EASTER - 2016

We see them everywhere: name tags. At Safeway’s and Whole Foods, at MacDonald’s, and CVS pharmacy. Most of the time, they’re plastic, pinned above a pocket like a miniature license plate. Other times, if you happen to be at a muffler shop or getting your oil changed, the names are stitched on a cloth patch and sewn on a dark blue shirt.

I hate to admit this, but I usually don’t notice the name of the person waiting on me. But when I do get out of my own little cocoon long enough to take the time to look, I do like to address the person serving me by his or her name. It makes the experience of going to the grocery store more human and less “mechanical.” If you don’t already do that, try it the next time you’re at the store and see if it doesn’t make you and the person waiting on you more pleasant and the encounter more enjoyable. We see name tags around the parish, too. Our parish sacristans and staff members each have a special name tag so that folks who come to Mass can identify them as official representatives of St. Perpetua and can go to them should they need some assistance. Imagine a world where every man and woman, boy and girl, would be so locked into his or her interactive technology — emails, text messages and video games -- that the virtual world starts to eclipse the real one and we lose our desire for and our skill at personal encounter?

Our Easter gospel today tells us about the very first encounter of Jesus’ friends with the Risen Lord – well, they didn’t really encounter the Risen Lord, did they? Mary Magdalene, who was filled with so much sadness after what happened to Jesus on Friday – the trial before Pilate, all the lies and false accusations the religious and government authorities brought against Jesus, and then that horrible execution – hanging Jesus on a cross as if he were a common criminal – Mary comes to the tomb. I don’t think she even thought about what she would do there. After all, the Roman guards sealed the tomb with a giant stone. She could never have moved it. Maybe Mary Magdalene just wanted to come to the place where the Master was buried and bring some flowers, or just sit in front of the tomb and cry. Well, the gospel story tells us when she got there she panicked. The stone was moved away! How did that happen? And worse, the body of
Jesus wasn’t inside the tomb. So, she runs to tell Peter (we know all about Peter; he’s the one who was so scared when Jesus was arrested that he denied that he even knew Jesus, three times! — some kind of friend Peter was).

So, as we heard in the gospel, Mary runs to tell her story to Peter… and to the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. Now, I find that little detail very interesting, don’t you? I thought Jesus loved all his followers, especially the Apostles who were his closest companions. The gospel tells us their names: Andrew, Bartholomew, James the Elder, James the Younger, John, Judas, Matthew, Peter, Philip, Simon the Zealot and Thomas. So, who is this other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved -- this friend of Jesus who isn’t given a name?

Well, I went through the gospel of John to see if I could discover a little more about this other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, the nameless one. It turns out that he is a very special friend of Jesus. He was there at the Last Supper right next to Jesus: (One of the disciples, the one whom Jesus loved, was at Jesus’ side. Jn 13:23) He was in the High Priest’s courtyard during Jesus’ trial: (Because this other disciple was known to the high priest, he went in with Jesus into the high priest’s courtyard. Jn 18:15) He was there at the foot of the cross when Jesus died: (When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother: “Woman, here is your son.” Jn 19:26) He was at the empty tomb, as we heard, and was the first one to believe that Jesus was alive (“Then the other disciple, the one who arrived at the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed.” Jn 20:8) Then, when Jesus appeared to the Apostles, after his Resurrection, while they were fishing, this disciple, whose name is never given, was the first to recognize Jesus: (“Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It’s the Lord.” Jn 21:7)

You know what I think? I think that whoever wrote this gospel deliberately left out the name of this special disciple, this faithful follower of Jesus. I think the author knew that people like you and I would be reading or hearing this story about Jesus and he wanted us to put our names in place of that special disciple. He wanted us to imagine ourselves in each of those scenes: at the Last Supper with Jesus, standing by Jesus when he faced his trial, being there at the foot of the Cross, at the tomb as a witness to his Resurrection, on the seashore when Jesus appeared to the Apostles – recognizing the Risen Lord in our midst and professing our faith in Jesus as you are today. To be a follower and friend of the Risen Jesus is to stay close to Him, to share your lives with Him, to allow Him to be a part of who we are and what we do -- present to your family with all its joy and all your challenges -- with you in the classroom, on the playing field, at home or in the office. If I were to hand out a name tag today to each one of you it would have your name on it and, beneath your name, the words:

A DISCIPLE JESUS LOVES!
Join with me in singing a song I learned many years ago:

I heard the Lord call my name,
listen close you'll hear the same.
I heard the Lord call my name,
listen close you'll hear the same.
I heard the Lord call my name,
listen close you'll hear the same.
Take His hand we are glory bound.

Father John Kasper, OSFS