

*Fr. John Warfel Sermon – Sunday, April 14, 2024 – The Third Sunday  
in Easter*

*From ghoulies and ghosties  
And long-leggedy beasties  
And things that go bump in the night,  
Good Lord, deliver us!*

I've never seen a ghost  
but I know a lot of people who say that they have.  
Take my old next door neighbors in Middletown, New York

They claim to have a ghost in their house,  
a woman dressed in Victorian clothes  
They've even taken pictures,  
and I must admit, the photographs are pretty provocative.

Most of the photos show misty figures,  
like large blasts of steam  
My friends are convinced that they can make out heads, even  
faces  
I'm not convinced, but there's clearly something in the  
photographs

Ghosts, phantoms, paranormal activity have long been the  
fodder-  
for hair raising, spine tingling stories  
The child in each one of us delights in getting scared-  
in safe, controlled settings that is.

Sometimes, however, our fascination with ghosts-  
gets a little too close for comfort.  
For example,  
My old rectory must have been haunted too;

it was even older than my next door neighbor's house

The rectory was built in 1872

A sprawling four-storied house with six bedrooms

At least one person must have died in that house, perhaps many had

There were probably even wakes in the front parlor,  
wakes with open caskets,  
and a stream of mourners trickling in from the front porch

Yet, I never saw a ghost,  
never even sensed a troubled or menacing presence;  
for that, I must admit, I am exceedingly grateful.

Unlike my sister, who would have been thrilled to experience any apparition

I always wanted to be left alone.

My unbridled imagination was enough to spook me,  
especially the years that I lived all alone in that big old house.

Whenever my imagination got the better of me I would pray:  
*Rest In Peace*, so I can rest in peace.

The disciples certainly believed in ghosts.

When Jesus walked on the surface of the water,  
what's the first thing they cry out? "It's a ghost!"

When they encounter the Risen Christ-

they were startled and terrified,

once again, they thought he was a ghost.

Even after seeing his hands and feet,

they remain in what today's gospel describes-  
as a state of joyful disbelief.

To reassure them, Jesus eats a piece of broiled fish,

proving once and for all that he was no apparition.  
This is a far cry from the Emmaus story-  
where Jesus is not immediately recognized;  
but when he is recognized, in the breaking of the bread,  
he vanishes from sight.

This is a far cry from the Jesus who tells Mary Magdalene:  
*Don't touch me for I have not yet ascended to my Father*  
The flesh and blood Jesus in today's gospel is startlingly  
different-  
from the Jesus who walks through the doors of a locked room.  
Does this mean the post-resurrection stories contradict each  
other?

No, they simply drive home a point.  
Our Lord's resurrection is uncharted territory.  
It is a first. It is unique.  
It is unlike anything else in all Creation.  
Jesus wasn't a ghost,  
but we can see why the disciples thought that he was-  
it was the only conclusion that the human mind was capable of  
making.

God gave us fascinating and complex brains.  
God gave us gifts of memory, reason and skill  
But these gifts are not perfect, nor are they fail-safe,  
memory can fade, reason can be flawed,  
and skill can diminish or disappear altogether

Reason can be especially tricky.  
It was reason, in the form of 19th Century Rationalism,  
that kept my whole family from believing in the Resurrection

We cannot prove the existence of God through reason  
We cannot prove the Resurrection through the intellect  
We intuit these things through an intimate relationship with God

This thing that some call intuited belief is really faith.  
Reason alone cannot answer the eternal questions.  
Only faith can.  
And faith, like intimacy with God, like Resurrection itself, is a gift.

The very fact that a part of us desires to have faith-  
means that, at some level, we already have it.  
We get into trouble when we compare our faith to the faith of  
others  
Or when we try to control the blessings and efficacy-  
of this thing we call faith.

Thanks be to God that Jesus never loses patience with the  
faithful  
Christ continuously invites the faithful to see and touch his  
wounds.  
To prove that he has a human body-  
the Risen Lord might even eat right in front of the faithful

Or he might walk right through the locked door of our hearts,  
demonstrating that he is far more than flesh and blood,  
far more than just a large blast of steam in a photograph

Sometimes we will recognize him, other times we will not  
Regardless, **There is a resurrection!**-  
even in the midst of our joyful disbelief.  
Reason permits us to doubt it, and so does Jesus  
God is big enough to handle our doubts,  
our doubts do not threaten God.

The gift of human reason is truly wondrous,  
at times it's even miraculous,  
but as long as reason depends on the human brain to function-  
reason is not eternal.

Faith is eternal. Reason is not.

Both are intentional parts of a Divinely created Order

I don't worry too much about ghosts anymore.

I no longer fear sleeping in the dark

Oh, I might leave a small light on in the bathroom,  
but that's only so I won't trip in the middle of the night.

(At least that's what I tell myself.)