

First Sunday of Lent – Cycle B (February 26, 2012)

Last week I ended up in the emergency room after a nasty fall; nothing but a few broken ribs resulted in my failed attempts at changing the battery in a smoke alarm on a 12-foot-high ceiling. I brought a book with me anticipating a long wait. But after some time reading, I decided to put down the book and observe what was happening around me. I sat there slowly, reading in a different manner...reading the faces of the people sitting, walking or limping around me. Their faces told a story, a much more interesting one than any book could provide.

There was a man with a worried look on his face, holding his daughter who was in a great deal of pain that one can only imagine; there was the face of a nurse which clearly spoke compassion and kindness; there was a boy who simply wanted to play and who seemed to exude joy in a place that doesn't speak joy. There was an older woman with her foot plopped on a chair talking with a friend; a man in a wheel chair was frustrated with feeling as though he were forgotten; there was the young man captivated by his texting (his fingers certainly weren't broken); there was the one who wheeled me to the x-ray room, who saw his job as a vocation of love, wanting this short journey to be as comfortable and warm as possible.

I was simply reading the story of humanity, a story of struggle, when life doesn't go as planned and when God is difficult, if not impossible, to experience. The emergency room is the great "equalizer," along with death: all of humanity has a role in this story with no exclusions.

We are all engaged in a life-long struggle, for life is a struggle no matter what anybody tells you. It is the struggle to discover God in the unlikely places of suffering and brokenness that life inevitably brings our way. And in this struggle, we are always tempted to give up on the reality of God or to surrender to these powers of darkness that defeat hope. The temptation is to want to do life on our own terms and to manipulate God so that we can determine the outcome of the struggle. In a sense, we want to become the author of our own story and determine its own ending which always involves the avoidance of suffering.

Jesus was embraced by the God of Love in his baptism and heard the Voice: "You are my beloved..." and now the spirit that hovered over him was thrusting him into the desert of the struggle...of the struggle of good versus evil; of the angels versus the beasts. Jesus entered the struggle for us, to show us the way through this struggle to ultimate victory, a victory grounded in trust, the deep trust that God will fulfill his promises never to abandon us but who will show us the way through this struggle. At the end of each struggle is the promised "rainbow" of hope and the very promise of God renewed. At the end of every rainbow is not a pot of gold, but victory, a victory of the human spirit, rising to new life.

Lent is a spiritual journey that thrusts all of us baptized into the desert where we must confront our own inner demons and beasts. Lent asks us to engage in this struggle, for only when we do this can we truly experience God in our depths and hear the voice softly whispering that we are his sons and daughters. Only when we are left without our comforts and supports, when we can no longer feel the certainty of the sand beneath our feet on the shore but water can God carry us.

The destination of this Lenten journey, for all journeys have a destination, is Easter. The result of every struggle, and the one great struggle of life itself—death— is

always new life. We rise forth from all the little struggles and the ultimate struggle of life as new creations.

As I looked at the faces in the emergency room, I knew deep down that we were all connected in our individual struggles and that God was the Author of this human drama with intermittent joys and laughter. The individual plots of our life's story are woven together by the thread of God's Love. We are on his journey to Easter together, sharing in the burdens and struggles, each becoming a human angel to the other, washing feet and breaking bread.