

Father O'Connor's Homily for 14 April 2024
Third Sunday of Easter-B

Acts of the Apostles 3: 13-15, 17-19

1 John 2: 1-5a

Luke 24: 35-48

The writer Leo Tolstoy told a story about the Czar and Czarina in Russia. They were having a banquet to honor the palace servants. The guests were instructed to come “with their invitations in their hands.”

When servant-guests arrived for the banquet they were surprised that the guards paid no attention to their invitations. They were simply looking at the guests' hands.

People were also wondering who would be seated at the head table with the Czar and Czarina. To everyone's surprise it was the woman who had been scrubbing the palace floors for as long as anyone could remember.

The testimony of her loyalty and love for the Czar and Czarina was clearly evident in the condition of her hands.

In the Gospel today, Jesus, risen from the dead, appears to some of His disciples. And He says to them, “Peace be with you.” But they were startled and terrified and thought they were seeing a ghost. And what does Jesus say to them? “Look at my hands and my feet, that it is I myself.” And they were incredulous for joy.

We see the testimony of Jesus' loyalty and love for us in the nail marks still visible in His hands and feet.

Even in our day, some people are still incredulous, but not with joy. They simply cannot believe that God could love them so personally. They are more comfortable with an impersonal notion of God: the Prime Mover, “the Man Upstairs.” But that the Son of God would still have scars on His hands and feet as testimony of His loyalty and love for us – well, people can still be incredulous – unbelieving, that is – about this.

There is a story about Moses Mendelssohn, the grandfather of the composer Felix Mendelssohn. Moses was born with a hunchback and, understandably, was very self-conscious about his appearance.

One day on a visit to Hamburg he noticed the beautiful daughter of his business associate. But she paid him no notice. The day he was leaving, he decided to make one more attempt to get her attention.

As Moses entered the room, her eyes dropped to the floor. And he said to her: “Do you believe that marriages are made in heaven?”

“Yes, I do,” she replied.

“Well, so do I,” he said. “I believe that just before babies are born, God looks out and says, ‘That boy and that girl are going to become husband and wife some day.’”

Moses went on to say, “When I heard God say that, God added this for me: ‘Yes, and your wife is going to have a hunchback.’ So I told God that He should give me the hunchback and give her all the beauty.”

That beautiful young woman, the story goes, reached out and took Moses Mendelssohn’s hand and, soon after, they were happily married.

This story illustrates what the Church has always taught: that the disfiguring wounds of Jesus should have been ours. He died for us sinners. He took our place.

You might expect that when Jesus rose from the dead all evidence of His wounds would be gone – with no trace of Good Friday to be found on Easter Sunday.

But the wounds of Good Friday are still there, even in His glorified, risen body. Our God has scars. And “by His wounds we are healed.”

A woman had been assaulted by a stranger in her own home. It was a devastating experience. Fortunately she had a very loving and supportive husband and family, and a very compassionate and capable counselor to help her through it. As a part of her care, she was encouraged to tell her story to someone outside of her circle of family and friends. And the person she selected was “Joe.”

One of her friends was very surprised by this choice and asked her: “Why Joe? He was the town drunk for years. Why would you want to tell your story to Joe?”

“Well,” she replied, “Joe is now a very grateful, recovering alcoholic. I chose Joe because I wanted to talk with someone who had also been through hell and has come back to life.”

Funny thing about our scars: sometimes they can enable us to bring some personal compassion and healing to others – and others to us.

To whom do you go when your heart is broken, or when you are in trouble, or when you are worried or scared? To someone who seems to be preserved from all suffering? Or to someone who has been through it, maybe not in the same way that you have, but who truly knows what

suffering is? As Bishop Sheen used to say, “The best blessings in life come from scarred hands,” pointing to Jesus on Easter Sunday.

Look at Jesus Himself: what comfort would there be for us now if He had no scars?

You have scars, and so do I. Some may be very evident, while others may be carefully concealed.

Jesus says to us: “Look at my hands and my feet. See the testimony of my loyalty and love for you. Now go and do for others as I have done for you. Be ‘a wounded healer’ for someone else along the way.”

Yes, brothers and sisters in Christ, we can accurately and gratefully boast that “our God has scars!”