

Pentecost

Everybody gets wounded. That's a given. But what you do with your wounds—that's up to you. Sometimes I tell people who don't have much peace in their life, "You ought to read John's gospel chapter 20." That's when the risen Jesus appears to his disciples, and he repeats one word over and over: "Peace." It's like he knew, after his crucifixion, that because of their PTSD, this is what they needed to hear.

His message was compelling due to one detail. After the crucifixion, they were afraid. They thought they were next, and that death was horrifying. So they entered a room and locked the door behind them so that nothing crazy would happen. But it did. "Jesus came and stood in their midst." That's how John describes it. I mean, can you imagine? Jesus was dead, but "Jesus came and stood in their midst." That's when Jesus said for the first time, "Peace be with you." He said it twice more in chapter 20. Then John gives us this compelling detail: "When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side."

When I was pastor at a previous parish, one of our families had gained asylum in the United States because of civil unrest in their home country. A migrant service agency had settled them in Kansas City, where it would be safer. One night, after they had moved into their American home, an intruder stole onto their property, broke in, surprised the family, and fired several shots. One bullet hit the mother in the lower right side. She survived, but she was hospitalized, so I visited her. When a priest administers the sacrament of the anointing of the sick, he usually anoints the forehead and hands, but we may anoint any part of the body that is ailing. I usually ask permission before doing that. So, before I anointed this woman, I asked if she'd like me to anoint her wound. Without hesitation, "Yes," she replied and immediately lifted her gown so I could see and gain access to the entry point. I anointed her. Then I lamented that she came to United States to escape such tragedies, but she said it would have been worse staying home. She was grateful to be here and grateful to have her life.

What you do with your wounds—that's up to you. Some people use their wounds to justify their despair. They concede their hopes and dwell on their loss; it's understandable. Some use their wounds as fuel for anger. They seek vengeance on those who afflicted them, as if that will somehow make them happier and make the world better. But all it does is widen the world's wounds.

Then you've got Jesus, who showed his wounds to the disciples. Unlike me going out to visit a wounded parishioner, Jesus, the wounded one, went out to visit his friends. They were also suffering. He was the only one who could get through to them. They saw his crucifixion as a threat to their lives; he saw his wounds as the gateway to their peace.

Jesus breathed out the Holy Spirit, giving his disciples authority to forgive sins or retain them. We have the same authority. We can forgive the sins of those who wounded us, or not. Jesus lets us go either way. But he gave a model: He accepted his wounds, displayed his wounds, and used them to reassure others that they could overcome their hurts too. Jesus is showing us his wounds today. Wherever we're hurting, he's been there. He longs to give us peace.