

Fr. Romeo Evangelista Homily  
Sunday, April 7, 2024  
Second Sunday of Easter  
Cycle B

In the movie, ***Flight***, Denzel Washington played the character of a decorated commercial pilot who lived a life of hidden alcoholism. For decades, he was able to hide and lie away his vice. One remorseful day, he was convicted and imprisoned after finally admitting he was on drugs the night before a flight and was drunk while he flew the plane. During a group therapy session inside the jail, he said, "This is going to sound strange from a man who is in prison. But for the first time in my life, I feel free".

That reminded me of my early years in the seminary. I wanted to impress the seminary fathers so much, I made sure I followed every rule in the formation handbook. I wanted to be a good seminarian. That resulted in me being rather stiff and regimented and, quite frankly, almost inauthentic. I could not forget what my spiritual director told me one evening, "Lighten up, Romeo. Be yourself. God wants to redeem who you are, and not who you wish to be". From that time on, the game changed for me.

I began being vulnerable, exposing my wounds to the painful yet healing balm of God's grace, and the seminary formation. Yes, I felt vulnerable and insecure, but I was free. It was when I took the stands of vulnerability that I felt the grace of God slowly shaping and forming me.

In the Gospel, the Risen Jesus appeared to the Apostles gathered in a room: they were afraid, vulnerable, and feeling guilty that they deserted Jesus. Jesus gave them a message of peace. And then the irony of ironies: it was when they felt their sinfulness the most that Jesus gave them the power to absolve sins: "Whoever sins you forgive, they are forgiven. Whosever sins you hold bound; they are held bound".

Before God, we need not wear masks. We need not put on pretensions. We are loved in our ugliness. Let us take off our masks, not in an attitude of defiance, but in a posture of vulnerability. Don't wait to be imprisoned before you discover what it means to be truly free. You see, God cannot save who we pretend to be God will heal only the real.