

OK, Your RISUS PASCHALIS, or EASTER JOKE. It's a grammar lesson. Which is correct? 'Complete, 'finished,' or 'completely finished?' No English dictionary has been able to adequately explain the difference. But in a recent linguistic competition, held in London and attended by supposedly the best in the world, a Guyanese man, Samdar Balgobin, was the clear winner with his response. He received a standing ovation which lasted over 5 minutes. The final question was: "How do you explain the difference between COMPLETE and FINISHED in a way that is easy to understand?" His response? "When you marry the right woman, you are COMPLETE. When you marry the wrong woman, you are FINISHED. And when the right one catches you with the wrong one, you are COMPLETELY FINISHED!"

First, I have always felt somewhat sorry for Thomas. He got stuck with that awful nickname – THE DOUBTER. True, he was probably the all star stubborn mule of the apostles. But which one of us hasn't been stubborn from time to time? (Except for your pastor, of course!. Now that's just my opinion. My humble opinion. My humble but CORRECT opinion!) And which one of us hasn't missed a gathering of a group when we shouldn't have? And which one of us hasn't put on a 'show me' stance at some point or other?

But that's not the point. The point of today's gospel is that THE RISEN CHRIST WAS MET IN THE WOUNDS. Thomas just couldn't believe that Jesus could have actually made something GOOD out of that awful Friday. He just couldn't believe that resurrection could actually occur. And so he was STUCK AT THE WOUNDS. He couldn't see beyond them. He just couldn't go any further to recognize in them nothing less than the salvation of the world.

And yet, that is basically the way that we often come to experience life. Look -- we all get hurt. We all get disappointed. Life often is unfair or unkind. Things don't work out the way we had planned them. None of us ever imagined the mighty American economy would be felled by – a virus! And so we cling to the past. We hold on to what we have always known. WE GET STUCK AT THE WOUNDS. We fail to see the Risen Lord – with the grace of resurrection -- behind ALL of life's failures, disappointments, and sin.

That is what happened to 'doubting Thomas.' He was a wounded man. Broken by that botched-up Friday. Cowering before the cross; intimidated by the young Nazarean teacher. And after all that – we expect him to believe that it's all ok now? That Christ has risen from the dead? That the wounds are signs of NEW LIFE?!

Well, he just refused to do it. He DOUBTED that anyone could do it. Not Thomas. He was going to poke his fingers through the holes and stick his hand into the side. In other words, THOMAS WAS GOING TO STAY RIGHT WHERE HE WAS. HE WASN'T GOING TO BUDGE ONE INCH. He wasn't into all that resurrection and new life, new beginnings jazz. Thomas was non-plussed. He DOUBTED that it could actually happen. And he just wasn't going to believe it.

It was much easier to stay where he was. Sure, it was painful, but he already KNEW the pain. He was living with it. And so he made up all kinds of excuses – to hope that all this new life stuff and Holy Spirit business would just eventually die away and he could go back to his old life prior to this thin rabbi from Nazareth came raging into his life.

Second, we can easily see that this is what we all do from time to time – perhaps even for a lifetime. We feel that life's been too bad. We've been too hurt, too wounded, too disappointed. We figure we can give up and stay right where we are, after all that we have had to go through.

--My mother or father is an alcoholic. Life's been too big a headache. I can't go any further. Life isn't fair.

--My marriage is lousy. I gave my whole self and all of my hopes and dreams over to another – and they have hurt me so deeply. I can't get over it. It's too much. I'm not going to be the one to make the first move and actually fix this.

--My marriage failed. I gave it my all – but they walked out and left me for another. I could never get involved again – it's too painful. Count me out.

--I didn't get the job I really wanted. I didn't get the breaks I really deserve. So now I'm bitter, and I'm angry. And I'm not going to change.

--I've never gotten the recognition I deserve – I'm STILL not a Monsignor! CAN YOU BELIEVE THAT?! I'll never forgive the 4 bishops who have passed me over!

--My children disappointed me – after all I've done for them – well it's THEIR turn to make a move now – I'll never forget what happened.

This virus has ruined my life – my retirement looks shot, my job's gone, portfolio a disaster. I'll never get over it.

--My friend hurt me so deeply that I will never never get over it – I'll never trust them again – how could I after that? I will never allow anyone to get that close to me again.

--My church/parish changed. The only pastor I ever liked is gone, and now we have this 3 point bozo. The Church teaches things I don't agree with. You call THAT loving community? I'm never getting involved again. I'm not contributing until they do it my way! I may change churches – or just drop out altogether. Sunday mornings in my pjs is a lot better than having to get dressed and go to Mass.

And we see that we have become just like Thomas. Clinging to our wounds. Grabbing on to the gash. Embracing the bruise. We clasp on to the pain and will not let go. Sometimes somebody just needs to grab us by the collar and tell us GET OVER IT! AND GET OVER YOURSELF!

Third, but there is great significance to our wounds. WOUNDS can be transformed! They CAN become marks of GLORY. They CAN become invitations to NEW AND FULLER LIFE.

Look – we ALL get hurt! We have all been wounded. We have all been battered and disappointed. None of us wanted to be quarantined for months, to lose jobs, watch portfolios crash, find ourselves wondering if this is ever going to end?

But wounds, suffering, pain – they are all part of life. We forget so easily that the one symbol which distills all that Christianity means is a corpse on a cross – a body as broken as they come, more broken than anyone of us participating in this Mass today. We have to GROW UP – and GET ON WITH LIFE. We need to see how these broken things can be transformed.

--People who fail courses can become tutors to help others get through.

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--The beautiful support system and wise spiritual teaching of Alcoholics Anonymous has come about BECAUSE of a lot of pain and suffering and wounds.

--People who work hard to heal their struggling marriages end up with a much better marriage on the other side.

--People who move on from broken marriages can be immensely more sensitive to the needs and struggles of others.

There are a lot of things to be learned – and gifts to receive – in the midst of a pandemic. Things like real values, appreciation of family, a simpler lifestyle, realigned priorities.

-- A church that speaks the truth despite its unpopularity proclaims the gospel which challenges us all to new levels of growth and maturity and holiness.

--People who forgive – children, parents, spouses, co-workers, friends, church – come to know the joy of real reconciliation, something of God's love, and the Easter promise of a new beginning of goodness.

There is a breakthrough here. Totally AMAZING GRACE. The Thomas who was struck by the cross suddenly moved on to the Thomas of the resurrected Christ. He allowed the pain of Good Friday to become the joy of Easter Sunday. Thomas grew up when he began to see the wounds as a PROMISE OF NEW LIFE, as an invitation to glory. Thomas grew up when he recognized that it is the RISEN LORD OF ETERNALLY NEW LIFE can be discovered in these wounds.

The wounds of death were transformed into marks of new life. And the same must be true for all of us. WE touch our own wounds. We see our own brokenness. We know our own inadequacies and hurts. Jesus calls us to see beyond all of that. TO MOVE ON. "Touch my hands. Touch my side. Touch my wounds. Do not persist in your unbelief, but believe." AMEN.