

Third Sunday of Easter

After the Kansas City Royals received their World Series rings this week, the moment arrived for the ceremonial first pitch. The club selected Sergeant Benedict Lohman, 97 years old, a retired Marine and a World War II veteran who had survived three years as a prisoner of war in Japan. Lohman sat in a wheelchair on the pitcher's mound. Mike Moustakas crouched at home plate ready to catch. Sergeant Lohman pulled himself up from the wheelchair and stood for a moment to the cheers of the crowd, but he seemed confused about what to do next. He sat down. He did not throw the baseball. An employee appeared to tell him what to do. He still did not throw the ball. Moustakas raised his hands and got 40,000 fans to stand and cheer. Still, the veteran clutched the ball, apparently too frail and too confused to throw it. It was mildly embarrassing. Finally, Moustakas ran out to the mound to visit the man for a few moments, and they left the field together as the crowd cheered. There was no ceremonial first pitch. But the episode showed how much respect many people have for soldiers who put their lives in the line of fire and suffer for the sake of their country. At 97 years of age, Lohman presented an image of strength through frailty.

Saint John presents the risen Christ in a similar way. Jesus had suffered greatly in the final hours of his life and was slain on a cross. That day he presented an image of failure. In the Book of Revelation, John sees Christ as a lamb that was slain but now is standing. This Lamb, slaughtered and yet alive, shares a throne with God the Father, and the two of them receive praise from a countless multitude. In John's vision, as in real life, when people see a fallen soldier rise again, the effect is riveting. We respect a person's abilities to overcome adversity.

None of us likes to fail. It can happen when students get bad grades at school, when an employee loses a job, when spouses fight each other, and when children make decisions that embarrass their parents. We do not like to fail.

But failure does not matter. What follows failure matters. After failure, some people give up. They never try to achieve again. But others learn something; they push aside the scorn of others and find a way to perform better. Often when we examine our past life, we remember ways that we overcame adversity, and these convince us that we can move forward. Each time we succeed after failing, we have more confidence in our own abilities, and we grow stronger in the eyes of God.

We also have responsibilities when other people fail. Sadly, sometimes we put people down and perversely try to make ourselves seem better at their expense. We never seem better when we put other people down. We always seem lower than they are. When others struggle, they need support and encouragement, but sometimes when they fail, we fail to support them.

We have it within us to offer help when people need it. We have the best example - the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who became one like us, mortal like us, and rose so that we could live like him. He is the Lamb that was slain and rose again, a model of triumph. As surely as God the Father raised the Son from the dead, so we can raise ourselves and others to life.

Sunday, April 10, 2016