

April 11, 2021 Super Scar Homily: In his commentary on today's gospel reading (Jn. 20:19-31), Saint Bonaventure, a Thirteenth Century Franciscan bishop and respected scholar, tells the story of a battle-tested general whose aide noticed ugly scars on the general's body from arrows, spears and swords. The aide said that he had found a skillful surgeon who could remove them.

To this suggestion, the general replied in emphatic fashion: "No. Let them be a sign to my soldiers that I am one of them and go into the heat of battle with them. Let my scars continue to be a sign of love for my troops." For Bonaventure, a doctor of the church, the message of today's gospel is clear, namely, that the Risen Lord will never have his wounds covered over, for they show that the Word who had become flesh loved his own until the end.

The background of the gospel reading is worthy of note. It is the first day of the week, Sunday, and the disciples of Jesus have gathered together in fear behind locked doors. Jesus, hoping to convince his disciples that he is not a ghost, shows them his wounds. "When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord." (Jn. 20: 20)

Those wounds, borne of our sins, proved to be telling evidence for the disciples to make the claim that they had seen the Lord. The resurrected body of Jesus was the same one that had died on the cross. No wonder that Saint Thomas Aquinas said of the wounds of Christ that they were "trophies of his victory". The sacred wounds in the hands and feet of Jesus are an inexhaustible source of faith, hope and love.

In the early 1970's, the rock opera "Jesus Christ Superstar", was at the height of its popularity. One of America's most renowned preachers at the time, Bishop Fulton Sheen, was invited to preach a sermon at Pastor Robert Schuller's Crystal Cathedral in Southern California. In his sermon, Sheen pointed out that Christ was not some secular "superstar." Superstars are celebrities in the public eye and are often celebrated for their notable achievements in sport or entertainment. But how many of them, Sheen asks, bear the marks of torture and crucifixion? Bishop Sheen spoke of Jesus as a "super-scar". He shared a story of the Sixteenth Century reformer, Saint Teresa of Avila, a Carmelite nun. One day Satan, disguised as Christ, appeared to her. Without a moment's hesitation she demanded that he remove himself from her presence. The devil was perplexed. "But how did you know that I was not Jesus?" She replied, "The reason I did not recognize Christ is because you did bear the wounds of the One crucified and risen."

Bishop Sheen also added that on the day of our judgment, we will not be asked for our bank statements, nor will we be asked to offer a list of our accomplishments. The Lord will instead demand to see our hands and feet. "Show me your wounds."

Recall the words spoken by Christ to his disciple, Thomas: "Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe". (Jn. 20:27)

Every year in celebrating Easter we re-live the experience of the first disciples of Jesus, who encountered Jesus on the day of his Resurrection.

What lessons can we derive from today's reading?

First, Jesus invites each one of us, through the Apostle Thomas, to not only touch Christ's wounds, but to touch also those wounds we discover in others... and even in ourselves; and

Second, since our faith is oftentimes shaken by doubt, we can recognize ourselves in the one we call "doubting Thomas."

At the end of the day, the true "super-scars" are those who bear the wounds of Christ in every age. We call them martyrs for the faith. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, may we bear witness to the One who's wounds will never be covered.

Amen!