

2nd Sun of Easter A... Stories

Introduction

We are a people of stories.

Our stories tell us who we are and what life is about.

What are our culture's stories?

What do we hear about on the radio and see on TV...

- *The trials of our professional athletes*
- *or Hollywood stars,*
- *or the ongoing competition of American Idol?*

Regrettably, many of these stories clutter and clog our hearts with anger, repulsion, fear and sadness.

Of course, recent exceptions might be the stories of Pope Francis and how he is reaching out to the street people of Rome with clothes, shelter and even a shower.

I Easter Stories

During Easter Season, which fills 50 days till Pentecost Sunday, we retell our Easter stories.

They fill us with joy and hope, peace and forgiveness – they lift us up and encourage us.

They assure us that we are not alone in this world, all on our own,

with no destiny except to be entertained consumers who have to have it our way all of the time.

Our Easter stories remind us that we come from God and go to God.

These stories remind us of God's love and care for us – even in the face of the many powers of death which surround us.

Our Easter stories assure us that our life is much more than just about us.

Our lives are not centered on us alone.

Our Easter stories remind us that we follow in the footsteps of Jesus, we are Jesus' disciples.

Therefore we too will be victorious over the powers of death that surround us... if we remain faithful to our call.

Listen to those powerful words of Peter, in the second reading:

... Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who in his great mercy gave us a new birth to a living hope thru the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading... In this you rejoice.

Do we realize that this is *our* destiny?

II The Gospel

Let's take a closer look at our Gospel story and see what it tells us. It is the story of *Doubting Thomas*.

Scene 1... the disciples are locked away and hiding after the death of their beloved Master. The Gospel story tells us why: they were fearful.

They were afraid of the Jewish leaders, many of whom were enemies of Jesus.

They were afraid that they might also suffer the same fate as Jesus because they were his disciples... a humbling arrest, beatings, a trial, and a bloody execution.

They lacked courage.

They were embarrassed at their own cowardice – they promised to die with Jesus –

and they scattered in the Garden, so fearful...

one of them denied Jesus,
and another even betrayed Jesus.
Not too good a track record for those who said they loved Jesus!

How could it have gone so wrong so fast?
A week ago the triumphant entry in Jerusalem... palms and song and excitement.
Now... fear and hiding...the spark gone... the Master dead...their hearts grieving and full of fear.

Scene 2... Suddenly, unannounced, Jesus is standing in their midst – not even a knock at the bolted door.

What does he say to them?

Does he accuse and angrily denounce them for their abandonment in his hour of greatest need... his supposed friends?

NO! Jesus blesses them with his peace.

He forgives.

He is merciful... just like so many parables he told.

He still lives what he preached.

He is happy to be back among them for a while.

He who has survived the evil of suffering and the powers of death... now gives them his shalom... his Peace and Reconciliation...

Their hearts are filled with joy, with relief, with happiness, with hope.

Their beloved Master has returned from death's darkness.

He holds no grudges.

And he goes even farther... listen to his words to them, and to us...

As the Father has sent me, so I send you.

His disciples are now given the mission of carrying on his work in the world.

How? He says...

Receive the Holy Spirit

Jesus gives them and us his own Spirit, his own divine power...

to strengthen, to encourage, to spur us on...

Without Jesus' very Spirit we could never hope to follow in his footsteps –
*for that is what our life is now all about, that is now our destiny, that is now
part of our story!*

Scene 3... There is one more scene in today's Gospel story. Thomas the
Apostle was not in the locked Upper Room,
when Jesus unlocked the hearts of his disciples.

His heart is still locked with grief and fear and embarrassment. When told
about Jesus' visit he refuses to open his heart.

How could that be true? Jesus died!

His friends must be suffering from wishful thinking or even delusion...

they want to see Jesus so badly that they *imagined* him present... how else
explain it reasonably?

Isn't it funny how we can blot out Good News,

how we can be blind to the goodness and love of God in our lives, when our
hearts are locked in fear or grief or anger.

We can choose to stay in our negativity,

our fears,

our worries,

our anger and resentments,

our envy and greed,

our cynicism...

these clutter and clog and choke our hearts to God's presence.

What are the fears and worries that lock the doors of our hearts?

Not enough money?

Growing old and losing our youthful looks (maybe even losing our hair!)?

Getting sick and enduring suffering and pain?

Not being as smart, as beautiful, or as handsome as we want to be?

Not driving around in the latest car or wearing the latest fashion, or owning the "must have" fad?

Our society's fears are poured into our hearts every day thru TV and the news media.

We are told we can't possibly be happy without the latest product that is new and improved, satisfaction guaranteed, money back if you're not totally happy.

We are told we have to look this way, smell that way, wear these designer clothes... or we won't be... what?

Worthwhile, attractive, lovable, recognized?

As if this is what our life is all about...

and our own lovableness and worthwhileness depends entirely on ourselves and the *Kingdom of Stuff*.

Our hearts can become so blinded to God in our daily life.

And what about the darkness that so surrounds us in our world today...

Even in our newspapers or on our smart phone on Easter Sunday.

Conclusion

And so Jesus comes into our midst today and says...

Peace be to you.

Why are you fearful?

What are you worrying about?

Don't you trust me?

Don't you trust my mercy?

Put your faith in me and in my love for you, and your heavenly Father's love for you.

This is our Easter Story for today.

Let's bow our heads and pray...

Jesus, in this Easter Season unlock the doors of our hearts.

Help us to turn our fears and resentments,

our embarrassments and our worries,

along with our successes and hopes,

our ideals and values...

help us to turn all of this over to you.

Help us to trust your loving mercy.

Fill us with your Shalom, your peace of mind and heart.

Fill our hearts with your Spirit, your power and love,

so that we can walk in your footsteps as we journey thru our world.

Help us to realize that our final destiny is to enjoy the Banquet of Life with you in our heavenly home...

But for now, we are to walk in your footsteps so beautifully described in these words of St. Francis...