

Pastor's Homily – Octave of Easter/Divine Mercy Sunday – April 23rd 2017

On Easter Sunday morning, when I was getting ready for the day, I was listening to the news on WCBS Radio 880 – as I usually do. I heard a story delivered by Steve Hartman for the “*On the Road*” weekly segment. It’s a beautiful Easter story that connects with Saint Thomas touching the wounds of Jesus. The story goes like this: When pro football player Konrad Reuland was hospitalized with a brain aneurysm last November, he took it as a sign. He texted his mom from the hospital, which said, “God has something big in store for me. I can’t wait to see where His plan will take me.” But a few hours later, the aneurysm ruptured. His parents, Mary and Ralf, raced to his side. His mom said: “I had my right ear on his chest and talked to him and laid in bed all day and listened to his heartbeat all day long.” But her son was brain-dead at age 29. If this was God’s plan, it sure felt like an awful one. “And then when we left I said, ‘Whoever gets his heart, better deserve it,’” He died on December 12th – four months ago.

Then the story shifts backwards a year before that (so that would be late 2015) to another person who suffered a massive heart attack, and almost died. (The paramedics thought the patient had died.) His name is Rod Carew. Even if you’re barely a baseball fan you probably recognize the name. Long before that massive heart attack landed him on the heart-transplant list, the baseball Hall-of-Famer played for the Minnesota Twins and California Angels. Along the way, Rod Carew earned a reputation for being great with kids, including one wide-eyed boy named Konrad Reuland. Some 18 years earlier, when Conrad was about 12, by chance he met Rod Carew. They only met that once, (and there’s a 40-year age gap between the two) but these two professional athletes are now inseparable. That’s because a few months before he died, Konrad checked the organ donor box on his driver’s license application, and by sheer coincidence, the person who received his heart was none other than Rod Carew! What’s the chances of that?

The story goes on to say that the two families got together about a month ago at the Reuland’s house in Orange County, California. Rod Carew said: “I’m going to ask his mom to listen to her son’s heart in my chest and tell me how beautiful it sounds.” When she did listen, she said: “That was really beautiful and cathartic for me to be able to hear it again! Every heartbeat is unique, and she said this one was unquestionably Konrad’s. “I’ve got it memorized.”

The two families are now planning to team up to use Rod and Konrad’s celebrity to promote the American Heart Association and to encourage many more people to become organ donors. The story ends with the observation: “When Konrad sent his mom that text, saying he felt like God still had a plan for him, he obviously thought he would go on living. And now we know he will!”

A beautiful Easter story is a tale of “new life.” - Resurrection flowing from death. Even the secular media can conclude – “that’s what Easter is about.”

I think that story underscores Saint Thomas – looking, listening, touching – and yes, doubting too, but underneath desiring to hear the Master’s heartbeat through the wounds of His suffering. Even in Thomas’s disbelief, God had a plan - a plan that included us. God used the doubts of Thomas to bring us comfort and insight in our own anxieties of life. St. Thomas checked the box and donated his doubting nature to us. But he also donated his faith to us – “*my Lord and my God.*”

We need Thomas as a reality check for ourselves because like Thomas and like Konrad Reuland, God has something in store for us. Life has something in store for us – that’s often beyond our control. Often times, it’s necessary to touch the nail marks of our lives to get a new perspective of where life is leading us. Sometimes, we have to put our ear close to a situation in order to hear and understand how life goes on despite our huge crosses. Sometimes our hopes wind up “transplanted” elsewhere beyond where we could have ever have imagined.

The Second Sunday of Easter is about doubt and faith in God's Divine Mercy. Why must a person of faith live – without doubt? Doubt means that a person is thinking, observing and struggling – and those are activities worthy of admiration! Doubts are a way to an honest faith. People of “perfect faith” – may grow disillusioned when sorrow and tragedy touches them – as they do us all. But here's the thing – faith can't protect us totally from life's turmoil. Yet faith will nonetheless help us to navigate our way through them with an energy of hope and security and optimism and stability – which are necessary at all times, but especially so during periods of unrest or sorrow.

There are so many stories out there – secular and religious - that confirm us in our doubts and fears. God has something big in store for us and like Konrad our wounds (and Jesus wounds) are often a way to that plan. Jesus went on living in Thomas and the other Apostles. His heart continues to beat in the church.

Msgr. Frank Caldwell