

To Share in the Joy of the Risen Lord

- 5th Sunday of Easter
- May 19, 2019
- Stephen V. Sundborg, S.J.

It is ironic that I am giving this homily. I want to talk about Easter joy, joy in the Risen Lord, joy in our Christian kinship. It is ironic because my name is Swedish “Sundborg”. Do you want to see an expression of Swedish joy? ... Do you want to see it again?! The name, by the way, means “Fortress on the Sound”. Fitting, for I am a rather well-walled person.

St. Ignatius of Loyola in his Spiritual Exercises, when he has us contemplate the encounters with the Risen Christ, tells us to ask for the grace of joy, not so much our joy, but to share, have a part in the joy of the Risen Lord, the joy Jesus now has in being in his people and able to do what he has always wanted to do. In the Easter Season let us ask to share in the joy of the Risen Lord among us, with us, in us.

In the first reading St. Paul comes home to Antioch and reports to his local church what God has done in the communities Paul has visited, where God has opened the door of faith to the people. I would like to report some experiences I have had in the last weeks of the Risen Lord’s presence by the sign of joy in communities I have experienced. In the gospel Jesus, just having washed the feet of his disciples, says now he is glorified, and his father is glorified in him, and he and his father will continue to be glorified among their disciples if they follow the new commandment of loving one another as Jesus has loved them. I want to report where I have seen the Risen Lord glorified in certain communities of joy.

I go to many events, many breakfasts, and lunches, and banquets for many causes. None is more filled with a spirit of joy than the St. Vincent de Paul Society Breakfast. Why? Because the members of this society go by pairs into the homes of the poor to respond to their needs person-to-person, face-to-face, need-to-need. They find the Risen Lord in the poor “Whatever you do to the least of these, you do to me.” They find joy in their ministry and it is contagious, it bubbles over, it fills the room of hundreds of good people gathered in the breakfast to share in this ministry of Jesus and to Jesus in the poor. Campion Ballroom is alive, noisy, good-spirited, cheerful, a community of joy. Jesus prayed “that my joy may be in you and your joy complete”. As Ignatius says, don’t seek your own joy; share in the joy of Jesus risen, and your joy will be complete when you accompany and minister to Jesus in others. St. Paul would have loved to report on this community of St. Vincent de Paul Society.

Then I attended a talk by Jesuit Father Greg Boyle in a packed Pigott Auditorium and heard of another community of joy among former gang members Greg and others accompany in Homeboy Industries in L.A. Greg has learned something very important from the experience of this rather unusual community. As he says, “Service is only the hallway leading to the ballroom of kinship.” All service for justice, for equality, for fighting poverty and discrimination is not an end in itself, he says, but many steps in the hallway, leading to the real end, the ballroom of kinship, of being one in community, friendship, love with others. In kinship is the risen Lord. There is what praises and glorifies God when people live as one. How amazing to find and to have a share in the joy of the Risen Lord in rough gang members getting off their addictions,

getting their tattoos removed, working in industries, in communities of joy. St. Paul probably didn't get to report on this kind of community of gang members, but he would have loved to.

Then I attended a talk at the Jewish Temple by David Brooks after having read his new book The Second Mountain. The Quest for a Moral Life. David Brooks, our best public intellectual, humbly, vulnerably, indefensibly talking of his conversion not so much to faith—though that too—but conversion to community, to people who are weaving together a moral life of care and compassion, of gatherings on Thursday nights in Washington D.C. of dozens of young people, unloved in their families, coming together for straight talk, for really seeing one another and being seen, for loving one another. There is David with the big brain being welcomed into and learning how to listen and love from his heart. What he finds and what his big truth to convey is about is that in this being for the other we are taken over by joy. We don't pursue it, it finds us when we give ourselves to others in relationship, in community. David Brooks says he wavers about whether he believes Jesus really, physically rose from the dead. Well, David, you are experiencing the real risen Jesus in these communities and in the joy which so surprises you. St. Paul—a brainy match for David Brooks—would love to report on these communities of straight talk and straight seeing.

Then we learned that Jean Vanier, the founder and inspiration of the L'Arche Communities, died. Jean, this very tall Canadian who became a stooped man in posture from having leaned down daily and for decades to little people, persons with intellectual disabilities, the core members of L'Arche, who live from their hearts and from their need to be healed in their wounds by love, and who become so whole-heartedly, whole-bodily able to love. Go into a L'Arche Community in one of the three homes on Capitol Hill and you find humor, song, dancing, the blurring out of immediate friendship and love and pride in their little successes. I find the gospel of Jesus nowhere more patently present than in a L'Arche Community. There you find the joy of the Risen Lord, in their kinship, in their open hearts. There you can share in the joy of the Risen Lord and find him glorified. Bless Jean Vanier and straighten him up and bless his communities who so love him. St. Paul please report on these L'Arche Communities of joy to a world that needs to know of them.

You don't get away in a homily by Fr. Steve the Swede without a little bit of poetry. Maybe being Swedish is why he badly needs poetry. We indeed share in the joy of the Risen Lord in the kind of communities I have described where we love one another as Jesus loved us. It is really Jesus and it is really his joy. But it cannot yet be quite full till we are fully with him. Our joy in him now points to something even greater beyond it which is promised to us and for which we now long and have some taste in our joy. The poet Richard Wilbur in a poem about a clear brook says this well:

Joy's trick is to supply
Dry lips with what can cool and slake,
Leaving them dumbstruck also with an ache
Nothing can satisfy.

By the way, I told you about my Swedish name meaning "Fortress on the Sound". Well, Fr. John Whitney once had lunch with a Swedish couple and told them he had a friend named "Sundborg" which means "Fortress on the Sound". They paused and said, "Oh it could. More

likely it means “sandcastle”! I, and perhaps all of us, need to let our walls be washed away to allow the experience of the joy of the Risen Lord in this Easter Season wash in.