

God catches us on the bounce.

Screen: [Pic of daughter Sara]

My daughter Sara who attends Loyola University finished her Spring Break a week ago. The week before Spring Break, she had a lot going on and was pretty stressed out. Besides her mid-term exams, she works for the Loyola **Center for Community Service and Justice** (CCSJ), and had a couple big presentations. She is also a member of the Loyola **Ultimate Frisbee Club** team, which was preparing for a Spring Break tournament in South Carolina. And, because she is hoping to study abroad next year, she had to decide between two programs. On top of all that, her boyfriend is studying abroad now, so she “really misses him.”

😊 It's also important for me to add that Sara is a very good student, and works very hard in school and preparing for exams. That's all the stuff she told me on the Monday night of the week of midterms, the week before Spring Break.

Then, the following Tuesday morning, while I was at work, she called her mother to tell her that she was sick. Sara woke up with a fever, a bad headache, had vomited and was feeling pretty nauseous. And, because of all the stuff she told me the night before — e.g. midterms, etc — she was also now pretty stressed-out. Well, my wife Cindy (of course) immediately reassured Sara that everything would be OK. She offered to drive to Baltimore to take Sara some gatorade, some soup and crackers and to check her temperature. When I got home from work, I called Sara and asked how she was feeling and also reassured her. I told her that it sounded like she had the flu. I asked if she had spoken to her professors about her mid-terms, recommended that she hunker down, drink plenty of fluids, rest and get through this thing (part of the College experience, right?), and told her to let us know if she needed anything or started feeling worse.

The next morning, Cindy drove up to Baltimore to see Sara and took soup, crackers, Gatorade, etc and while she was there, even swabbed Sara's cheek so she could test for flu (which, by the way, was positive).

Screen: [Pic of Sara's night-stand with gatorade, crackers, soup...]

Sara was very appreciative, and with a healthy dose of love and support, started feeling better. I am happy to report, she called last night to tell me that she took her make-up exams and did very well. She even went on Spring Break, and her team did well in the tournament.

Screen: [Pic of Sara playing ultimate frisbee — “Mom Point”]

I knew everything was OK when Sara called me from South Carolina towards the end of last week, and asked, “Hey Dad, can you stay on the phone for a few minutes. We are in the middle of an Ultimate Frisbee game and we are playing a ‘**Mom point.**’” So, apparently, there's this thing in Ultimate Frisbee where all the players on the field have to have their cell phone in one hand with a parent on the line while catching and throwing the frisbee with the other. [Sara scored while I was on the phone]

Screen: [Pic of Transfiguration]

Today's Gospel is the transfiguration. A version of the transfiguration is read each 2nd Sunday of Lent. It appears only in the synoptic Gospels. I have preached on this gospel several times, but about four years ago I began to read it differently after I read a commentary in which the author noted that for scripture scholars, the story of the transfiguration is something of a

mystery. Why is it there? One author pointed out that some scripture scholars have proposed that Mark's version was most likely the first to be written down and that Mark — in collecting and recording the oral tradition — may have simply put the story in the wrong place, since the story seems more like a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus in his “glorified” body.

On that same occasion, while I was in the throes and anxieties of parenthood trying my best to challenge and support my own kids as they struggled through adolescence, I went back to the beginning of Luke's Gospel and studied the structure to see where the transfiguration fell in the larger Gospel story. As I read it again in this larger context, a different understanding of the transfiguration event jumped out at me. I think it was only because of what was going on with my own situation, trying to navigate my own challenges as a parent, that made this other way of reading the story seem so obvious.

You see, I think we sometimes forget that Jesus was human, and so when we read this story we focus on His divinity — I mean, he is “**transfigured**” before Peter, James and John. Why wouldn't we focus on that?! If something that ‘miraculous’ happened right in front of our eyes, we would most likely pay close attention. But, in Luke's version of the Transfiguration, I noted that Luke specifically says that eight days after he asked his disciples “who do people say I am,” that Jesus went up on the mountain **to pray**. But, why?

I think that maybe Jesus was getting nervous, anxious? Maybe he was scared, afraid? Maybe he was not sure if he could do what God had created him to do...to willingly suffer and die a horrible death...so that he could be raised up on Easter? Remember...At this point in Luke's Gospel, Jesus was towards the end of his public ministry. He had just sent his apostles out to spread the Word and heal the sick (9:1-2). He had just fed the five thousand (9:10-17), he had calmed the sea (8:22-25), healed the sick, and made the blind see. He was really making splash, and people had to be noticing him. And, He knew that people noticing him — especially the Jewish leaders — was what would ultimately lead to his suffering and death. So, just before this Gospel, in Luke 9:18, Jesus asks His disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” And, they answers that some said he was John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets. And then, when Jesus asks them, “Who do you say that I am?”, Peter — who usually is a little slow in “getting it,” blurts out, “You are the Messiah.” I think this made Jesus nervous. Luke 9:21 says, “**He rebuked them and directed them not to tell this to anyone.**”

Screen: “He rebuked them and directed them not to tell this to anyone.” — Luke 9:21

So, ever since I re-read this Gospel, I have wondered if maybe Jesus asked them just so he could find out if it was too late? And, maybe he had doubts. And, hoping it is not too late, what does he do? He tells them not to tell anyone. And then, like my daughter Sara, “He calls his Dad” — He takes Peter, James and John with him up on the mountain to talk to God. And, while he is up there he prays — he talks to his Dad and (no doubt) God reminds him who He is and reassures Him, telling everyone in front of him: “***This is my beloved son. Listen to Him.***”

Screen: Catch People on the Bounce

We are in the second week of our series, “Everybody Always.” And, this week God invites us to “Catch people on the bounce.”

So, I have to say, I hesitated to include this next part in my homily, but I feel I have to in order to connect the series with what I just shared about today's Gospel.

For those of you who are reading Bob Goff's book, and have gotten to chapter 6, you already know where "catch people on the bounce" comes from. Well, I do not want to ruin the chapter for you if you have not read it yet, but I have to give a little context:

Screen: [Pic of skydivers]

In Chapter 6 of the book, Bob Goff tells a story in which he explains that if when you are sky diving and your primary shoot does not open, and then your back-up shoot does not open, it's not your impact with the ground the first time that kills you. Apparently (and, I was not aware of this), you will bounce and then the broken bones from the original impact will then puncture organs, etc when you hit the ground the second time.

Editorial note: I have never been sky diving. It was on my bucket list, but after reading this book...

But, Goff's point is that people "crater", they crash — they have failures, they get scared, afraid, anxious. And, as a result, they often close themselves off from others because they feel vulnerable. But, Goff says, that it is at these moments that people need others the most. So, Goff suggests, Jesus tells us that we need to be there to "catch them on the bounce."

In the verses just before today's Gospel in Luke, Jesus had likely "cratered" and so he prayed — he "called his Dad" for reassurance and support. In a much smaller way, my daughter Sara was overwhelmed with all the stuff she had to do a few weeks ago, and then got sick on top of all that. And, what did she do — she called home. And, we (her parents) reassured her. We reminded her that she would recover from being sick and reminded her that she is smart and disciplined and would get through it all fine.

Well, God wants us to do the same for each other. And, not just in our families — although, this is a really good place to start. He wants and needs us to catch everyone on the bounce.

Screen: Everybody Always (series slide — the one with all the colored fingerprints)

This past week, I attended our St. Pius men's small group and we discussed the first part of Goff's book. During the discussion, one of the guys told the story of an interaction he had on a trip to Chicago. Apparently, he was in a cab heading to O'Hare Airport during rush hour when he got into a conversation with the cab driver. I think he said they were talking about all the problems in Chicago — which are many, I can tell you since I used to live there — when the cab driver asked, do you want to just chat or do you want to have a "*real*" conversation. Well, the guy from our men's group opted to listen to the cab driver as he vented about the system and what was wrong with it. My friend from the men's group said he did not really agree with the cab driver on most of the issues they discussed, but at the end of the cab ride when they pulled up to the terminal, the cab driver got out and came around to give my friend a hug.

I am not sure, but it sounds like maybe the driver was on "the bounce?" And, maybe by just listening, our friend from St. Pius may have caught him before he hit the ground. Either way, I think this is what Goff (and Jesus) means when he says to "Love Everybody, Always!"