

Homily for the 2nd Sunday of Easter

April 7-8, 2018

Readings: Acts 4: 32-35; 1 John 5: 1-6; John 20: 19-31

Preacher: Gloria Ulterino

Our daughter Noelle must have been about 6. We were on vacation, near a lovely, small, pristine lake. There was a dock and diving board not far from the shore, where kids would jump with abandon into the water. Our three children had all taken swimming lessons, and Noelle was good at it. On this one day, my husband perched himself below the diving board, calling out: "Come on, Noelle. I'm right here. I'll catch you. Just jump." Noelle would walk out on the board. Look down. Walk back. Walk out again, always with the same result. It would take another year of growth for her to take that leap of faith. And then? What fun!

Today's readings have *everything* to do with that leap of faith. In Acts, we meet one of the earliest community of believers, sharing their gifts for everyone's benefit. And then, of course, there's Thomas. One like us. Wrestling to make sense of what makes no sense. Until he finally plunges into that ultimate statement of faith, into his heart-won, hard-won truth about Jesus: "My Lord and my God!"

So, how did he come to this? How might it have been for Thomas, that first week after Easter? Maybe, like this. Listen.

"Now, please, don't judge me! Yes, it's true, I wasn't there with the others ... at first. You might know what I mean when I say that I need time to figure things out. I mean, it was the end. Jesus was dead! In the most horrible way! And dead is dead! It wasn't that I didn't believe in him. I did! That's just it! There was something about him that was different, from anyone I'd ever known.

"I couldn't help but trust him, even though he was forever turning our expectations upside down. Talking to a Samaritan woman, when he shouldn't have had *anything* to do with her! Healing a man born blind ... and all the while

insinuating that it was the Jewish leaders who were blind! And then! Restoring Lazarus to life!

“But there’s even more. Not long afterwards, on that most intimate evening of all, he washed our *feet*! Now this was unheard of! He was a man! Our teacher! Our One and Only! Trying to prepare us for what was coming. He was going somewhere—we didn’t know where. But he kept assuring us that we already *did* know. Moreover, we knew the *way*! Everyone was puzzled, but I was the only one—as usual—to try and make sense of this out loud.

“So, after he died, I just needed time by myself. To wend my way carefully over where and how we’d been together. To try to make sense of him, yet one more time. And that time wasn’t wasted. For by then, I knew that I *had* to return to my friends, to all of us who knew him best. Where else could we complete one another’s story? Where else could we help each other see? Hear? Understand and believe ever more deeply in him? In this Jesus who was only going to keep on turning our expectations upside down. But always, always, always—I began to realize—for our good, our life, in all its fullness, even right here and right now.”

In truth, Thomas’ story is ours. Told precisely for *our* benefit. That we might also take that leap of faith, along with him. For we weren’t there, either, on that first Easter Sunday night. And yet, I *know* I’ve seen the risen Christ, over and over. And I’m sure you have, too. I’ve glimpsed him in every moment that gives life. In the birth of my three children. In my cousin’s delightful books that teach youngsters to read by giggling with her at the absurdity of her skunk’s perfume. “To get a whiff of the spray, just carefully lift up her tail!”

Then, on a much more somber note, in four American women who went through their own agony of the garden before remaining in El Salvador during the brutal civil war of 1980. Yes, they stayed, like Jesus. Because they simply couldn’t walk away from the children they loved, the “poor bruised victims of adult lunacy.”

Also, in Jesuit Father Gregory Boyle, who speaks the language of Los Angeles gang members. Who sees their goodness, nearly beaten out of them by adults who never parented them. Who loves them into being the very ones that God created. Who tells their stories that we might see and believe the goodness that God placed in *every* human heart, body and soul. And in teenagers who have been profoundly wounded by mass murder, most recently in Parkland, Florida.

Enough to stand up and shout, “Enough! More than enough! We must have strict gun laws in this country. Now!” I’ve seen them all. And more. Haven’t you?

In truth, Jesus—the risen Christ—is calling out to each of us today. All of us who weren’t there behind those first locked doors. Each of us, still tempted to crouch behind whatever it is that holds us bound. Yes, he’s calling, “Come on! Jump! I’ll catch you! I’ve got you!”