

3rd Sunday of Easter 2018

Where did everybody go? Just two weeks ago the Church was filled to overflowing. There were even people outside on the steps. They couldn't see or hear anything but they were here. Had they come back last week or this week they would have found plenty of seats! What is it about Easter Sunday that draws so many people to church for one day and not for the whole Easter Season? In my homily last week I suggested that the reason may be that they think the Resurrection story is just about Jesus. It's something that happened to him 2000 years ago. And they are happy about that because his story offers them hope for "eternal" life. For lots of Christians, the Resurrection is tangential to their daily lives. It's kind of like when you hear a story about something good happening to someone, maybe winning a lottery or receiving a good diagnosis, you share their joy for the moment but then you go back to your life, your day to day with its ups and downs.

May I share with you three stories since Easter that have been a source of joy for me?

The first happened two days after Easter on a visit to Boston. I was able to see again a former parishioner who was a victim of the terror attack here in NY last Halloween. Martin was one of the Argentinians who lost 5 of his friends in that horrific attack. The last time I saw him was in the hospital here in NY bruised and bandaged, and in great physical and emotional pain. When I visited him it was the feast of St Martin de Porres and when I shared this with a parishioner, she gave me a medal of St Martin to share with him. When I saw him after Easter, you could no longer see the wounds on his body, although he will always carry the wounds of that day. It was sheer joy to see him again and know that he was recovering his life.

The second story has to do with the violin that I play. I took it recently to have some work done on it and the violin repair person was surprised when he saw it. He asked me if it was an Amati. (that's like a Stradivarius and worth a fortune) I told him it wasn't but he was fascinated by it and called me the next day to tell me that it was an old violin, made by hand by a

Check violin maker probably around 1820. Little did I know it but I have been holding a “treasure” in my hands, an instrument that is almost 200 years old. Imagine my sheer joy and receiving this news!

The third story is a simple joy. You know how cold and unspringlike it has been? It’s been hard to believe that it is spring but yesterday, Spring was bursting out all over! All of a sudden the trees that that seemed to be barely budding were blossoming, pink and white. Walking to Union Square to see magnificent magnolias, or the white blossoms on 6th avenue. Such joy!

Now perhaps you can relate to my joy. Perhaps you have a story of encounter with someone who was suffering and is now recovering their life. Perhaps you have discovered that something you thought was “ordinary” has turned out to be a “treasure”. Perhaps you were filled with joy at seeing in feeling the signs of spring. (Yes I know it’s going back to winter tomorrow) Your stories and my stories may have some similarities but yours is yours and mine is mine.

But when it comes to the Jesus Story that’s not the case! His story is Our story! The Jesus’ story is not just about him. It’s about us. Each of the appearance stories makes the point that Jesus is not just a “spirit”. The disciples experience him in a bodily way, carrying his wounds. He is recognizable in his body. As he says, touch me, see me, hear me. All the ways in which a human body is recognized, are present in the Risen Jesus. He is not some disembodied voice? He is truly with them. But he is also recognized as the Messiah, the fulfillment of God’s promise of victory of life over death. He is present to them in a way that they know and in a way they never could have imagined. And here’s the source of “incredulous joy”, his disciples, those who have come to belief in him and his Cross and Resurrection are now his body in the world. And that’s us as well. We who are gathered here on this beautiful spring day. That is why the Easter story is not just about Jesus but about our sharing the joy of being in him and with him.

The three stories I shared with you are my Easter stories. Like the Risen Jesus, my friend Martin carries the wounds inflicted by human cruelty but has also “come back” with a new sense of life as gift. Like my violin the Risen Jesus is the treasure whom we hold in our hands in this Eucharist. And like this beautiful spring day, the Risen One surprises us with new life, new hope, new love.