

The Sixth Sunday of Easter  
May 25, 2014  
9:00 AM La Gracia  
5:00 PM Holy Eucharist  
The Rev. Robert H. Malm

## Hope and Suffering

What a joy to be here presiding and preaching on the first Sunday back after my accident 15 weeks ago. That seems like a very long time – 15 weeks, 105 days! But I have a different perspective on time now. In some ways it seems like a very long time, but in other ways it doesn't seem very long – especially when compared to the sacred time we observe in the Church calendar (it is still Easter season!) and also when compared to eternity, the life that comes after this physical life is over.

When I told Mother Leslie and Mother Elizabeth that I thought I could do both La Gracia at 9:00 AM and, then, the 5:00 PM Holy Eucharist, I didn't realize the lessons for today from the Gospel of John and the First Epistle of Peter would be so focused on a subject I've considered at some length these 15 weeks – hope and suffering.

Since my accident, hope for me is so much more concrete – focused on what used to seem like small things I always took for granted – mobility, independence, work, driving, being with family and friends. Each day now I begin and end my waking hours reflecting upon hope, especially when there is some great challenge, some suffering.

Most of the suffering I have experienced has been more emotional and spiritual than physical. Yes, I've had some intense pain. I used strong pain killers for 2½ months. But the hardest pain to bear has been for me to know the worry, the anxiety, the suffering my family had to endure – especially early on. Would I live? Would I regain mobility? How would the recovery proceed?

Another component to this emotional and spiritual pain came as I realized I could not be present for my Mother in the last two months of her life. Just 36 hours before my accident I had left my Mother in Georgia after helping her to come under hospice care. Having to wear the halo brace for 10 weeks prevented me from any long-distance travel. Thankfully we had many wonderful phone conversations and, even, used "Skype" to see and talk with each other right up until her death. I was also blessed to know that my sister and Leslie, my wife, could be by her side during the last days of her life.

Chapters 14-17 of St. John's Gospel are known as Jesus' Farewell Address. This concentrated teaching comes after the Last Supper and washing of feet, before Jesus and the disciples go to the Garden of Gethsemane on that last night. Jesus is trying to give hope to his disciples, even as he anticipates his and their suffering.

So much of this hope comes through the promised gift of the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, the Comforter (in Spanish, the “Defensor”). By the power of the Spirit the disciples will be able to carry forth the “new Commandment” to love as Jesus has loved. The Spirit gives us strength in our darkest hours. The Spirit empowers others to give us hope when we experience pain. The Spirit brings love stronger than death.

The First Epistle of Peter was written decades after the Resurrection. The Church was growing and changing the world. The Roman Empire was threatened by this new religion and began massive persecution. Peter is written to Christians being arrested, tortured, killed. Just as Jesus experienced the suffering of the cross, so, too, these Christians needed hope to endure their suffering. *“Always be ready to make your defense...for the hope that is in you...”* The suffering experienced here and now is connected to the suffering of Christ on the cross.

So we look ahead. Thursday is Ascension Day. We anticipate celebrating the gifts of the Spirit in Pentecost. We live in hope even as we know life can bring suffering. As I look ahead I realize four lessons, learned again, during these last 15 weeks.

1. We never know what will happen. We need to make plans in life, but we need to know plans will change. And, so, we need to be open to whatever comes our way, while at the same time...
2. Being careful. I was not careful when I fell. I could have been more careful in two ways: Take it slow, there’s no rush (maybe count to three before going forward). And use the light; darkness can confuse us, disorient us, unless we can...
3. Depend on others. People are willing to help, to assist. My family and I have had so many gifts, kindnesses, encouragements come our way these 15 weeks; cards, meals, rides, visits. All of this reminds us to ask for help when we need it and...
4. Be thankful. Start and end each day giving thanks for life, for love, for those who journey with us, for those who bring hope, even when there is suffering.

Acts 17:22-31  
Psalm 66:7-8, 14-18  
1 Peter 3:13-22  
John 14:15-21