Spirituality



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I just giggle thinking about the fact that I write for a column entitled "Young Voices." What makes me so young? Is it the stories I tell of youth and young adults exploring their faith? Is it the "newness" of my perspective in relation to a centuries-old Catholic way? Is it literally my voice, as my mortgage broker said to me the other day, "You just sound so young on the phone."

I associate youth with simplicity, exuberance and energy. Sometimes I think about youth naivete and that's when doubt creeps into my structured worldview and eventually invites me to reconsider what I just came to understand.

The Gospel for April 15 reminds me that to be a witness to God's presence in the world, it requires a continual openness to amazement and possibility that, quite frankly, demands real work and presence:

> "The two disciples recounted what had taken place on the way,
> and how Jesus was made known to them
> in the breaking of bread.
>
> While they were still speaking about this,
> he stood in their midst and said to them,
> 'Peace be with you.'
> But they were startled and terrified
> and thought that they were seeing a ghost."

Being open sounds so nice, so kind, so gentle. But openness (think a hand open with fingers spread apart) requires a willingness to allow moments to pass through those same open fingers, unable to hold on to just about anything unless it lands firmly on your palm. It is striking to continue to hear this normal human experience — "The two disciples recounted what had taken place on the way. ..." They just had an encounter with the resurrected Jesus. Then the next paragraph reads:

> "While they were still speaking about this,
> he stood in their midst and said to them,
> 'Peace be with you.'
> But they were startled and terrified

and thought that they were seeing a ghost."

Oh my! How quickly moments pass through our very experience! Even when talking about their experience with the resurrected Jesus, the disciples came to be startled and terrified … and he was offering them peace!

So much has happened in our lives and the lives of those youth I teach and learn from. Before Easter Break, my students were engaging in the power of the peace movement brought on by the shooting in Parkland and repeated actions taken by student leaders to get others to pay attention. So many of us are wondering if this moment we are living in could be the catalyzing moment for this generation that seems to be apathetic and social media-crazed. For a generation of high-school students whose lives have only known their country to be engaged in war and conflict, there was a moment when their calling "b.s." was heard around the world.

Personally, I took a group of students on a four-day overnight retreat called Kairos. While these seniors were away from the regular pressures of school, life and home, they too pondered much of what has happened in their lives, and some did recognize this hazy version of a resurrected Jesus as we shared stories, meals, and gifts of grace with one another.

But returning to school after this Easter Break I find myself in between the paragraphs.

I spend much of my time reminiscing on the past, savoring what had happened, and wanting to hold onto these remarkable moments. Now I question, am I missing out on the present moment? Am I started and terrified with this new moment, this new invitation to recognize Christ in my midst offering me peace?

Easter is quite a difficult reality to fully grasp. Catholics would much better hold onto Christmas — a season of 12 days receiving and giving gifts because God took on human flesh. We also love our Lent — 40 days of restraint, denial and challenge to improve. But this Easter — 50 days of newness, possibility, uncertainty and peace … well, this is a bit too unknown for us … In fact, I'll just go back to life as normal.

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But life is not normal, for those of us who believe. We are invited to become better witnesses to the miracles in and around us. Just as one moment happens, the challenge is to accept yet another one from a God who is ever so generous and indulgent. Life is not normal. It is recognizable, though. Jesus returned to walk with them, offer them peace and eat with them.

I tell myself that we don't need to have everything figured out. Most days I believe this. I just have to remind myself that if I stick to recognizing Jesus, choose to walk with him, receive his peace and share in a meal with him, then I am simply and most honestly, living a life that is a witness of this "beyond my imagination" resurrection.

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