

2nd Sunday of Easter 2007

Earlier this week I was in immigration court getting ready to be a witness for my friend Joseph who I have known for 15 years who may be deported and sent back to prison in Haiti. As I was waiting outside the courtroom for my turn to testify, I couldn't help but be struck by the number of people brought in handcuffed, accompanied by friends and family members. The languages I heard were Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, English spoken with strong accents that betrayed the fact English was not their native tongue. The one thing that all had in common was the emotion of fear. Fear was on their faces, in their eyes, in their speech. I spoke with one man who has lived in this country for 25 years and he too was afraid that he was going to be sent back to Honduras, a country where he was born but had not known for 25 years. He had family, a job, just an ordinary life here but now he was afraid for his future.

When I was not speaking with George (Jorge) or overhearing the conversations of others waiting for their cases to be heard, I was reading "An Introduction to New Testament Christology" by Father Raymond Brown. Throughout this Lenten/ Easter Season a group of parishioners has been getting together to talk about Jesus, his humanity and how we understand his divinity. Brown's work was the last we were reading. So here I am in immigration court, surrounded by people who are desperately trying to justify a reason to remain in this country, reading about Christological controversies from the first centuries. And I had to wonder, What in the world does any of this that I am reading about "truly god, truly man, truly divine, truly human" have to do with the very real struggles of these immigrants. What in the world does the Easter affirmation that God is victor over life and death in Jesus have to do with the fears and anxieties of people who don't know what the future holds for them?

I guess this week I have been feeling a lot like Thomas in today's Gospel. I need to see evidence, not of the Easter event. I wouldn't be here if I didn't believe that Jesus is victor over death. There is too much evidence for me not to believe. Not the empty tomb. That is not evidence that would hold up in court. That can be explained away. The evidence for me is in the dramatic change of people. The evidence is in the transformation that happens in individuals and the community. Take Peter for instance. Look at him in the Acts of the Apostles' reading today. Here was the one who had been hiding in the shadows when Jesus was captured and whose shadow now was bringing about healing. Isn't that incredible. Peter who was hiding in the shadows out of fear of being discovered as a disciple of Jesus, now even his shadow has the power to heal in the name of Jesus, the

Risen one. Peter is a man totally transformed. Where there was once doubt and fear, now there is certainty and conviction. You hear it in his words on Easter Sunday; " This man God raised on the third day and granted that he be visible, not to all the people but to us, the witnesses chosen by God in advance, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. HE commissioned us to preach to the people and testify that he is the one appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead.

No, I don't doubt that Jesus is raised from the dead but I wonder what difference it makes in our world today. What difference does it make in the lives of people who are imprisoned by fear of any kind? Like those immigrants who are not in this country according to law. Like anyone who lives in fear of violence, or exile, or displacement. What difference does the Resurrection make in our everyday lives. Or more to the point what difference does the presence of the Risen Lord Jesus make in our lives, in our fears, our locked doors, our anxieties about loss of any kind?

Is the story of Jesus, Risen from the dead, who comes into the midst of his friends and says Peace, just a story with a "happy ending" that promises a "happy ending" in the next life? Or does it make a difference now. Where do we encounter the Risen Jesus as a real presence in our lives? How does Jesus come to any of us and say "peace". How does Jesus Christ "show up" for us, the way he did for those first followers who are startled by his presence, saying "touch my wounds" and know that it is I.

Will you finish this homily for me? Will you think deeply about how you see without seeing? Will you think deeply about the power of this Easter event in your own life? How is the Risen Jesus coming to you even now and saying "Do not be afraid, Peace be with you!"

The decision about my friend Joseph's future will not be made until the end of June. I don't know what the future will be for him. But somehow I think Joseph knows that the Risen Jesus who says "peace" I am with you" is in an Irish lawyer who cares about people like Joseph and maybe even in a Jesuit priest who care as well.