

In the Name of the Living God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

How does this parish live in the passionate presence of Jesus Christ for the twenty-first century?

What would you say is the most challenging part of that question? I, personally, think that it is the 21st century part. And, in getting down to the nitty-gritty, is it any easier for each of us to....honestly...ask ourselves:

What do I really believe in? What does Jesus Christ have to do with my life...or this world... in 2016, or next year, or whenever?

I am not sharing anything you do not already know, but we need to be honest about it. Jesus essentially told the disciples, “Hey, get ready...because I am NOT of this world. And, if you follow me, you are out of it, too”. Well, I certainly feel “**out of it**”. Probably more so than Thomas Aquinas, or Martin Luther, or any of those saints long passed on. In this century, we are so different from them in so many ways.

For example, I finally....finally...own a smart phone. I do not know how it works, but I **am** aware of its technology to the point of confidence in its ability, not mine. Same with our species, and what we have done and what we can do.

To the moon and back? Can do.

Cure cancer? The common-cold? AIDS? Confidently working on it.

Fix world hunger? Global warming? Energy dependency? We can do it...if we have the will.

You get the idea that it is all about us. Humanity has the ability, or we are up to the challenge.

So, it is in this particular environment that we, as Christians, are called to proclaim the gospel... the story of Jesus as the Christ...by our words and life in the world.

Let us say, sometime this Tuesday, we fall into a casual conversation with friends. Friends who know that we attend church, but they do not attend themselves. Friends who we know as being spiritually inquisitive....who like to ask us about church in order to get into that type of conversation. So let's say they are familiar enough with church to say, “Tell me the Jesus story you heard last Sunday?”

Or, let us say the discussion is with our children, or our grandchildren...sitting right here today...or not. I know. It seems like fantasy...like any kid is going to ask me anything about anything! But, theoretically at least...and indirectly for certain...the younger look to their elders to help them figure out stuff...and particularly when we do not know they are looking. So...all of the sudden...our baptismal promises flash before our eyes...with their question.

Look at the gospel reading again. And tell me if you, in your heart of hearts, do not agree that **this** is, in your mind and everyone else's, the primary focus of today's gospel reading...and **the** question:

“Mom, Grandma, Dad, Grandpa. Do you **really** think that Jesus brought that dead boy back to life? You know...the one from that town in the Bible that we heard about in church today?” “I mean..how can **anyone** do that?”

Right? Coming from a kid weaned in an “iPod” world? The 21st century is tough!

Would not **you** want to trade, even-up, with Thomas Aquinas? Or Martin Luther?

Frankly, I think to get that question from **anyone** is a blessing....because there is SUCH a disconnect between our ancient scriptural stories and this technological world that, again, we have lost our ability to have a common dialogue. Even **within** the faith, we have trouble with a common dialogue! But in **this** world, it is virtually impossible for anyone outside of the faith to believe that the dead boy from Nain could be revived...by Jesus or anyone else some 2000 years ago. Without miracle drugs...or without an external defibrillator...or....you guessed it...humanity’s technology again.

The world often excuses, or explains away, the literalism of our stories like this as magic. It happened before modern medical science so, if it were true, Jesus had to be a magician. If so, who **should** care out there on Main Street? When is the last time you saw a magic act? It is all an illusion, they say. “It is all irrelevant, so why be **passionate?**”, they ask us.

So, how do we answer? How do we live into today’s gospel reading, so that our lives reflect what all of us promise to our children before God and each other? How!?

I say, “**re-focus**”

Let’s try it this way. Any of our children can relate to this and, for those of us who are older: Remember when our parents called out our name, and we could tell right away if we were in trouble? When I was a kid, I could always tell what my mother’s mood was in the way she addressed me. “Jim” was one thing, but the rarely announced, “James” meant quite another.

We do that today in all our conversation...whether we transmit data by our language, or volume, or body language or movement, or whatever. We also are pretty good in receiving human data as well. We can usually tell if someone is really sincere in their expression, or heart-felt in what they say...or that they are just giving us lip-service.

So, in this way as well, **we need to re-focus....or move the focus within the story.**

Forget the defibrillator analogies, or the images of magical incantations as pictured by our world.

Instead, let us move the focus of this story to what is the **true** miracle, the on-going and never-ending blessings from God.

Let us re-focus on how the coffin bearers stopped for a moment when Jesus touched the coffin. How he had seen the pain of the widow, knew how her life would be, and then comforted her. How his word brought life to that place. How they all might have missed the blessing if the procession had just moved on.

Re-focus on lives restored, and lives renewed.....not through theological debate, but through the love of Jesus in compassion for all.

I knew my own life of spiritual searching, and had some lack of confidence in our scriptural stories through the lens of the post-modern world. But, the procession stopped and Jesus touched me in a way that has changed my post-modern world...because I let him.

The **real** miracle of Naim is when we stop...completely stop...and let Jesus touch each one of us, so that God can get us to re-focus and renew. It is God that does this, not us...but we have to stop first. .

As a parish, dear people of God, we must keep hope in our hearts. As a parish family, we must continue to stop the procession to let Jesus touch the coffin so that we continue to have real re-birth here. Real life emerging in force which is not lip-service, but engaging love in Christ to those around us. Ready to live into the passionate presence of Christ in the 21st century....for the street out there. For those who will expect a magician, but will instead...get **reality**.

The reality is that Jesus, when he touches the casket before each of us, says to us in turn:

The Lord be with you. (And also with you)

Lift up your hearts. (We lift them to the Lord)

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. (It is right to give him thanks and praise)

It is right to give him thanks and praise....all in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.