

Seventh Sunday of Easter, May 12, 2013
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Acts 7:55-60; Psalm 97:1-2,6-7,9; Revelations 22:12-14,16-17,20; John 17:20-26

Today's gospel ends with the words "I made your name known to them, and I will make it known ..." (John 17:26) What is it that we are prepared to make known? What are we ready and willing to share with others? Some things are easy to share, maybe a favorite recipe or information about a sale this weekend. How much more do we choose not to share? How often are we ready and willing to share our faith with others? Are we prepared to tell others truths that they may not want to hear? What price are we willing to pay? Revealing the truth often requires taking risks.

Uzima Centre is a project in Tanzania that serves people living with HIV and AIDS. The first hurdle the clients need to overcome is their fear of getting tested. You should not get tested for HIV unless you are ready to receive a possible positive result. How hard that truth is to hear! Yet everyday people are told that they have a virus for which there is no cure. The second hurdle the clients face is what to do with this information. Do they keep it to themselves? Do they tell their partner? Can they tell their family and friends? It is at this stage that many people face their greatest risks. We all need to feel loved and to belong. The fear of rejection often keeps the truth from being told. In Tanzania, women are more likely to get tested for HIV than men. When they learn that they are HIV positive they face tough decisions. If they tell their husbands, it is likely that they will be accused of infidelity and kicked out of the house. Many choose to remain silent.

Ester is a faithful member of a support group for people living with HIV. Fortunately, her husband did not reject her and the children, but he refuses to get tested. Ester finds the support she needs by meeting with others who share the same struggle. She also has a strong belief in God. God is her strength, and her faith helps her to carry on.

In Revelations 22:17 we read, "'Come.' And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift." Maybe the first step is to admit we are thirsty. We are all hurting and in need of healing. "Blessed are those who wash their robes so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates." (Rev. 22:14) Acknowledging the truth of our brokenness, and accepting God's healing love can set us free. People like Ester know that a weight is lifted when you can be honest and open about your condition.

When Stephen called out, "I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56) we are told that the onlookers held their hands over their ears. Stephen was stoned by those who refused to hear the truth. To this day, around the world, people continue to be persecuted for speaking the truth.

In today's Gospel we heard the beautiful prayer "that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us ..." (John 17:21) Do we truly believe that we are one in God? If so, then when any member of our human family hurts, we all hurt. When a woman is abused, we are all abused. When a girl is forced into sex trafficking, the dignity of the human race suffers. When someone is rejected because they are HIV positive, we all share in that rejection. The longer there is silence, the longer the suffering will continue.

This week let us each start with our own condition. Where do you need healing? Are there truths about yourself that you are afraid to reveal? What is holding you back? Let us ask God for the courage to face what we need to face, and to say what we need to say; so that the truth can set us free, and all may be one.