

Second Sunday of Easter

Cycle B, 4.8.18

Acts 5:12-16/Revelation 1:9-13,17-19/

John 20:19-31

FIND A NEW WAY OF LIVING...

FIND A WAY OF FORGIVING

I've had the good fortune during this past Easter week of hosting three of my brother Oblates from Toledo, Ohio. Allen is an ordained priest and Craig and Joe are seminarians preparing for ordination. All three are currently teaching high school and came out West for their Easter break. I called it the "Resurrection Roadshow." I wanted them to enjoy the glories of these Easter days here in Lafayette, as well as the beauty of the Bay area. Our itinerary included an excursion to Aptos, Monterey and Carmel; a trek through the redwoods near Santa Cruz; and a rainy day trip to wine country (Wine tasting never gets rained out).

One of the trip's highlights was a performance at the Leshner Center of the marvelous musical, "West Side Story." This romantic musical update of 'Romeo and Juliet' won ten Oscars. The tale of a turf war between rival teenage gangs in Manhattan's Hell's Kitchen and the two lovers who cross battle lines has captivated audiences for nearly six decades.



Just as Tony and Maria, a modern-day Romeo and Juliet, set themselves apart from the other kids by their love, so the

musical set them even further apart from the warring gangs by their language, their songs, their movement. Their beautiful duet captures our deepest desires:

Someday, somewhere,

We'll find a new way of living,

We'll find a way of forgiving -- Somewhere.

The theme of the musical is the antithesis of today's Easter message. The Acts of the Apostles tells us: *The community of believers was of one heart and mind... they had everything in common.* John's narration of the Risen Lord's appearance to the frightened disciples tells us what the first Easter gifts were: *Peace and Forgiveness*, the core of Our Risen Lord's Easter blessing: *Peace be with you... whose sins you forgive, are forgiven them.*



Peace and forgiveness had no place in the musical we saw on stage Thursday evening – not until the very final scene when Maria cradled the dying Tony in her arms as he took his final breath – dead because of the hatred and animosity that separated races, cultures and classes of people. From that stark ending the audience comes to realize that only those two gifts of Our Risen – peace and forgiveness – can resolve our human differences and allow people to live in harmony with one another. The failure to do so perpetuates a world torn by strife and discord, by suspicion and fear – whether between states or nations, neighbors or siblings.

As a young seminarian working at an inner-city parish in Buffalo, New York, I observed a real-life reenactment of “West Side Story.” Two fourth graders from the parish school – one Italian and one Puerto Rican – were rivals in school and on the playground. Constantly bickering, fighting, and bullying one another each was usually in trouble with his teacher and, ultimately, with the school Principal. Unfortunately, the animosity was stirred up at home as each boy told his parents only his side of the story or altercation. Instead of helping their child to learn to get along, the parents only fueled the fire and ignited their own prejudices.



It was the night of the school Christmas pageant. The assistant pastor, the nun on our staff and I were leaving the auditorium together after the evening of children’s Christmas performances and holiday singing. Outside, on the street covered with snow, we were stopped short as we saw the two mothers of these boys at each other’s throats, one with her spiked high heels in her hands swinging at the other mom, who was reaching for the other mom’s hair, with the hope of tearing out a clump of it. After we pulled them off each other and made sure they went home in

different directions, we went over to the parish house to calm our disturbed spirits over the lack of Christmas spirit, bemoaning the sad truth that the angels song of “Peace on earth and good will to all” still had not echoed in the ears and hearts of everyone in our neighborhood.

Anne Lamott, a Bay area author, writes with wit about finding God in her struggles with addiction, pain and single-parenthood. In her book **Tender Mercies**, she recounts her struggle with forgiveness. The target of her animosity was the mother of one of her son Sam's classmates. She was too perfect, too sweet, too pretty, too together. She was everything that Anne wanted to be as a mom and woman - but wasn't. And her son eclipsed Sam in every subject in second grade. Anne's interactions with this woman were strained at best. Anne saw every offer of help from her as patronizing and subtle criticism. The two women were on opposite ends of everything, from politics to housekeeping. In her book, Anne dubs the woman "Enemy Lite."

Then one day, Sam is invited to play at *Enemy Lite's* house after school. When Anne goes to pick him up, *Enemy Lite* invites her inside and offers a cup of tea. At first, Anne refuses, wanting to get out of this House-and-Garden perfect home as quickly as she can. Anne writes about what happens next: *"Our boys appeared, and I got up to go. Sam's shoes were on the mat by the door, next to his friend's, and I went over to help him put them on. And as I loosened the laces on one shoe, without realizing what I was doing, I sneaked a look into the other boy's sneaker - to see what size shoe he wore. To see how my kid lined up in shoe size."*



"And I finally got it. The veil dropped. I got that I was as mad as a hatter. I saw that I was the one worried that my child wasn't doing well enough in school. That I was the one who thought I was out of shape. And that I was trying to get her to carry all this for me because it hurt too much to carry it myself. I wanted to kiss her on both cheeks, apologize for all the self-contempt I'd been spewing out into the world, all the bad juju I'd been putting on her by thinking she was the one doing harm . . . "This was me," Anne realized. "Not her."

In the light of Jesus' resurrection, we're able to see ourselves as we really are and confront our failings to be compassionate and our inability to forgive with hope and understanding. Anne Lamott came to realize it in her relationship with *Enemy Lite*; Thomas saw reason to let go of his doubt and skepticism in the person of the Risen Jesus.



This Easter season, may we see our lives - both our gifts and failings, our certainties and doubts - in the light of Easter hope and grace, to embrace Christ's gift of peace enabling us to forgive and "let go" of our resentments, anger and disappointments in order to re-create our hearts and spirits in the living presence of the Risen One.

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