

Easter 3, April 26th, 2020

Acts 2:14a, 36-41, Psalm 116: 1-4, 12-19, 1 John 3:1-7, Luke 24: 36b-48

Chasing the Horizon



Introduction

In this Easter Season, the Church spends time focusing its attention upon what believing and living as Christians means, what believing and living as Christians looks like. Last week, we heard the story of Thomas the Doubter, and his scepticism about the veracity of Jesus' resurrection. In the story we heard that Thomas needed to test the report of his companions about Jesus' resurrected state, by concretely, tangibly, empirically touching the wounds. As I reflected upon the story, I talked about the nature of the idea of resurrection in Scripture: that it belongs to the language of the heart, the language that strains forward to the altogether new. Resurrection is the language of the poet, of the visionary, of the prophet. Resurrection strains forward to the social and political, to utopian imagination. In this sense then, Thomas did not really understand what resurrection was about, Thomas was the quintessential empiricist who missed the point.

we heard about the story of Thomas the Doubter. In the homily and in the meditation on-line, I was at pains to in the light of the Gospel reading about Thomas, the "doubter" we thought about the place of doubt within Christian belief, within Christian faith, within Christian living. We concluded that doubt has its place, in fact doubt is necessary if faith is to be more than just blind faith. Faith must question. Faith must enquire. Faith must examine. Faith must probe.

Today, we consider another aspect, another dimension of Christian belief, Christian faith, Christian living: it is about seeing and living *beyond the horizon*. What do I mean by that? Let's think for a moment! Let's look at the image "chasing the horizon". What is a horizon? It is that place we see in the distance, where the earth and sky meet. It is that place to which people of curiosity, adventurers are drawn with the question: what lies beyond? It is that place which moves, as we move toward it: we never quite catch it. It is that place that invites us, beckons us forward. Franklin Roosevelt, President of the US, during the Great Depression and much of World War II, summed it up well: "*We have always held to the hope, the belief, the conviction that there is a better life, a better world, beyond the horizon*"

The Texts

Let's look at the Gospel reading for today, but first have a prior look at the story which I would like to use as a segue into the Gospel reading. Because, of copyright limitations, I cannot we send it to you, so please use your imagination as I present the story-line. It is a story about Brian and Kevin. In the we discover an insight about *seeing and living beyond the horizon*. It is a story written from the point of view of Kevin the dog, about his relationship with Brian, the father and husband in the family. Brian is not into emotion, least

of all when it comes to the family dog. “Brian usually ignored Kevin, except when he nearly trod on him in his big shoes”. What is revealing about the story, is that it takes reversal, pain, suffering, illness, for Brian to begin to see Kevin. It does not happen immediately; for a while Brian shuts down and sits in the darkness as he ruminates over his fearful diagnosis. But, in the end, it is because of his suffering that Brian re-evaluates, sees things in a new way. His blindness, his myopia, his short-sightedness, is exposed for what it is. In the light of his suffering, Brian begins to notice Kevin, Kevin, for the first time, is on the radar. In the last picture, we see Kevin and Brian snoozing together both wrapped in the daily newspaper: Kevin in his basket and Brian on the sofa – with the mark of suffering upon him – remember the wounds or marks of Christ: there it is. It is reversal and suffering that transform Brian’s world – he looks beyond the old life to a new one: the old excluding Kevin, the new embracing and loving Kevin. Brian, perhaps for the first time in his life, looks toward, beyond the horizon.

The Gospel reading has a similar tone to the story of Kevin and Brian. The context is the situation of the disciples as they walk along the road to the town of Emmaus. This happens after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. The nameless disciples are focused myopically, short-sightedly, upon the execution, the death of Jesus. Yes, they have heard reports of a resurrection, but understandably, share what we heard last week from Thomas – scepticism. The language used in the reading is interesting: and is understated in the English. The words give an impression of lack of faith, but the words really refer to the disciples’ inner turmoil, their confusion, their pain, their fear as to what will happen to them. In Jesus’ conversation with them, he calls them to conversion, which at its root, means a ‘change of mind’, an about face, a 180 degree turn, in thinking and living. Instead of paralysis, Jesus points them toward living dynamically. The news of resurrection is to animate them, to wake them up, to a possible new world, a new order of things, in which they are asked to participate, to build, marked by that wonderful Hebrew aspiration – justice – *mispat* and loving kindness – *chesed*. Death is not the defining thing – it is life that counts, resurrection life for the world.

Reflection

Much of what I have learnt about resurrection life, active, hopeful living, has been learnt from other Christians, living in difficult circumstances: under dictatorships, under intolerant religious regimes, Christian as well as Islamic or secular. But, often I have learnt about resurrection life, from people who claim no Christian allegiance. This man (slide comes up on screen) taught me in my post-graduate work in the US. His name is Elie Wiesel. Wiesel was a Romanian Jew, imprisoned as a child during the holocaust. He survived the concentration camps of Auschwitz and Buchenwald. He was tattooed with the inmate number A-7713. In my first conversation with him, he rolled up his sleeve and displayed it to me.

Despite all that he suffered – or perhaps because of it – he was able to see and live beyond the horizon: to imagine, to conceptualize what a resurrected world would look like. He was not a Christian, but he thought and lived in a way that put many Christians to shame. He died on July 2nd, 2016 at his home in Manhattan. At the end of each seminar he would say:

“Because I remember despair, I have the duty to reject despair”

That is what resurrection life, belief in Jesus, is all about.

