your concerns for our limping church? Did you talk about the dwindling numbers and the church closings in former bastions of the faith---like Boston, Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, etc.? Did you hear parents express concern about their children who are too distracted by the world's noise and allurements to attend church or have their children baptized? Did you wonder with others how we could possibly be a prophetic church in the world when we are so defensively licking our wounds from recent scandals?

No, the disciples who gathered together in fear, despite Mary's tidings about meeting the risen Christ, are not strangers to us. Their past is our present story. They may have each other; but as the story opens, that is not enough. They are not yet the community that will change the world. Someone is going to have to break in to their locked room and their closed-tight minds and hearts. They need what they cannot provide for themselves---new life. Right now all they are trying to do is protect their skins and hold on to each other for support.

Jesus' entrance onto the scene comes quickly. John will not leave us focused on what has passed nor on the fearful disciples. The past is past; something new is happening. Jesus quickly dispelled their belief by showing them his wounded body. Like you, I have waited at the checkout line in supermarkets flanked by the magazines that feature television and movie stars. They all look so perfect on the covers. They have young, unblemished and perfect bodies, the envy of those of us waiting on line. Why didn't

Jesus come back looking perfect like those on the covers of those magazines? Couldn't he have done that? We certainly have seen enough paintings and holy cards in which Jesus looks untouched by his earthly sojourn and painful death. Instead, he comes back scarred, showing what he went through for us.

Each of us accumulates scars in our lives. Our bodies show the remnants of past surgeries, falls, burns and other accidents. Some have the scars of physical abuse, beatings and torture. Those of us who can point to the physical pain and suffering we have experienced find a companion in the wounded Jesus---he is one of us.

We also bear other, not so visible scars. No one gets through life without being hurt and wounded. Those wounds start early---some say even in the womb. They are the psychological and spiritual wounds received because we: were taught about a fearsome God; grew up in a violent home and certainly in a violent world and culture; were lied to and betrayed by intimates; entered into unhealthy relationships; made choices that hurt us and leave us with regret; had talents and gifts that were neglected or denigrated, etc. When Jesus entered the locked room and showed his scars to his disciples they recognized him and so do we. Jesus is not only showing his wounds to his disciples, he is also showing them the signs of his love and how far he was willing to go because he loves us.

The story is moving rapidly---from fear, to manifestation, to rejoicing. But there is still more. The signs of his love and sacrifice Jesus showed to his disciples must become the signs the disciples bear in the world. We are called to serve and offer ourselves for the well being of others. Now we are the manifestation, in the flesh, of God's love for the world.

First, Jesus reassures his disciples by offering them "Peace"—the conventional Jewish greeting that is now given profound significance because it is offered by the risen Christ. Their fears are changed to joy. Then Jesus commissions those he empowers with his Spirit, to exercise his power by forgiving others. This the church will do through the ministry of forgiveness, baptism and repentance. The disciples not only experience the Lord's peace, but through them, so will others.

"As the Father has sent me, so I send you." We are not to stay locked up and cozy together, but are sent to others who may be fearful and hiding behind locked doors: the grieving, under-educated, outsider, intimidated, those who experience prejudice and injustice, whose voices are ignored in our society and who have no political clout when communities or nations make decisions. Let's not forget prisoners, and those in mental institutions and senior residences. The One sent by God, risen from the dead, now sends us, his disciples, to do what he did---go to the frightened to share the gift we have received and are empowered by the Spirit to give, the gift of reconciliation

and peace.

But Thomas was not there for all of the above and of course, he is skeptical. Who wouldn't be? He lays down some tough standards for belief. What is remarkable is that the community that first met the risen Lord does not exclude Thomas from their company. They don't throw him out for his lack of faith or his different stance. They accept him where he is, with all his doubt, the way we accept our friends and family members who don't believe what we do. When Jesus appears again, Thomas' doubt evaporates upon seeing the Lord and Thomas makes the most profound act of faith in the New Testament, he expresses the faith of the apostolic church, "My Lord and my God." Thomas' new-found faith is not disparaged by Christ, for he joins the first disciples who believed and who are a blessing for us. On their testimony, the witnesses of the gospel, we are, according to Jesus, among the, "Blessed ...who have not seen and have believed." There were many who saw Jesus in his lifetime but did not believe in him. We are blessed, we have accepted the word of the witnesses. Those who followed Jesus put faith in his word; we now follow him because we have placed faith in the gospel word they have passed on to us.

When we reflect on today's gospel we realize that people came to faith in the risen Lord in different ways. There was no one way, no higher road to Christ. There are no specially ranked disciples in these resurrection accounts. Indeed, the very ones we would expect to be the first to believe, like Peter, James and, later Thomas, didn't. The seeming minor figures, like Mary, the women and the beloved disciple did see and believed first. All this is encouraging because we have diverse faith experiences in our church today. ("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.")

What unites us is that we are a community who believes in what is "written" and whose faith is strengthened by the word we have received from the first witnesses and the meal we share at this Eucharist.

ONE GOOD BOOK FOR THE PREACHER

Bruce Vawter, C. M. THE FOUR GOSPELS: AN INTRODUCTION. (New York, Doubleday and Co. 1967.

After an introductory chapter that outlines the identities and main characteristics of each of the gospels, the author develops the relationship among the gospels and the different points of view which the evangelists take to write their gospels. This book has been around for a while and you

may have to hunt it down at a theological library or among the books of anyone who studied in the late sixties and early seventies. Worth the search.

PRAYERS FOR PREACHERS

I recently asked readers to submit prayers for preachers. Here is one. If you have one, send it to JudeOP@juno.com. I am sure other preachers will appreciate it.

PRAYER BEFORE PREPARING A HOMILY

Holy Jesus, Model of Preachers, you who delighted those who heard you with your simple stories and profound insights, come to my aid as I prepare to create this homily. My personal gifts for such a work seem limited, but I believe profoundly that if I but empty my heart of myself, that you will flood that heart with words that you want spoken. May the Sacred Words of Scripture fall like seeds upon my spirit to be nourished by the flesh and blood of my own sufferings and struggles to be holy. Help me, Lord to speak only what I believe, and to will to live what I shall proclaim, so that my whole life may be my homily. May I experience this time of preparation as prayer. May my efforts to re-shape the message of the gospels to fit this age and to launch those persons who seek You in the midst of their daily lives be truly prayerful. Send forth your Spirit and touch my heart as I now begin this prayer, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

---Submitted by Deacon Louis Bauer, Slidell, LA.

POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES

"It is time to abandon the death penalty -- not just because of what it does to those who are executed, but because of how it diminishes all of us... We ask all Catholics--pastors, catechists, educators and parishioners -- to join us in rethinking this difficult issue and committing ourselves to pursuing justice without vengeance. With our Holy Father, we seek to build a society so committed to human life that it will not sanction the killing of any human person."

-----("Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice," U.S. Catholic Bishops, Nov. 2000,)

Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I am posting in this space several inmates' names and locations. I invite you to write a postcard to one or more of them to let them know that: we have not forgotten them; are praying for them and their families; or, whatever personal encouragement you might like to give them. If you like, tell them you heard about them through North Carolina's, "People of Faith Against the Death Penalty."

Thanks, Jude Siciliano, OP

Please write to:.....

. Fernando L. Garcia #0702066 (On death row since 4/19/01)

. George M. Kelly #0223210 (5/29/01)

. Jim. E. Haselden #0561943 (6/6/01)

---Central Prison 1300 Western Blvd. Raleigh, NC 27606



