

Seeing Him in Action

*When it was already dawn, Jesus was standing on the shore;
but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.
Jesus said to them, “Children, have you caught anything to eat?”
They answered him, “No.”
So he said to them, “Cast the net over the right side of the boat
and you will find something.” – John 21:4-6*

It’s one of the most perplexing themes repeated across the Easter stories: Each time the Risen Christ appears, no one initially is able to recognize him. Mary of Magdala thinks he is the gardener. The disciples on the road to Emmaus think that he is a fellow traveler. And now at sunrise on the seashore in Galilee, once again, none of Jesus’ favorite fishermen are able to recognize that it is him until ...

Until he tells them to cast their net over the other side of the boat and they haul in a great catch. Immediately, Peter says, “It is the Lord,” and jumps into the water to swim toward Jesus. How did Peter suddenly know? There is nothing to say that Jesus’ appearance changed in that moment. Just as there is no indication it changed for Mary or the disciples in Emmaus. In each of these instances, the Risen Jesus must not have looked like the Jesus they had known before. Rather, his friends are suddenly able to recognize it is Jesus only when he *does* something that they associate with him.

On the shoreline, Peter recognizes that he has heard these odd instructions to cast his net on the other side of the boat once before: on the day when Jesus first called him to become a “fisher of men.” The disciples in Emmaus become aware that it is the Risen Christ when he sits at the table and breaks bread with them just as he had so many times — most notably at the Last Supper. Mary of Magdala knows it is the Risen Christ when he calls her by her name. No stranger could address her so intimately.

Looking back now, we can spot that Jesus was guiding his friends through a difficult but important period of transition. Before his death they had recognized him by sight. In the time of the resurrection Jesus needed them to learn to recognize him instead by signs — by actions characteristic of his earthly ministry. He wanted his friends to know that when they witnessed one of these loving actions, whether they could “see” him or not with their eyes, he was still very much there with them.

Even unto today, this is the way that the Risen Christ remains present to his friends. And in Catholic health we understand this well. We know that if our patients and residents encounter Jesus within our care facilities it will not be because they “see” him

with their eyes, but because they experience him in the gentle laying on of healing hands, in the touching of wounds, in compassionate voices that call them by name, and in the experience of being fed. These ancient actions, so characteristic of Jesus during his time on earth, continue to be the way that he makes himself known today. Except that today the communication of Christ's presence, if it is to be communicated at all, happens through *our* hands, through *our* voices.

The 16th century Spanish saint Teresa of Avila wrote:

“Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.”

In our Easter journey this week, let us join Peter, Mary and the disciples at Emmaus marveling at the Risen Jesus' continuing presence in every act of loving care. Moreover, let us offer our hands and feet as the means by which Christ can continue to act here on earth.