

2nd Sunday of Easter Year C 2007 - Jn 20:19-31

1. In just a few weeks now,
 - a. our archdiocese will have a group of newly-ordained priests,
 - b. fresh out of seminary.
2. Shortly after their ordination they will have one of their most memorable experiences:
 - a. Hearing confessions.
3. I remember my first time hearing confessions was with a group of high school students on retreat at the seminary.
 - a. What surprised me was not what they confessed, but the way they sat there, warily looking at me as if at any moment I might attack them.
 - b. They were afraid!
4. My cousin Father Richard Baker tells the story of the first time he heard *first* confessions.
 - a. A little girl came into the confessional; sat across from Fr. Richard, made the sign of the cross and said, "I'm so nervous, I could just pee myself!"
 - i. And promptly, she did.
 - ii. She was afraid!
 - b. Now, she had never been to confession before;
 - c. those highschool students had never met me before:
 - i. Tell me: where did that fear come from?
5. We all know: the fear comes from the stories about angry priests their parents experienced in the confessional when they were young.
6. It comes from the punishments they themselves experienced, when they have had to admit to doing something wrong;
7. It comes from a whole culture that from economics to religion
 - a. from prejudice to jurisprudence is based on fear:
 - i. Whether that fear is of the police, the president, the teacher, sister, father mom or dad or God.
 - ii. That fear is supposed to make us do what is right;
 - (1) but look around and you will see, all it ever really does is make us afraid of getting caught doing something wrong;
 - (a) and getting punished for it.
8. That is why the disciples were locked in that upper room on that first Easter night.
9. It say it clearly they were afraid:
 - a. It says they were afraid of "the Jews" but not because they were Jewish; for so were the disciples:
 - b. No they were afraid of the punishment Jesus had received from their rulers for challenging them
 - c. They were afraid of the punishment they would receive for following him.
10. And thus we can imagine their reaction when Jesus suddenly appeared in their midst.
 - a. They were afraid that the punishment that they deserved from God for having abandoned, denied and betrayed him had finally arrived.
11. But then instead of anger he wishes them peace;
12. And instead of punishing them he forgives them;
13. and sends them out to forgive others in his name.
14. The scriptures say that the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord;
 - a. But they must have been even happier that they'd escaped God's punishment.
15. It was only later that they realized; that they had not escaped anything;
 - a. It is just that there was no punishment.
16. They realized that

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- a. God is not revealed in the actions of angry people,
 - i. Be they police or priests, parents or teachers.
 - b. That God's will is not revealed in sickness,
 - i. and certainly not in violent death.
 - c. And that God is not the one who causes the suffering in this world
 - i. no we in our own fear and anger prejudices and stupidity do that;
17. God is the one who raises us up after the world has done its worst to us;
- a. God did that for Jesus at Easter
 - b. and God does that for us through forgiveness.
18. Oh yes, you can find many places in the Bible
- a. where God is pictured as the one who punishes due to sin;
 - b. Those passages need to be taken seriously and understood in their context,
 - c. as the attempt of people to understand the suffering in their world;
19. but as Christians we believe that God's deepest nature was revealed in Jesus of Nazareth;
- a. When he gives his guilty disciples forgiveness and peace.
20. And we believe that Church's deepest nature is revealed in Jesus' command to share that forgiveness with others.
21. One of the ways that is done of course is in confession;
- a. One of my great joys as a priest is to hear confessions;
 - i. To see how the fear on a person's face melts away
 - (1) when they encounter God not as an angry parent
 - (a) in the person of an irritated priest,
 - (2) but as the forgiveness offered in the name of Jesus Christ.
 - b. So many of you went to confession this past Lent and I encourage you to continue; and to bring your children (just make sure they go to the bathroom first!)
22. But forgiveness is more than what we receive in the confessional
- a. It is what we share in our homes, our marriages, our jobs our friendships and our lives.
 - b. Forgiveness is about creating that community,
 - i. where forgiveness and the peace that flows from it
 - (1) are more important than fear and punishment,
 - c. Imagine what that community would be like!
 - i. we catch glimpses of it here at Church,
 - ii. in the forgiveness we pray for and the peace we give one another.
 - (1) And that is no accident because forgiveness is not something that happens at Church;
 - (2) forgiveness **MAKES** the church.
 - (3) and it makes **US** the Church
 - (4) because when we forgive, we reveal
 - (a) not only who **GOD** truly is,
 - (b) nor only what the **CHURCH** truly is,
 - (c) but who **WE** truly are; people guilty ourselves, yet forgiven and given the power to share that forgiveness with others.