

## Homily 2nd Sunday of Easter 2020

Netflix is now worth more than some of the big oil companies, as a result of our having to stay in doors. And it looks as though now they will benefit from another three weeks.

I have to admit I do enjoy an old film, but find it hard to believe that 'Pretty Woman,' which I was watching again the other night, is over 30 years old. For me the Roy Orbison theme tune still sounds good.

So indulge me for a moment as I go over the story.

There's two main characters. Julia Roberts, a young woman who finds herself earning her living on the streets of Los Angeles. She didn't intend to end up there, she's bright and is aware that she could have done better, but that is where she is, and she is in charge of her life in many ways.

She has a flatmate she likes, who is far less capable, spends their rent money on her addiction, but Julia knows that that is just how she is, she forgives her, and takes care of her. She doesn't judge, she accepts people for who they are.

She has her dream, but buries it as impractical.

And society has her marked, pigeon-holed, she is of the streets and so to be scorned as we see as she tries to shop on Hollywood Boulevard.

The Richard Gere character (that seems to be a name from the past), has made himself very wealthy, his business is buying up companies and taking them apart and selling them off, regardless of the jobs that it costs, asset-stripping as it was called. He is ruthless.

Yet underneath he is a frightened person, of heights outwardly, but of life too. He doesn't really know how to drive. He hides away from people except for business. He is compulsive in his behaviour avoiding life, self-absorbed, and he is angry with life, he hates his father and cannot forgive him. He doesn't know how to love.

And yet his fallibility reveals a goodness that life has buried.

Neither character is at peace, yet there is great potential for love and goodness in both

So the film needs a catalyst, something to set it off, and that comes from a chance encounter when he is on the street at night looking for a hotel and he stops to ask Julia for directions. Is this chance? In the film it is.

This could just be a one-off encounter but out of it grows a love that transforms both their situations. (With some ups and downs.)

So a classic 80s rom com.

But also a story of change, of conversion, made through love. He admires her honesty, her lack of pretence, that transforms him too.

So where am I going with this? Well, I think it explains our gospel well.

The disciples are hiding in a room after the resurrection. Hiding from the world. Certainly not fulfilling their mission, the bearing witness to Jesus that they are called to.

And God has seen that in fact many of us are far from fulfilling what we were called to do, living the lives that he made us for and hoped for us.

There are so many things that bury our ability to express the person we are made to be. It can be where life has taken us, it can be a breakdown in relationship, a fear of love as a result, a fear of who we really are or might be, simply possibly not feeling we have the time or opportunity to do, be, who we could be. Or even to think about it.

Perhaps it is too painful to think about it. As Richard Rohr points out, at the original end of Mark's gospel, when faced with the Resurrection the women run away from it. Perhaps we run away from the life we could have had, might have, for a variety of reasons.

(Perhaps too, as we re-evaluate our society and what we value, as we journey through this pandemic, we may have to reconsider what our society could be like, what, and who, we really should value, and perhaps have not before.)

But God realises there has to be a catalyst, a divine action, a kairos, (which means a divine time or moment of significance,) so that we, God's people, his creation, have the opportunity to relook at life, the life he has given us. And this has to be an act of love, because when God acts, because as St. John says 'God is love,' to be of itself from God it has to be an act of love.

What could possibly be dramatic enough? And from that thought God arrives at the Cross and then the Resurrection.

There can be no greater act of love than to lay down a life for another, as St. Paul says, and especially for those who really don't see they need it, or know how to respond to it.

God knows we are in trouble. This is what he does.

In the film, the love grows from the encounter.

For God the love comes first, then comes the encounter.  
And the spoken offer of first, peace, and then forgiveness.

The disciples are typical examples of response to the encounter, to the news of resurrection.

Many are scared in others gospels, here most are joyful, Thomas is scornful, until he has the proof. I won't believe unless...  
As God's people we have so many responses to God's act of love for us.

The peace that Jesus offers first of all, that shalom, means, as we know, more than no warfare or struggles, it means a wholeness and integrity of person. When we offer a sign of peace in church, it is a prayer that each of us will find this wholeness.

It is just this peace that the encounter of love brings to Julia Roberts and Richard Gere. They find who they are in each other.

What Jesus offers to us after the Resurrection is just that. A wholeness, an integrity or completeness of life, found in him. In belief and trust in him. Not built on anything but love, his for us and ours in response. This is his gift to us.

This is true of our communities too. Peace and forgiveness is what they have to be built on as an expression of our love, our expression of God's love.

It is only through encountering Jesus in his death and resurrection, being open to where that encounter may take us, that we can find that peace, that shalom.

As Roy Orbison sings in response to the sight of the pretty woman, Mercy, and that is what this is, God's mercy, God's offer of love.