

Gospel Reflection – April 16, 2020
St. Mary's Catholic Church, Richmond VA
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He is a World War II Veteran. A few years ago, he had a mild heart attack and he ended up in the hospital. Since he was a parishioner, I drove to the hospital to see visit him.

I walked into his hospital room. Now, if you've been in hospital, you know that sometimes those hospital gowns (how shall I put this?)... well, they don't cover everything that is normally covered!

So when I walked into his room, I could not help but notice that he had series of terrible scars on the upper part of both legs. I had never seen this man's scars before, because they were always covered by his pants when he came to church.

The World War II Veteran smiled and said "come on in and see my sexy legs!"

I asked about his scars, and he told me how he was badly injured in Italy. How a bomb went off near his platoon, and shrapnel ripped through his upper legs. He almost bled to death, but was saved by a medic.

Then he said to me: "I don't normally talk about all this. But one time, my grandkids saw my scars and asked me about them. I just told them that my scars were a reminder of how much I love my family and my country."

My scars are a reminder of how much I love my family and my country.

Later, I thought about what he had said. In his *wounded* flesh, he carries a tangible reminder of what he was willing to do because he loved his family and his country. The scars tell that story.

Jesus has scars too. The scars of the Risen Jesus also tell a story. Did you catch that detail in today's Gospel reading? Remember, this is the RISEN Jesus that we are meeting in today's Gospel. The crucifixion is over. He is risen in glory.

On one hand, the Gospel tells us that this risen, glorious Jesus has been so transformed by the resurrection that he can walk through locked doors or suddenly appear in the midst of a group of his friends. There is something radically new about this glorified body.

But both the Gospel of Luke and John also tell us that this risen Jesus *still has scars*. In his hands, on his feet, in his side, perhaps on his head where the thorns pierced his scalp.

Did you notice in today's reading? Luke tells us that the disciples think they are seeing a ghost. So, to prove his identity, Jesus says to them – "Look at my hands and feet." He could have said, "Look at my face, my ears, my elbow." But he doesn't. He tells them to

look at his hands and feet. And what will they see there? The scars of his crucifixion. That's how they will know that it is really Jesus!

But I still want to ask – why would the risen, glorious Christ still have his scars? If I make it to heaven, believe me, I want a different body than the one I have now! I want my heavenly body to be thinner, with fewer aches, no knee problems, with all of my missing hair restored!

In heaven, I want a body that will allow me to eat everything I want, and not have to worry about calories.

So, why would the risen Lord still have scars? Well, maybe he carries those scars into eternity precisely because those scars are a reminder of how much he *loves* us, and what he was willing to do to *show* us that love.

It is as if the Risen Lord stands before us, silently, showing us the scars in his hands and feet and side, and without saying a word, he is proclaiming to every human being of every age: “*this* is how much I love you! Look at my hands, look at my feet. See my scars, see my wounds.”

Without saying a word, the risen Christ can simply show us his scars which proclaim silently: “this is the price I was willing to pay, because I love you.”

“I was willing to bleed ...because I love you. I was willing to be crucified... because I love you... I was willing to bear the scars of human suffering, because I love you.”

And when we see his scars, we recall that even as the nails and spear were tearing his flesh, his prayer to the Father was simple and precise: “Father, forgive them...”

For all eternity, the scars in the body of the Risen Christ remind us that God sent his son into the world, and we would not fully listen to him, we would not fully embrace him.

So he embraced the cross. His love was wounded and crucified. His skin tells us – he gave everything away, to love, to serve, to call us to life!

And then I ask myself... when I am in the hospital like that World War II vet, or when I die, will my skin say *anything* about how I lived, and how I loved?

Jesus loved us to the point of total self-giving. But I try to get through each day with a minimum of mess, the minimum of fuss.

Oh yes, I will *try* to love you and help you and serve you.... as long as it does not cost me too much, or inconvenience my schedule.

Oh yes, I will *try* to love and serve the Lord... as long as I can still get to my dinner reservation, surrounded by whatever comforts me.

But during this particular Easter week., during these strange times we are living through, maybe the Risen Lord is reminding us that if we want to love like he loves, and serve like he served, then it's going to cost us something. It's going to require much change in us. Perhaps the Risen One wants to reorient our priorities, and uproot our assumptions.

Those who truly follow the Lord have to follow him all the way to the cross. And it is in that kind of sacrificial love and service that we earn the scars that tell the story of our Christian lives. Those who seek nothing but safety and comfort in life cannot really follow the risen one where he wants to take us.

This current crisis is upending the usual flow of our daily routine. Many people are struggling in significant ways. Many of us have to work hard to make it through the day with our faith and hope intact. There may be lasting changes within us, and changes in the way that we live our lives moving forward.

After the current crisis is over, we will all have stories to tell.

For today, I simply ask: what story will my skin tell on the day that I die? Will I bear any scar, or show any sign, that I tried to love as generously and fiercely as Jesus?

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