

From the Desk of Fr. Jerry

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The gospel seems to have its focus on Jesus' wounds. When something is repeated multiple times, it is an invitation to deeper reflection. The wounds of Jesus are mentioned three times. First the Gospel says, Jesus "showed the disciples his hands and his side." Next Thomas states 'Unless I can probe the wounds, I will not believe.' Finally, Jesus says to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands and put your hand into my side."

Why is Jesus still wounded after his resurrection?

As people of faith, we believe what Isaiah prophesied and Peter later reiterated, "by his wounds we were healed." During Holy Week we read the sections of the gospel that describe in detail the suffering Jesus endured. This resurrection story insists that the wounds were still there when he rose.

Scars are signs of imperfection. Most of us try to hide the wounds we have experienced in life. Jesus' wounds remind us of the pain and indignity that he suffered. The Passion stories tell us about that in detail. Why does this resurrection story insist that the wounds were still there to be seen after Jesus' resurrection?

A traditional explanation of Jesus wounds is attributed to St Anselm. He wrote a treatise entitled "Why God became Man." In it he articulated a theory of satisfaction. According to the theory of satisfaction, the original human sin offended God. God had to do something to reverse it. Since it was God who was offended only God could satisfy the demands of justice.

Contemporary critics of Anselm's theory say the theory devalues the mercy of God. Beyond St. Anselm, the Church has continued to reflect on the wounds of Jesus after his resurrection.

We shouldn't think that the crucifixion of Jesus was a defeat and resurrection a contradiction of that defeat. Jesus' resurrection was not simply the overturning of the cross. The Christian belief is that Jesus' death by crucifixion was part of an ongoing drama of salvation. The crucifixion is not the end of the story. The vilest evil done to humanity offends God. But it does not and cannot thwart God's plan. The cross and resurrection are part of the one act of love and mission that Jesus accomplished.

But don't the prints of the nails and the gash of the spear reveal weakness and vulnerability? If God is all powerful isn't this a contradiction? Wouldn't it be better to remove rather than memorialize the visible signs of an agonizing death? The word vulnerable comes from the Latin word "vulnus" which means wound. Does this mean God became vulnerable? The persistence of the scars seems to show that the answer is "yes."

"If a scar is a healed wound, a wound that the body has marvelously managed to rescue and restore, then Christ's resurrected form is that of a scar. The wound is healed; the scar remains as a visible sign that healing has occurred. The fact that the traces of Jesus' wounds are not simply wiped away allows us to make meaning of our losses. An essential part of what happened to Jesus shouldn't be forgotten, even in eternity.

This is like the situation facing victims of trauma. To recover, they shouldn't be told to forget their trauma; they need to integrate it into their lives. It is part of their story, never to be downplayed, but it need not define who they are forever. The wounds of Jesus are not the final word, but they are significant.

In his resurrection Jesus could have kept a perfect body. Instead he kept a remembrance of his time on earth. He chose scars. The fact that Jesus did not hide his scars is a great help to us. If Jesus showed us his scars even after his resurrection, then maybe we can learn to integrate pain and suffering into our lives. The energy we spend on denial and shame could be better directed on healing a wounded world.

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