

HOMILY ~ SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

APRIL 15/16, 2023

We all have scars, don't we? Some of them are physical and visible, some of them are psychological and we can keep them more hidden, but we all have scars. We all have scars from living through the Pandemic. Our individual scars are different depending upon our experiences, but we all have them. We tend to doubt our faith when we are going through the difficulties that cause the scars. *Why is this happening now? Why did God let this happen? Why is it happening to me? Why isn't God listening to my prayers?* These are all natural questions, and sometimes we need to ask them; but we will never have any good answers to these questions, so we cannot get stuck there.

I sometimes talk to people who are troubled because they doubt their faith; but I think it is healthy to doubt at times, just do not abandon Jesus. Faith is not the absence of doubt, faith is the overcoming of doubt. When we work through our doubt, our faith is stronger. When we expose our wounds to the healing power of Christ, they become our strengths. The scars become signs of wisdom and hope. Our scars make us who we are.

In the Gospel Reading, we heard about *Doubting Thomas*. I think Thomas got a bad rap. The truth is that all of the disciples doubted, that is why Jesus needed to make the post resurrection appearances. What did they want to see? They wanted to see Jesus' scars. That was a very important part of who he was. That is how they knew it was Jesus. It also reminds us of the unconditional love that Jesus has for us. That is why we like to see the crucifix, Jesus with his wounds. It is through those wounds that he saved us, not just through his suffering and death, but also through his resurrection. When the disciples worked through their doubt, their faith became stronger. Eventually they were able to leave the upper room and continue the work of Jesus.

I do not find fault in Thomas or any of the disciples in doubting. I may find fault in Thomas for leaving the group. We are not sure why he was not there at the first appearance. Maybe he thought:

"I am really disappointed in Jesus. I am done with all of this, I am out of here." Or maybe he just went out to get food for the group. When we doubt our faith, it is very important to stay connected to our faith community. You can try and do it on your own, but it is going to be more difficult. Our rituals in the Catholic Church are very important and rich in meaning. That is why we streamed the Mass during COVID, even when Connie had to do it with her phone. That is why I made the videos and sent them out periodically. We could not get together physically, but at least we could stay connected as community through technology. Our rituals are part of who we are as Catholics. They are familiar and comforting, and they can relieve some anxiety. They give us a sense of having some control when things are out of control. Our rituals are repetitive, redundant and rigid; and we can rely on that. That is why we get so upset when we change the rituals, like when we changed some of the prayers a few years ago. Our Catholic rituals engage all of our senses: the music, the incense, the beautiful environment, receiving the Eucharist, touching one another. This makes them even more powerful. When we participate in the rituals together, it makes us more cohesive as a group. We share something in common, and we trust one another more.

So, be proud of your scars. They make you who you are and become signs of wisdom and hope. Go ahead and doubt your faith at times, but do not abandon Jesus. Expose those wounds to his healing power. When we work through the doubt, our faith becomes stronger. Remember faith is not the absence of doubt; faith is working through the doubt. Do not underestimate the power of our faith community and our rituals. They can help us to work through the doubt. I am so sad when people leave the Church when they are going through a difficult time. I know many people who left the Church when they got divorced. This will probably be the worst experience of their lives, and they left the Church when they needed the Church the most. So do not leave when you doubt. Stay connected and encourage others to do the same.

Love and Peace,

Fr. Jim