

SCARS
3rd Sunday of Easter, April 18, 2021
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In 2008, I had a section of my spine fused together... a vertebrae was degenerating causing my nerve column to be cut off from the waist down. It wasn't a terribly long surgery but left me in the hospital for about five days. After my 32 staples were removed, I was left with a good-sized scar. I have another scar along the left side of my hand where the slip of a knife almost cost me my pinky finger. And, I have other scars from my time in the military that can't be seen.

Maybe you have scars too? A scar from a caesarian welcoming a new baby or one as a breast cancer survivor? Perhaps a scar from an auto or farming accident... or even from an injury from when you were a child or teen? Some scars are deep within us and hidden from the world such as those surviving a violent crime or sexual assault. Other scars are emotional or physiological such as those dealing with a break-up, regret, guilt or addiction. Many of us carry multiple scars... some concealed by our clothing others hidden by our emotions and how we

interact with others. In time, many scars fade and are forgotten, they become a part of us... other times, they are painful reminders of a sad or tragic event... each scar has a story. Most of us would like to erase our scars while others find pride in what they represent. One thing is for sure, we can hardly speak of Jesus' resurrection without talking about his scars.

Today's gospel is striking in its comparison to last week's reading from St. John. Our story picks up as the two disciples who traveled with Jesus on the road to Emmaus are passionately relating what happen to the other disciples... it's been just three days since the resurrection... they explain they did not know who their companion was until the breaking of the bread and at that moment their eyes are opened and they realize that Jesus is before them. In simplicity, St. Luke, in 11 words, defines the heart of the Eucharist: "Jesus was made known to them in the breaking of bread."

At that point in their story, Jesus literally appears! At first, the apostles are terrified believing that they are seeing a ghost. Last week,

they were terrified of the Jews, that they would be hunted down and crucified like Jesus. The Messiah answers this fear with, "Peace be with you." He tells the disciples he is not a ghost. "Look at my hands and my feet," he says. "Touch me and see... a ghost does not have flesh and bones." Luke tells us that the disciples were incredulous or disbelieving. If we were in the same situation, I think we'd also be frightened... what manner of man is this? A person who can appear and disappear, walk through walls and doors, yet be physically touched and enjoy a meal of fresh, baked fish. This is the Messiah who bears the scars of torture and of crucifixion. To me, disbelief is putting it mildly!

But why didn't Jesus come back from the Father whole and unblemished? The first, an almost obvious reason... St. John was the only follower who actually witnessed the crucifixion. For Jesus to appear without his scars, the disciples might question if Jesus really did die on the cross. They might second guess themselves if the crucifixion even happened. Second, without the marks of the passion, we would

never know the true depth of God's love for us. Thirdly, the wounds testify that death has no power over Jesus. They also show that God's words in the scriptures had been fulfilled... for example, take the Prophet Isaiah [53] whose prophecy was written centuries before Jesus birth: "He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him and by his *wounds* we are healed." Even today, the healing power of Christ continues through his resurrection.

How powerful it must have been for Thomas to actually stick his finger into the marks in Jesus' hands... or for Thomas to push his hand into Jesus' side... to literally touch the raw truth of God... to **physically** feel the resurrection. For us, as a result of Thomas' doubt, we have one of the most powerful and beautiful promises in the Bible: "Blessed are those who do not see yet believe."

Contemplating the Stations of the Cross or gazing upon the corpus... imaging the pain inflicted upon Jesus as we look at the nails or the crown of thorns, can be very difficult. Yet, the disciples, Jesus'

closet followers and friends, they found peace and joy in Jesus' scars. They are solid proof of his humanity ***and*** his divinity. *We* can find that same contentment and faith. Our scars can serve as a reminder of Christ's scars. While visible or hidden, our scars link us to Jesus, his oneness with humanity, intertwining us with his passion. They can be a reminder of our God who sacrificed his only son for the forgiveness of our sins... they can remind us how Jesus was obedient even unto death... they can remind us how much, how deeply we are loved by our Creator... and, they can bond us to the resurrection and the presence of the Christ in the Eucharist.

Yes, our scars can be painful to look at or relive just the as looking upon Jesus' scars can make us winch in empathy. Instead of looking upon these injuries negatively, let us embrace the core essence of Jesus' scars which we can call "wounds of love."