

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

April 26, 2009 B

"on ne voit rien qu'avec le Coeur. L'essentiel est invisible pour les yeux."

Luke 24:36b-48

I did something last summer I had wanted to do for many years. I decided to get in touch with my Latin teacher and basketball coach from high school. I didn't realize just how much a mentor he was to me until I reached adulthood and I've wanted for many years to see him in person, and, if at all possible, to touch him and thank him, to tell him how grateful I am for the influence he's had in my formative years. I had found out at a class reunion some five years ago that because of health reasons, he was unable to make it to our class reunion in the little town of Calicoon, New York, where we went to school. I knew he lived in Maine, and so when my family and I went on vacation last summer to visit friends on the coast of Maine, I took a detour and first flew to Portland where, after some forty- two years, we were reunited. It was a very emotional visit for me - and I'll save my reflection on that reunion for another sermon - because it's the story of what happened **after** I left him, on the same day of our visit, that's my starting point for talking about the resurrection account in Luke's gospel today.

Jim had told me that one of the graduates of St. Joseph's, the high school and junior college overlooking the Delaware River in a sleepy upstate New York town called Calicoon, had opened a little book store somewhere in the area where my family was staying with friends on the picturesque coast of Maine. Well, soon after arriving at our destination, while on our way to dinner, we stopped in a little book store our friend had told me I just had to see. And as we stood for a moment in the doorway, I happened to mention that my old high school teacher and basketball coach, whom I just visited, had told me that a former student from Calicoon had opened a bookstore somewhere around here. No sooner had I spoken (honest to God!), when a long-bearded man, sitting rather stoically at the cash register, looked at me in a Buddha-like fashion and said, "You're left-handed." "Yes," I said. "You've got a good jump shot," he said. "Well, I used to," was my response. And then, he said, "your name is Hudak," to which I responded, "and once you tell me your name, I'll probably come around the counter and give you a big hug." "I'm Bill Halpin," he said. And in that moment, I no longer saw this older man with the long beard and bald head. I saw a young face with blond hair and remembered the kind and caring college guy who always took time to affirm and encourage me as a high school student in the time we were together some 43 or 44 years ago. I immediately went around the counter and embraced Bill warmly. We got together during the week and I even made my sons, Jeff and Alex, come and

meet Bill just so they could hear from him that their dad was a decent basketball player once upon a time! Given the extent of the transformation that had taken place both physically and in terms of personality, I doubt Bill and I would have ever recognized one another were we to have been in a context different than the one in which he overheard me talking to my friend.

Today's gospel raises a question the disciples of Jesus faced after his death. It's a question at the core of our belief in the resurrection of Christ: "How do we recognize the presence of the Risen Lord in our lives and in our world?"

If our journey from childhood and adolescence into adulthood brings about radical transformations in how we look, and who we are, how much more must have been the transformation from death to resurrection in the relationship the disciples had with Jesus. Their suffering and dead rabbi was now risen, offering them peace and healing and the promise of their being witnesses to his risen life – and they're scared to death! Filled with joy but frightened. Debbie Blue, an insightful spiritual writer, puts in words something helpful for us in looking at this "reunion" of Jesus with his disciples after his death and resurrection.

"as threatening as death might seem, at least we know what it looks like. Resurrection is a little unnerving, unsettling, because it basically goes against what we know, contradicts everything we take to be absolute about the nature of history and the reality in which we live...It doesn't play according to the rules we accept as necessary. If the dead can come back to life, if that (sort of major) rule is broken, what does that mean about all the other realities, rules, that order our lives, that we take for granted?"

She goes on to say that "Resurrection isn't some personal insurance policy that you can earn by believing in God, or something. It's not just reassurance for individuals hoping to slip by death's vast powers somehow. Resurrection sucks up all the powers from death. It is God overcoming every obstacle to love and mercy...it opens us to the possibility of genuine surprise, to grace and love that confounds the limits of all our calculations...It isn't just about life after death. It's about nothing being able to separate us from the love of God, not life, or death, or power, or principalities, not now or ever." (*Sensual Orthodoxy*, Debbie Blue, Cathedral Hill Press, 2004, pages 108-109)

What this means for me is that I need to pay more attention to the gift of imagination God has given us, a gift we church folk don't always use when it comes to seeing God's grace and unconditional love and healing strength present in and among us. Imagination isn't just for children. It's been years since my kids lived through the Barney era. (Remember Barney! "I love you, you love me, we're a happy family!") I don't know if he's still on TV or not, but what I loved about watching Barney as an adult is that Barney taught children how to use their imagination – how to see life through a lens we adults often lose as we grow older. And I'm not talking here about needing bifocals to read the small

print in a phone book! I'm talking about seeing with our hearts, expanding our minds, and opening ourselves to imagine the presence of the Risen Lord abiding with us in the everyday realities of our daily living.

Luke tells us that the Risen Lord opened the minds of his disciples. And the question it raises for us is: How is the Risen Lord opening our minds? How does the mystery of his death and resurrection offer hope and healing? For we, like the disciples that first Easter Sunday night, are invited by the Lord to witness this hope and healing in the way we listen to and love and care for one another. Do we recognize the Spirit of the Risen Lord in others? Do we feel that presence in ourselves? We often get so bogged down with all sorts of trivial things, even in the church, that we fail to see that the source of our life, our hope, our healing, is the Risen Lord, who is always with us.

Jesus is alive. He's present to us in ways we often don't recognize. And every so often he shows up in people, like Bill Halpin did in my life last summer, to surprise us with unexpected gifts and blessings – and to reassure us that it's 'only with the heart that one can see rightly, what is essential is invisible to the eye.' That comes, as some of you might know, from Antoine de Saint Exupery's gem of a book called *The Little Prince*. It's the secret the fox shares with the little prince when it came time to say good-bye. It's an insight which has helped me through the years to see the presence of the Risen Lord in my life and in the world.

"What is essential is invisible to the eye," the little prince repeated, so that he would be sure to remember." And so, too, is it with the Risen Lord's presence, for it is only with the heart that we are able to recognize his presence in our lives, in one another, and in the world. *What is essential is invisible to the eye!*

"Open the eyes of our faith, O God" we prayed in the collect of today, "that we may behold the Risen Lord in all his redeeming work."

Amen.

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