

Last Tuesday, I was visiting someone at the hospital who was about to undergo major surgery. This kind of surgery you don't choose to do, this kind of surgery the doctors tell you you have to do if you want to survive. This kind of surgery you may take days to totally wake up from, this kind of surgery you're a bit afraid you may not wake up from. It was not an easy moment, as you can imagine, and after we have talked and prayed and received the sacrament, not knowing what more I could do, and a little bit to my surprise, I asked the lady: "Well, would you like me to visit you after the surgery, even though you might be unconscious?". And again a little to my surprise, the woman responded to me: "Yes, I would like that very much. Just stand outside the room if they don't let you in, it's enough for me to know you will be here."

One thing I do the week before I have to preach is to read the Gospel, and as I carry it in my head while continuing to do some researches, in general, new ideas come to mind. I am reminded of something I read in a book, saw in a movie, sometimes it's a song on the radio that catches my attention, and I start thinking: Well, maybe this relates to our Gospel and I may have something to say about that, and I start writing. This did not happen this week. The more I thought about our Gospel, this strange, strange story of resurrection, the more puzzled I felt and the less I felt I have something to say about it. It was okay on Monday morning, but on Thursday night I started to panic. What was the Holy Spirit doing? Not only famous authors are haunted by the phobia of the blank page, the humble preacher can be too.

What happened this week though is that I noticed that, having this Gospel in that back of my mind, I started to act in a different way. Having such an overwhelming sense of Jesus present in his flesh and bones, I became a less intellectual, and maybe even a less spiritual person. I was less in my head and I started go places in a more intentional way. I offered less thoughts and prayers from my place of comfort, would it be my home, our church, and I started thinking about the importance of being present with my body, not only in places where I could be the priest I was expected to be, but in places where I had nothing particularly smart to say, and in places where there was nothing really helpful I could do. It started on Monday as I went to the Court House for a case in which I wasn't asked to testify, and it ended on Thursday driving two hours in traffic to visit at the hospital someone I expected to find unconscious.

The Gospel we have heard today, at the very end of Jesus's ministry on earth, is not centered on what Jesus had to say, or even on what he did. The Gospel we have heard today is about Jesus being present, among his friends, and present as much as presence can be experienced in this world. He was present with his body. Not a vision, not a voice from above. He was with his friends, speaking, touching, eating. He was real. And their overwhelming joy had little to do with what Jesus had to teach, or even with the proof that death could be vanquished. The overwhelming joy of the disciples was about having anew their friend sitting among them. Jesus, after his resurrection, comes back to give the best that he has to give: His presence with us, in a way that was for the disciples recognizable and concrete.

The best that we have to give, you see, when we do ministry, would we be Jesus, a priest or any other believer, is not always about the great insights we may have on God, it's not always about the good advice we could offer, it's not about the example of our great virtue, it may be not even about how many prayers we can say for those in need, and it's probably not about accomplishing worship in the proper manner either. When we do ministry, when we become *witnesses*, as Jesus invites us to be today, it is about being present for one another. The woman I visited at the hospital knew that in her time of need, and confusedly, I knew it too. Being present has value in itself and maybe has the greatest value of all. Being present, we are witnesses of the Resurrected Christ who was present with his disciples. Having someone being there for them is what most of us long for, in a world where loneliness is often perceived like a shameful disease although we all suffer from it, but we think we are strong and independent people, and blessed too, so what could we possibly need? Well, the Gospel tells us: We need one another. We need company. Not necessarily to accomplish big things, although we it can be. We need to be together just for the joy and the comfort to see one another, to be with one another, we need to express our tenderness by a few words, a hug, small gifts. Sharing a meal. I am amazed at what I hear each time I visit people in nursing home. I have been doing that for almost a decade and almost each time this is what I hear: "I would like to be able to make friends, I miss my church family, I would like so much my children to visit." Some people in those facilities spend all day sitting in the hall waiting for someone to come visit them. And it's not only older people, young children with over committed parents can feel very lonely too.

This is the thing Jesus and the disciples longed for after the separation: being together, acknowledging each other, recreating the relationships after the separation. As I get myself ready to travel to France after almost two years of absence, I relate to the feeling. I just want to see the faces of my family and friends, to hold them in my arms, I just want to sit and have a meal, have a conversation that does not make much sense because I know we are going to speak of all the same old things, but I also know this conversation means: it is to say to them and hear them say to me, as Jesus did: "It is I, myself". "It's me, I haven't changed, we are still in a relationships, even though we feel at time so far away from one another, nothing has changed." I guess you all experienced some of that in a way or another. And so this week, I have been wondering how the Gospel could change us as we realize that Jesus worked so much to make God real for us, to get us out of our heads, and maybe even to get us out of our spiritual selves, if by being spiritual we become desincarnated and distant. Jesus does not want us to send good thoughts and prayers unless there is nothing else we can do. Jesus wants us to show up, to be present, because this is where joy and life and love can be found. This is where God can be found too. And when relationships are difficult or broken, this is the first step we need to take to find peace and reconciliation.

It's hard sometimes just to be there. It can be very humbling: to be sitting in a courtroom or standing in the ICU with really nothing smart to say and having nothing useful to do. We like to keep ourselves busy with words and actions, and there is value in it, but sometimes we forget there is value in the mere presence. I had the delightful surprise since Easter to have a couple of people from the English-speaking congregation visiting us at La Gracia. And the funny thing is, when I asked them, they told me they could not speak Spanish! But they realized there were value in the mere fact that they were here sitting with us, even if they could not say a word or understand all that was going on. We can have many thoughts and many prayers but there is only a place at a time where our body can be, and where our body is means: This is the most important thing I can do right now, is to be there for you, or maybe just with you. This is what Jesus did for his disciples after his resurrection, this is what he still does for us being present in the Holy sacrament, being present in communion, offering us what we call: "The real presence".

At our turn, we have to be the sacrament for one another. The sign of the Resurrected Christ in the world. We don't have to be particularly bright to do that, we don't have to be saints. We just have to offer what we have, or even better, just to be "us, ourselves", fully present. At times we are all so much distracted by our phones and our many activities, it's more needed than ever that we learn how to be present. Even if we are not convinced we make a difference, I think we do. I am sure that for most of us we can remember a difficult time in our lives when having someone present for us made all the difference in the world. This requires humility. To believe we are enough. To believe it's enough to be here. Jesus did not come to give his disciples a lecture, about life after death, or even about the Bible, he just told them he was coming back to be with them and that's all what the Scriptures are about. We cannot really explain what the Resurrection is, but this is what life after death will look like, the Bible tells it again and again and again and our sacrament reminds it to us too: Heaven is sitting together at the same table, rejoicing in the company of one another, it will be as real as what we can experience right now, if we choose to. Amen.