REFLECTION FOR WEDNESDAY, SECOND WEEK OF EASTER

Acts 5:17-26   John 3:16-21

It was the only time in my life when I broke a bone.

It happened one Saturday. My brother and I were playing football in our house. He happened to kick my leg from behind and broke my leg. If it was a professional football game he would have been given a straight red card.

That's how I broke a bone in my leg. It really hurt. I shouted something angry at my brother – "I hate you!"

That night, my leg hurt so much that I could not sleep. And I kept saying to myself, "I hate my brother."

The next morning, Sunday morning, we went to church. My Mom sat between myself and my brother. All through Mass I really wasn't paying attention. I just kept feeling how much my leg hurt, and whispering to God, "I hate my brother. Please punish him for being mean to me. In Jesus name I pray… Amen."

Then the priest started preaching, and I still remember the first line in his homily. I remember it because he kept repeating it over and over again. It was a sentence in the Gospel of John. Here is the sentence:

"God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life."

"God so loved the world." The priest kept repeating that. My leg kept hurting. I kept praying that God would punish my brother.

And then the priest added something I did not want to hear. He said:

"God loves the whole world. God loves the people you don't like. God loves the people you hate. God loves the people you're mad at…maybe even the people who are sitting here in church with you today!"

God loves me (I like that.) But God loves my brother (that is hard to deal with!).

I was fairly young when I heard that homily. I don't remember much else about it. But that homily created a problem for me. I did not like my brother very much that day. I was blaming him for breaking my leg!

I wanted God to punish him. But the Gospel was telling me that God loves my brother. Which means that I should try to love my brother too!

This is a famous passage in John's Gospel, and it still creates problems for me. The Gospel says that "God so loved the world." Not just my world. God so loved the whole world, that

he sent his only son… not to condemn the world… but that the world, the whole world, could be saved through him.

Which means that God loves my brother. And God loves those people who do things that frustrate me! And God loves the people I see on TV who make me angry. And God loves your annoying mother-in-law and sister-in-law.

God has the annoying habit of loving everyone I've ever been mad at. God sent Jesus to save every person who I thought should be punished. God offers forgiveness, hope and healing to every person I've ever wanted to yell at, or call a bad name, or hit with my leg.

God loves the whole world, and everybody in it. But if we are honest, I am not sure that we love everybody in the world.

People do things that annoy us, make us mad, disappoint us, frustrate us, and make us angry. Maybe it's happening right now in your home, in your family, in your neighbourhood, workplace, etc.

When we spend lots of time with the same people, doing the same thing, guess what happens – we get on each other's nerves. We discover that none of us is perfect. We are all human. We all make mistakes. We all have habits that make the people around us a little bit frustrated and annoyed.

It is easy to love the people we don't see often. It's easy to love the people who do things the way we think they should be done.

But what happens when your brother makes you mad, or your sister gets you upset, or your parents make you angry, or your wife or husband or neighbours get on your nerves?

Well, the Gospel says that God sent Jesus to save us. To save you. To save me.

So when I am ready to say a bad word, or loudly tell someone that I think they are a stupid, I try to step back and say "Jesus, save me."

"Jesus, save me - from myself. Save me from my selfishness. Save me from my self-centeredness. Save me from the judgments I pass. Save me from my anger."

"Jesus, save me from my lack of patience with the people who are dearest to me."

That is one way that Jesus saves me. He reminds me that he loves me. And he reminds me that he loves even the people I'm mad at. And if Jesus can love them… well then, maybe so can I!!!

As St. Augustine puts it: "God loves each one of us as if there were only one of us to love."]

God's love for us is unconditional, forgiving, and merciful. Let us make an earnest attempt to include these qualities in sharing our love with others during this Easter season. "In the evening of life, you will be examined on love."

Fr Patrick