

**2nd Sunday of Easter
May 1, 2011
B.C. Arts Festival Liturgy - 4 P.M.**

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The Invisible Gorilla returns! That should leave most of you—if not all of you—puzzled and confused. What did he say? Something about an invisible gorilla? Yes, he did.

Almost a year ago, I preached a series of homilies here at St. Ignatius about “The Invisible Gorilla.” I’m not sure that any of them were preached at this 4 o’clock liturgy, so that explains why, perhaps, few here today have heard anything about it. But here, for your listening pleasure, is the sequel to the invisible gorilla.

The invisible gorilla is the title of a relatively new book that came out last year. It is written by two cognitive scientists (Christopher Chabris & Daniel Simmons). The title comes from a rather famous psychological experiment in 1999 that became a big hit on the Internet a while back. [It is still available on YouTube.]

In the experiment, subjects are shown a short video of two teams passing basketballs to each other. One team wears black and the other white. The subjects in the experiment are simply asked to count the number of passes the white team receives. The video tape lasts about

one minute. In the middle of the tape a young woman clothed in a full gorilla costume from head to toe walks calmly into the middle of the frame, pounds her chest a bit, and walks off. She is present for a full seven seconds.

After the video is finished, the experimenters ask a few questions. The first, of course, is how many passes the white team received. The correct answer is 15—even though the answer is quite irrelevant to the real purpose here. They are then asked if they saw anything unusual in the video. Almost half say no. They are then asked if they saw *anyone* unusual in the video. Again, almost half answer no. *Fully half of all the subjects did not see the gorilla.* At all! They literally do not see the gorilla. When shown the tape again, they can't believe they missed it and say that the video must have been altered the second time.

Lest you think this experiment is done only with the usual subjects for psychological experiments, namely college/university students, this experiment has been replicated thousands of times on all kinds of different people on every continent in the world. It has been controlled for men, women, children, for IQ, vision issues, race, ethnicity, and just about every other conceivable variable. Always, in

every experiment, with a variety of language groups: only about half the subjects see the gorilla.

The experiment is not about vision; it is about brain function. Our brains perceive in certain ways. We all have pockets of “in-attentional blindness.” It’s sometimes called selective inattention. We do not see things that we are not expecting in our line of sight. We can all look, but only some actually see. Half of us at any given time see only what we’ve been expecting. Who, after all, expects a gorilla in the basketball game?

So why, you are asking, is the gorilla in today’s homily sequel? Because all these post-resurrection appearance stories illustrate much the same point. We’ve already heard in John’s gospel that Mary Magdalen “sees” Jesus but thinks he is the gardener. We’ve seen Peter and John run to the tomb, see it empty, and think someone must have stolen the body. We will see next week two dejected friends walk all afternoon with Jesus on the road out to Emmaus and not have a clue who he is until he “breaks bread” with them, and then he goes “poof.”

And today we have poor “doubting Thomas.” Thomas always gets that modifier: “doubting.” I’ve always felt it’s a bad rap. He was

not alone. He is not alone even today. Thomas just asks: What is this gorilla they're all seeing and talking about? I want to slow down the tape; I want to touch the fur; I want to really know. What's so unusual about those requests? Not much really.

It may be that the gorilla story is more relevant than we might think. It tells us that we too can only see what we are open enough to expect in our line of vision. Listen to the acts of the Apostles reading again. Who would have expected that people could actually live like that: pooling all their resources, always sharing with those poorer in their midst, singing songs all day in the Temple and quietly breaking bread together in their homes. Being actually happy! It's what Karl Marx envisioned, but it couldn't last in that framework. Yet there they are! The first century Christians. Now there's a gorilla for you!

Our world does not operate this way. We don't live in harmony with each other around the world. We don't constantly give praise, sing songs, and wonder at the world's beauty. We do not see dead men walking, or eating with us, or wishing us nothing but peace. Unless we *expect* that all these things are at least possible.

Are they possible? If you can muster an ounce of courage to

consider the possibility, you, too, might see the gorilla. And wouldn't that be a wonderful Easter present?

Artists have always had a head-start envisioning things that seem impossible. (And we are celebrating the Arts Festival this week!) Playwrights always invite an audience into a "willing suspension of dis-belief." And musicians know there is much more to a Mozart quartet than notes in black and white on paper. You have to hear the music—and it's different each time you to hear it. Just as we all know that hunger is never satisfied by just reading the menu. Life is always more than what it seems at first glance. Artists instinctively know the boundaries of what is possible and what only seems impossible.

Perhaps that is "the" real gift of the Resurrection. "Peace I give you; my peace I leave with you." Can you imagine it? In the words of the Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins: can you believe and know that because of His resurrection "the whole world is charged with the grandeur of God." Can you imagine it? Can you see it?

You and I just have to be able to at least *expect* that any of this is possible. So the next time you pray, watch for the invisible gorilla, and don't focus so much on the game. Basketball we always have with us.

Gorillas are rare. Keep watching for one.