

Listen to One Another

Easter Sunday, 2010 Acts 10:34a, 37-43; Colossians 3:1-4; Luke 24:1-12
Monsignor Thomas Sandi, Pastor, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish, Shrub Oak, NY

Resurrection morning, almost 2000 years ago, was pretty complicated for those who experienced it. Imagine, if you will, hearing about someone *rising from the dead*. I'll say it again, someone *rising from the dead*. People knew Jesus was dead; he had been buried. The Roman centurion who thrust the spear into his side knew, and so did everyone else. That's why he was put into a tomb. Now, it had been three days. And yet the first day of the week—Sunday—women went to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. No embalming in those days; they perfumed the corpse.

Think of the risk Luke the Evangelist was taking in remembering this pivotal story for the early Christians as he wrote his Gospel. *Women* were the first witnesses of Jesus' resurrection! Remember, no one actually *sees* anything at that tomb. All they see is that Jesus' body is *not* there, and they remember he had said—over and over again in his public and private conversations with his followers-- he would rise. They had to make *a leap of faith*. They did not actually *see* the resurrected Jesus' this is something a human being just can't imagine—that is just on one's own. *Women* were the first witnesses of this rather impossible act—the resurrection of Jesus, and the first ones to announce his resurrection to the Apostles—the eleven who remained—though not faithfully--hidden in the Upper Room. Judas had gone his way and taken his life. The shaken Apostles would have to *hear* the first announcement of Jesus' triumph—a fact that did indeed change the world, as it would become the very core of our Faith—from someone else. *We* would not be here, worshipping on Easter Sunday, had it not been for those women announcing to those men that Jesus was no longer dead. Understandably, they didn't believe them; you or I wouldn't either. There were other women witnesses too, and still the men did not believe *it* because they did not believe *the women*. But that's precisely what they had to do: *listen*.

And we know the story well. Peter, not taking any chances with what the Gospel calls “nonsense,” ran to the tomb, peered in and went home. Did he really know what had happened? He didn't see anything. All he had was the testimony of those women and an empty tomb. He went home, amazed. Interesting, of course, because he and the remaining Apostles were “wanted men”—associates of a known and crucified criminal. Remember, they all had been in hiding since Good Friday afternoon; they were not crucified along with their Master. They had all abandoned him and locked themselves in a room—separate from everything and everyone. Now here is Peter, informed by the women and the empty tomb, but so dazzled—dare we say, so guilty—he goes *home*. Why didn't he believe the women's testimony?

I mention this to you because in talking about this faith event we tend to think only of the hard and fast facts, but reason only took them so far. Faith is at the heart of everything we know about the Jesus. Without making *a leap of faith*, we only see the empty tomb. And someone must *tell* us about resurrection and then we have to voluntarily believe him or her. We believe *the person*, so we believe what is said.

Over the period of 24 years as an Air Force chaplain, I asked many of my fellow chaplains if, given their experiences and heritage, they might articulate what the Resurrection meant for them *in a word*.

An African American said “liberation”—being set free. Think of *his* heritage and what that means. A Baptist pastor said “balance” allowing faith to stabilize fact. A specialist in education said “transformation.” We’ve been formed and fashioned in the values of our culture, and Resurrection *changes* us . . . better us, so to speak. We must go beyond what we think and enter the realm of faith. And finally, someone who had known great troubles told me, Resurrection is “healing.” We are all wounded; we all need someone to cure us.

To reach this Person that liberates balances, transforms and heals us, we have to humbly *listen* by coming to believe another person. This is what Christians *do*; what we have always done. What’s my description of Resurrection? For me, it has always been “reconciliation,” making peace, allowing God to put us back together, reassembled, as it were, amidst the perils of ordinary life. What follows should be nothing short of cheerfully doing likewise for each other brothers and sisters in Christ. Resurrection is not a purely private affair between God and individuals; it is communal, a *public* affair, since everything we do, in the faith community, affects others, whether we know it or not. The world will judge us as “genuine” accordingly. And you just can’t do that without heeding one another’s advice.

Now on this very special day of Resurrection, I can’t ignore what everyone is seeing in the newspapers and on television about the shameful abuse of youngsters, which is despicable and criminal. All of us Catholics are suffering, no matter who we are, no matter where we are. Now I suggest it is reconciliation among ourselves and among all those who call themselves human that is the cure. There will be other times to speak about institutions, guilt, blame, discrimination and anger. I want to speak about being made whole, putting us back together, being transformed, re-orienting ourselves.

I would like to share with you a profound meditation, spoken by the Bishop of Pittsburgh at what he called a *Liturgy of Apology*. His name is David Zubik. Last year, he gathered wounded and emotionally crushed people together in his cathedral and articulated this *Litany of Apology*. As the Catholic leader of the Church in Pittsburgh, he had listened well, and now asked for forgiveness. Here and now, as the leader of this blessed parish (along with other clergy and laypeople), I believe I can use these words with you. Now listen with your *soul*, my friends.

To those of you who looked for the compassion of Christ in the sacrament of Penance, but found only scolding and harsh judgment in return—I ask for forgiveness.

To those of you who found sacred moments in your life and the life of your family met with callous, heartless, unfeeling, un-Christian-like attention to your needs—I ask for forgiveness.

To those of you who have in any way been the victims of any abuse, sexual or otherwise, whether as a child or as an adult, or as a parent, or sibling, or friend who shared in the pain of that someone you love—I ask for forgiveness.

To those of you who came to the Church, rightly expecting her to help you understand the rich tradition of our teachings, but were met with a less than half-hearted response—I ask for forgiveness.

To those of you who have been hurt by the poor judgment of others entrusted with leadership—I ask for forgiveness.

To those of you who believed the Church to be a voice against prejudice but found a deafening silence—I ask for forgiveness.

To those of you who looked to the leaders of the Church—lay, religious or ordained—to give a good example but met, rather, with a philosophy that said: “Do as I say, not as I do,”—I ask for forgiveness.

To those of you who needed the Church in sickness, in grief, in trauma, in turmoil, but found her representatives to be too busy—I ask for forgiveness.

To those of you who have offered your talents for the mission of the Church, but experienced injustice in the Church’s workplace—I ask for forgiveness.

For whatever ways any representative of the Church has hurt, offended, dismissed, or ignored you—I ask for forgiveness.

I think something like this needs to be said and heard in order that the healing may begin and the implications of Resurrection take hold among us this year. The Body of Christ is certainly divine, and inspired by the Holy Spirit. To the Church we are staunchly loyal. But since the Body of Christ is administered by human beings in Holy Orders and otherwise, we know each and every one of us fails in serving God’s people. We are all weak and frail. People need to see the Body of the risen Christ in and through ordinary, struggling, human beings—clergy and lay alike. The Church becomes a stronger sign to the world, as a result. And people need to see us holding fast to one another as wounded healers . . . seeking forgiveness, one for another, wherever it leads. We should do more listening to one another.

It takes a lot of prayer, a lot of attention, to lead by example, as we *all* are required to do. We all need fraternal, loving correction and forgiveness. Only then can we truly “seek what is above” and “think of what is above,” as St. Paul said in today’s second reading. We’ve died with Christ; we’ve risen with Christ; we ought to talk and listen carefully, no matter the source, and so be seen to be learning along the way that is Christianity. Criticism of our Church should not surprise us—it has always been so. We should expect misunderstanding, as did the Savior. It’s a complicated thing to speak of Resurrection, to walk in the bloody footsteps of the Risen Savior. If you’re not interested in that, you’re not interested in being Christian. In the end, it takes everything we have, everything we *are*--and a commitment everyday--to *be* Christ to a waiting world. Look at how much we gain by embracing what is strong in you and me, and what is weak in you and in me, what is blessed in you and in me, and what is sinful in you and me, what is easy for you and me, and what is hard. Love is like that. We can’t do it alone; we have to spend time understanding each other’s pain, depending on one another, being open to forgive and be forgiven, be humble enough to say this Resurrection is complicated; it can’t be understood without us risking all for Him who risked all for us, and doing so humbly and seriously. Only then can we live fully, knowing “Everyone who believes in him will receive forgiveness of sins through his Name.” (Acts 10:43) Only then can we know His peace.