

REFLECTION FOR 3rd SUNDAY OF EASTER 2021

Acts 3:13-15,17-19; 1 John 2:1-5; Luke 24:35-48.

He is a World War II Veteran. A few years ago, he had a mild heart attack and he ended up in the hospital. Since he was a parishioner and a friend, I drove to the hospital to visit him.

So, when I walked into his hospital room, I notice that he had series of terrible scars on the upper part of both legs. I had never seen this man's scars before, because they were always covered when he came to church.

The World War II Veteran smiled and said, "come on in and see my sexy legs!"

I asked about his scars, and he told me how he was badly injured in Italy, how a bomb went off near his platoon and ripped through his upper legs. He almost died but was saved by a medic.

He told me that his scars were a reminder of how much he loved his family and his country.

Later, I thought about what he had said. In his wounded flesh, he carries a tangible reminder of what he was willing to do because he loved his family and his country. The scars tell that story.

Today we have Luke's account of Jesus appearing to his disciples after his resurrection.

As today's Gospel opens, the disciples, gathered in the room, are hearing the account of the two disciples who have just returned from Emmaus after a powerful experience of meeting the Risen Jesus. All of a sudden, there is Jesus among them. And he said to them, 'Peace be with you'.

The disciples thought they were seeing a ghost. So, to prove it was him, Jesus says to them – "Look at my hands and my feet."

Jesus could have said, "Look at my face, my ears." But he doesn't. He tells them to look at his hands and his feet. And what will they see there? The scars of his crucifixion. That's how they will know that it is really Jesus!

The Risen Jesus still has scars. In his hands and on his feet. The scars of the Risen Jesus tells a story.

But I still want to ask – why would the Risen, Glorious Christ still have his scars? If I make it to heaven, believe me, I want a different body than the one I have now! I want my heavenly body to be thinner, no more big stomach, with all of my missing hair restored!

So, why would the Risen Lord still have scars? Well, maybe he carries those scars into eternity precisely because those scars are a reminder of how much he loves us, and what he was willing to do to show us that love.

It is as if the Risen Lord stands before us, silently, showing us the scars in his hands and feet and without saying a word, he is proclaiming to every human being of every age: "This is how much I love you! Look at my hands, look at my feet. See my scars, see my wounds."

Without saying a word, the Risen Christ can simply show us his scars which proclaim silently: "This is the price I was willing to pay, because I love you."

"I was willing to bleed...because I love you.

I was willing to be crucified... because I love you.

I was willing to bear the scars of human suffering...because I love you."

And when we see his scars, we recall that even as the nails and spear were tearing his flesh, his prayer to the Father was simple and precise: "Father, forgive them..."

So, he embraced the cross. His love was wounded and crucified. His skin tells us – he gave everything away, to love, to serve, to call us to life!

And then I ask myself... when I am in the hospital like that World War II veteran, or when I die, will my skin say anything about how I lived, and how I loved?

Jesus loved us to the point of total self-giving. But we try to get through each day with a minimum of mess.

Oh yes, we will try to love the Lord and serve him.... as long as it does not cost us too much or inconvenience us.

But during this particular Easter period, during these strange times we are living through, maybe the Risen Lord is reminding us that if we want to love like he loves, and serve like he served, then it's going to cost us something. It's going to require much change in us.

Those who truly follow the Lord, have to follow him all the way to the cross. And it is in that kind of self-giving love and service, that we earn the scars that tell the story of our Christian lives, Christian discipleship. Those who seek nothing but safety and comfort in life cannot really follow the Risen One where he wants to take us.

For today, the gospel simply asks: what story will your skin tell on the day that you die? Will you bear any scar, or show any sign, that you tried to love as generously and selflessly as Jesus?

If you wish to have life, love one another. Care for each other. Sacrifice for each other. And then you will know that God is with you and you need not be afraid of anything, not even death. For there is no death in God, there is transition from life to life.

Fr Patrick