

The Second Sunday of Easter (Year B) April 23, 2006

Given at Saint Raphael Church and Saint Anselm Abbey
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Glorious and wounded [John 20:19-31]

Imagine the condition of the disciples, hiding in that room behind locked doors, overwhelmed by fear. Can we enter into the scene? Can we identify with their suffering? Do we sometimes pass through the same states in our own lives? Wracked with guilt and the terrible thing they had done in our weakness. Filled with regrets, “*if only*”s. Disillusioned, confused, bewildered, finding no hope to cling to. Afraid, oh, so afraid. Afraid of what is outside and of what is within. Afraid of those outside their zone of safety. Afraid of the darkness they have found to be within themselves. Afraid for the future. Having no idea what will be happening next, having no direction, having no vision, no sense of *what-comes-next*, having not even the merest shred of control over their destiny.

But I’m not merely speaking about the disciples, am I? To some extent, I’m speaking about myself, as I think back over some of the most painful times in my life. Could it be that I’m speaking about you as well, about you at some time in the past, or perhaps even about the situation you find yourself in now.

In light of this, let’s take a closer look at a few of the details in the story, and see if they can bring us some message of consolation, or perhaps even of joy. about the great hope which is held before us during this Easter Season of 2006.

First: *The apostles were gathered behind locked doors*, No matter what barriers they had set up: Jesus got to them, And us: No matter what barriers we erect, no matter how we cut ourselves off, no matter how much we try to hide, no matter how unworthy or guilty or alienated or out of touch we might feel, Jesus gets past it all. He comes to us where we are at. And what does he do?

He says, “Peace be with you.” He whom they had abandoned says, “*peace be with you.*” Lest there be any doubt that they are forgiven, he greets them with the word “*peace*”

That’s a word we all need to hear; in fact, it’s a word we cannot hear enough. That’s why we hear it everytime we celebrate Mass; that’s why we read it again and again as we make our way through the scriptures. Not only the word *peace*, but so much more: “*Peace be with you, God-is-with-us, Do not fear. I am with you always. You are precious in my eyes and I love you. Your sins are forgiven you. I will not leave you comfortless. I will not abandon you.*”

It is as if he is holding a wounded, frightened child in his arms, giving what is needed the most. What would you say to that child? Now, if you’ve ever been terribly afraid, you probably realize that hearing “*peace be with you*” once doesn’t really make a whole lot of difference. The afflicted one--whether it be you or me or the apostles or perhaps even some we care about whom we’re worried about—the suffering one needs to hear the word again and again and again, just like a child. How would you console that child if it were in your arms? “Don’t be afraid. I am with you. I will protect you. I’m right here. I will be with you. I love you, I forgive you, I am with you. Sshhh. Be at peace now. Everything is going to be all right.” Yes, sometimes we are

called to be the consoler. But sometimes, we ourselves are the child, needing to hear once again the words of reassurance.

And then what does he do? He tells them he is sending them out to others. That must have shocked them. They were so not-ready to go out on mission. In fact, after Jesus appeared to them, they would lock the doors once again. But sometimes, when we encounter the risen Lord, he points out a direction for us that we don't feel up to. But we don't need to be. When we unite ourselves with the risen Christ, a process is set in motion, a process which begins to transform us into something far beyond our imagining.

There is one last detail that I invite you to ponder with me: *He showed them his hands and his side*. Jesus is risen, yes indeed, Alleluia! And in his body was glorified. But his glorified body carries the wounds. This fact blows open our concept of who God is—in fact, it reveals an aspect of God that people of other faiths find hard to imagine. Our God, who has conquered sin and even death itself, bears the wounds of his struggle against evil. I remember being asked a riddle in grade school: *What are the five man-made things in heaven?* And the answer: the wounds of Jesus.

That is what the disciples needed to see. That is what Thomas asked for before he could believe. Not a vision of the glorified Christ, but the vision of the wounded Christ transformed—which is also a vision of what we are called to become as well: wounded yet transformed. And that process will continue throughout our earthly lives and even beyond the grave. That is why we, too, need to gaze with the eyes of our hearts upon the wounded God transformed. It tells us so much. God knows and understands about pain. God has experienced our pain. God was wounded because of our own sins, and yet still he comes to us, having triumphed over the punishment, and when he comes to us, he speaks about forgiveness—the very forgiveness won by the wounds we contemplate.

It is the sight of those wounds that makes God so real for us. We worship the risen, wounded Christ, and more often than not, especially during the most painful times of our lives, we cry out as the hymn said, “Deep in thy wounds, Lord, hide and shelter me, so that I may never, never part from thee.” A glorious God is perhaps too much for us to wrap our minds around. But a wounded yet glorious God? There's something we can grasp, not only with our understanding but with our own lived experience of life itself with its glories and with its horrors.

And that, I suggest to you, is one great message of hope that we can derive from this Gospel passage. Christ is risen, and he bears the wounds of a painful life. And he comes to us, and shows us, and speaks to us words that make sense only in the light of the union of glory and misery. He says, once again, as he will continue to say: *Peace be with you.!*