

FIRST THOUGHTS, FRAGILE FOOTSTEPS

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Easter 3, Sunday April 10, 2016

My title: *First Thoughts, Fragile Footsteps*

- Fragile?
- A parish scenario not unknown to me
- A wonderful legacy of lay and ordained ministry
- An immediate observation and discovery of energy and Spirit
- A great time to consider a fundamental question: “What’s it all about?” – Stories from a biblical era

FROM JCC

I don't know how to love him.
What to do, how to move him.
I've been changed, yes really changed.
In these past few days, when I've seen myself,
I seem like someone else . . .

Should I bring him down?
Should I scream and shout?
Should I speak of love,
Let my feelings out?
I never thought I'd come to this.
What's it all about?

FROM ACTS 9

Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a **light from heaven flashed around him**. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' He asked, '**Who are you, Lord?**'

TWO STORIES, SAUL/PAUL AND ANANIAS

Now there was a **disciple in Damascus named Ananias**. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." He answered, "Here I am, Lord." The Lord said to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." But **Ananias answered**, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name." But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel

THE COURAGE OF CONVICTION AND THE ABILITY TO SEE ALL THINGS DIFFERENTLY – Three right purposes of religion

- Religion can do a great job **helping believers discern right from wrong**

- Religion can help believers relate kindly and justly to other people AND CREATION
- Religion can stiffen the will of believers when they face unjust suffering for their faith.

CASE STUDY – (the so-called Democratic Republic of CONGO)

Father Vincent Machozi, an Assumptionist Catholic priest who led the fight against the extractive industries and in support of human rights in the Democratic Republic of Congo, was assassinated on Sunday night, March 20, when gunmen — reportedly, by members of Congolese military — disrupted a peacemaking retreat at a village in Beni and murdered him in a hail of bullets. According to reports, onlookers said Fr. Machozi’s last words were: “Why are you killing me?”

Machozi, 51, operated an influential website, Beni Lubero, documenting human rights abuses. He had recently posted an online article denouncing the involvement of the Congolese and Rwandan presidents in the massacres of innocent civilians. According to John L. Allen, “Machozi used the site to denounce what he saw as collusion among political elites, armed factions, and commercial interests in what he termed the ‘Balkanization’ of the region in order to exploit its natural resources, especially its rich Coltan deposits.”

OTHER CONTEXTS of witness and solidarity with vulnerable persons

(We can imagine) a faith that learned the lessons of, for instance, the Nazi period, that honored Dietrich Bonhoeffer for standing fast against Nazi seductions when so many of his fellow Christians surrendered their souls; or that of **Martin Luther King Jr.** who resisted America’s own

racism; or the story of **Helen Caldecott** who rejected the idea that more nukes would make the world safer.

We all say we believe in Jesus, but what do we make of that belief and how do we act uniquely, effectively and faithfully?

NOW THIS IS RATHER SERIOUS STUFF for an inaugural sermon! Yikes!

Well . . . I guess that's because **there is serious work to be done locally and globally**. And so much has been and is being done here, right now, especially regarding supporting the poor for which I say

Well done, and on behalf of the voiceless, THANK YOU