

3rd Sunday of Easter
April 26, 2009
Fr. Tom Elliott

Choosing what's Most Real

Acts 3:13-15, 17-19

Psalm 4

1 John 2:1-5a

Luke 24:35-48

We live in a culture that encourages us to choose imitations over the real thing. If you've never thought about it before, then think about it now—we are surrounded by imitations. For our bodies, we have implants. For our food, we have artificial sweeteners. For our hobbies, we have simulators. For our conversations, we have text messaging. For our relationships, we have online avatars. Our lives have become so saturated in imitation that I think most of us have forgotten about the fears that lie behind the imitations.

The very fact that we call something an “imitation,” or “fake” or “simulation” means that there is something better, more real that exists. Why then do we choose imitation over reality? I think that it's mostly because of fear. We fear that our bodies aren't good enough. We fear that sugar will make us gain weight. We fear the high cost (and not just monetarily) of real things. We fear other people's opinions. We fear people really knowing who we are. In our Gospel reading today, we hear about how the Risen Christ invited His disciples to move beyond their fears and into community.

Christ appears to the same two men whom He had visited with on the road to Emmaus. Despite the fact that these men seemed to have been transformed by their encounter with the Risen Christ, they were terrified when He showed up again!

Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the 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.

-Luke 24:35-37

The post-Resurrection Gospel stories give us many examples of how fear isolates us from other people. For example, the Apostles were huddled together in a locked room out of fear after Jesus' death and Resurrection. In today's Gospel, Jesus invites the disciples out of fear and offers them peace instead. He then calls them into greater union and community through the sharing of a meal, which is one of the greatest of all symbols of union and communion. This is such a great reminder to us that fear is the intimate link between imitation and isolation. And, Jesus is always inviting us to what is more real and into communion with other people. God began showing me this connection and calling last fall in a unanticipated way.

As some of you know, I love aviation. In fact, I've heard it said that most bikers are pilot wannabes. Motorcycles can give a similar sensation to flying, especially banking through corners. Not only have motorcycles curbed my appetite for aviation, but I have also enjoyed a flight simulator on my computer for about nine years. Toward the end of last year, God began to show me how a computer flight simulator was about as counterfeit as a person could get to

aviation. In response to this, I decided to purchase an inexpensive radio controlled airplane, knowing that it would be at least a little more real than a computer simulator which can be crashed over and over without consequence.

The first thing I learned after I put the RC plane together was that I could not learn to fly it by myself. After three disturbing crashes, I found myself frustrated and ready to give up. That's when I decided to reach out for help. I called the president of the local flight club, Josh, and he generously taught me how to fly my plane. On my day off, when the weather is nice, I drive to the RC airfield and enjoy flying my plane. While Josh taught me how to fly the plane, God continued to teach me about what reality can do for us.

One day in prayer, God pointed out that the greatest imitation of aviation—a computer flight simulator—does not require any human contact. It is a very isolated activity. However, by choosing something a little more real—a radio controlled plane—I had moved more fully into relationship with people. I found that the majority of the time spent at the RC airport was devoted to visiting with the other people who were out there—getting to know them, sharing ideas, and even sharing our faith. While this story and example might seem strange or even simplistic, it was a wonderful opportunity for me to learn that our choices are important and in our culture of isolation and imitation, we can draw deeper into community by choosing what is most real.

This week, I encourage all of us to be more conscious of the various imitations that surround us. What are the fears behind those imitations? Do they draw us more intimately into authentic communion with others or do they lead to greater isolation? May the new life that the Risen Christ invites us into be one of greater reality and community!