

Installation of Lectors & Acolytes for Permanent Diaconate

In the last month we have seen a decline in Covid cases all over our country and certainly here in San Antonio. The fear we had as the cases increased once again in late summer and early fall is slowly giving way to a new hope. Although we know we still have a ways to go and we must still sacrifice in order to keep the virus under control, at least we are beginning to hope things can return to what they were. It is hard for us to believe we may be turning a new and hopeful page.

A fearful feeling giving way to an unbelievable hope is what is happening in the Resurrection appearance we read today in the gospel of Luke. The risen Jesus gives hope to the confused, discouraged and fearful disciples. In the section of today's gospel leading up to what we have heard, Luke is similar to John's resurrection story, where Jesus shows his wounds, but this time a few different things happen. Luke says they think they see a ghost and are terrified. The apostles could not grasp what had happened. It was hard for them to really believe Jesus was alive. They were in turmoil and in fear. Jesus starts again as in other resurrection appearances with, "Peace be with you."

Peace! The gift we all want in a broken and divided world!

We are reminded that in the beginning of Luke's gospel, this peace was the message of the angels to the shepherds announcing the Messiah's birth. Jesus brings peace at his birth and gives peace at

his resurrection. Peace comes when things are right between us and God and between us and our neighbor. As the angels said, the message was for people of good will. Peace means we work in good will to do the right things. We have seen many examples of this during the past year and a half of the pandemic. Think of one or two that impressed you the most, like health care personnel risking their lives to serve patients and so many more people going above and beyond to help others in crisis.

The story continues with the apostles still in disbelief, so Jesus tells them to touch him and then asks what they have to eat. To touch him, and then to eat with them prove he is for real. This is the height of human connection. He is the same Jesus who died on the cross and is now alive. Yet he is also different. No locked doors can prevent him from entering to be with his disciples. As we see in other resurrection stories, Jesus helps the disciples and us to unlock the doors we lock due to fear of the other. Unlocking doors is the way to fully live the peace of Easter.

Jesus eats food to once again prove he is real and not a ghost. This renews the table fellowship with the disciples, the moments they learned from him how to welcome others to table, share what they have, and be with the stranger. The Emmaus disciples had just returned and shared their witness of recognizing Jesus in the scriptures and breaking of the bread. Jesus does the same here as he opens their minds to understand the scriptures. They are being called to the life of witnessing to the risen Lord, which Jesus commands all his disciples to do.

Luke stresses the gathering for meals throughout his gospel. He recounts ten meals all told. This resurrection appearance tells us the body is important. Our humanity is shown through the body in our words and actions. We need to feed it and care for it, and not just our own bodies, but especially the bodies of the hungry and the poor.

Jesus tells the disciples that the key to their mission is repentance for forgiveness of sins. That is what it means to touch the wounds of Jesus, the forgiving, loving, merciful compassionate Jesus. When we acknowledge our sinfulness and repent to accept forgiveness, we then can reach out in compassion to others who need to feel that same forgiveness. That is the ultimate human connection, a connection that gives and sustains hope, a hope so needed today after all we have endured. That is how we witness the risen Lord and how we share the peace of Jesus. In a special way, you future deacons are being invited today to become more and more connected with the suffering servant Jesus, whom you will imitate in ministry.

Pope Francis said at this past Easter, “The disciples received the mercy of Jesus at Easter through three gifts. Jesus offers them peace, then the Spirit, and finally his wounds.” The pope goes on to say, “Today Jesus tells us, ‘peace be with you!’ and ‘you have a mission.’”

Today you are receiving the ministries of lector and acolyte, ministries that you will exercise at the Eucharistic gathering. The Eucharist is our moment to experience the resurrection

appearances. It is our moment at the table with the Lord. It is the time to receive the peace of Christ and to commit ourselves to share that peace. Peace is living in right relationship with God and showing that in our relationships with each other. Jesus is with us in the Eucharist. He is alive and shares his life with us. You must witness that more intensely from here on.

To be human is also to be wounded as Jesus was. The wounds are physical as we see in sickness and injury, but they are also emotional and spiritual. Woundedness is part of the human condition. To help heal wounds we must reach out and connect our humanity with the humanity of the other. After all, that is what we all share. Before we are rich or poor, black or white, Asian or Hispanic we are all human. Jesus' wounds remind us of the need to recognize suffering and do what we can to heal it.

That was what happened last Spring here in our city when 1,500 unaccompanied migrant adolescent boys, mostly from Central America, were housed temporarily at the Coliseum exhibit halls. There were many volunteers spending hours helping them feel some sense of humanity in a foreign country and on an uncertain journey. It was a sharing of humanity to help bring about some sense of peace in their young lives. All those volunteers serving and sacrificing themselves were a sign of hope and a new sense of solidarity with those who were suffering and on a long journey.

The other part of our humanity is to listen to the other. It helps us understand the often painful existence of so many people who suffer

in other parts of the world. We often do not listen very well. The apostles had to overcome fears, misconceptions and even prejudices to really listen. They then could understand it was Jesus who was with them. They also had to listen to his mission to them in order to fully grasp what they were to spend the rest of their lives doing. Have we taken time to really listen to the humanity of the other during these months of Covid? If we listen we will be better witnesses.

How do I witness to repentance and the forgiveness of sins so that there is the peace of Christ? The young migrants who arrived after a long journey just wanted peace in their lives and a chance to develop their gifts and talents for a good future. They felt some human connection as they were cared for under difficult circumstances. Those who have stayed mostly home during Covid and yearn to interact with others miss the human connection as well. We have a lot of opportunity to show the best of our humanity to others right now.

Jesus showed his followers his humanity in the gospel today. He also gave his followers many Easter gifts. Today be fully human. Think of how you as a future deacon can share the peace, compassion and humanity of the risen Lord with others in your life.

May La Virgen de Guadalupe, who encouraged Juan Diego to be a witness to her son, give each of us the gift to also witness the peace of Jesus in our ministry and in our lives.