

Cycle C, Third Sunday of Easter

Reading 1 ACTS 5:27-32, 40B-41

When the captain and the court officers had brought the apostles in and made them stand before the Sanhedrin, the high priest questioned them, "We gave you strict orders, did we not, to stop teaching in that name? Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and want to bring this man's blood upon us." But Peter and the apostles said in reply, "We must obey God rather than men. The God of our ancestors raised Jesus, though you had him killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as leader and savior to grant Israel repentance and forgiveness of sins. We are witnesses of these things, as is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him." The Sanhedrin ordered the apostles to stop speaking in the name of Jesus, and dismissed them. So they left the presence of the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they had been found worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name.

Responsorial Psalm PS 30:2, 4, 5-6, 11-12, 13

R. (2a) I will praise you, Lord, for you have rescued me.

I will extol you, O LORD, for you drew me clear and did not let my enemies rejoice over me. O LORD, you brought me up from the netherworld; you preserved me from among those going down into the pit.

R. I will praise you, Lord, for you have rescued me.

Sing praise to the LORD, you his faithful ones, and give thanks to his holy name. For his anger lasts but a moment; a lifetime, his good will. At nightfall, weeping enters in, but with the dawn, rejoicing.

R. I will praise you, Lord, for you have rescued me.

Hear, O LORD, and have pity on me; O LORD, be my helper. You changed my mourning into dancing; O LORD, my God, forever will I give you thanks.

R. I will praise you, Lord, for you have rescued me.

Reading 2 REV 5:11-14

I, John, looked and heard the voices of many angels who surrounded the throne and the living creatures and the elders. They were countless in number, and they cried out in a loud voice: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches, wisdom and strength, honor and glory and blessing." Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, everything in the universe, cry out: "To the one who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor, glory and might, forever and ever." The four living creatures answered, "Amen, " and the elders fell down and worshiped.

Gospel JN 21:1-19

At that time, Jesus revealed himself to his disciples at the Sea of Tiberias. He revealed himself in this way. Together were Simon Peter, Thomas called Didymus, Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, Zebedee's sons, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "we also will come with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. When it was already dawn, Jesus was standing on the shore; but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, have you caught anything to eat?" They answered him, "No." So he said to them, "Cast the net over the right side of the boat and you will find something." So they cast it, and were not able to pull it in because of the number of fish. So the disciple whom Jesus loved said to

Peter, "It is the Lord." When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he tucked in his garment, for he was lightly clad, and jumped into the sea. The other disciples came in the boat, for they were not far from shore, only about a hundred yards, dragging the net with the fish. When they climbed out on shore, they saw a charcoal fire with fish on it and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you just caught." So Simon Peter went over and dragged the net ashore full of one hundred fifty-three large fish. Even though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come, have breakfast. "And none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they realized it was the Lord. Jesus came over and took the bread and gave it to them, and in like manner the fish. This was now the third time Jesus was revealed to his disciples after being raised from the dead.

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" Simon Peter answered him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." He then said to Simon Peter a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Simon Peter answered him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." Jesus said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was distressed that Jesus had said to him a third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. Amen, amen, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." He said this signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when he had said this, he said to him, "Follow me."

“Simon, son of John, do you love me?”

Of all the scripture in the Bible, today’s Gospel speaks to me more than most. I have been a Catholic since I was 20 years old and for most of those years my mantra, my constant prayer, has been “I love you Jesus.” When I was discerning to become a Deacon, one day I heard the question, “do you love Jesus?” Immediately, I responded to myself saying, “Well, yes, of course I do”...I continued, “Then Fraser, put your money where your mouth is!”...I said yes to the Diaconate. A couple of years later I was about half way through formation, and I distinctly remember hearing this Gospel and Jesus asking, *“Do you love me?”* I couldn’t help but put myself in Peter’s shoes...*“Yes Lord, you know that I love you!”* I couldn’t help but be affirmed that I was on the mission that He wanted me on.

The second part of today’s Gospel is Jesus’ speaking with his leading apostle, Peter, “the coward”...“the denier”. Many say this dialogue is Peter being forgiven by the Lord for denying him three times. But you notice Peter never asked for forgiveness and Jesus never forgives him. These verses are not about dealing with forgiveness as we know it when we say, “I’m sorry, please forgive me.” It’s not that. It’s something much deeper.

Jesus takes Peter aside and he says to him three times, *“do you love me?”* And Simon responds, *“Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.”* So the key, you see is not in forgiveness...The key is in the love.

Each of us are born into this world with a deep and lasting hunger at the center of our hearts, and that hunger can only be satisfied by the love of God. There is more to forgiveness than asking for forgiveness or even saying I’m sorry. Jesus is reaching down into Peter’s inability to ask for forgiveness. And rightfully so. Peter was the leader, he was the one who was going to lead His Church and yet, Peter denied Him and swore and

cursed. What he did was unforgivable. Peter had no right to ask for forgiveness because he had overstepped the boundary of betraying God Himself, viciously and out of fear and distress. So what exactly then makes this such a lovely Gospel?

Well, it's Jesus reaching down into that basic yearning of every human being...He meets us right where we are. God reaches down...into the deepest part of our hearts, into our souls where the yearning for His love is born and stays with us no matter how many sins, no matter how many betrayals, no matter what we do. Jesus, in his great generosity, forgets everything else and reaches down and says to Peter...and to us: "*Feed my sheep*"...*I love you, I trust you and now I ask you to take care of them for me.* And when Peter hears that, three times, he knows that there is something here more than forgiveness. It is that Jesus loves us and forgets everything except his love for us...and, He has a mission for us! God wants Peter to continue to be the one who would lead His church...and, Peter is transformed to be a great witness of how a life of faith is lived for Jesus Christ, despite its trials.

And that's the lovely thing about today's Gospel. God tells us every day, "you don't have to cry out for my forgiveness, for I have loved you from the beginning, and I will be faithful and true to that love...forever."

Hearing about Peter in today's Gospel, including the ominous prediction of Peter's future death reminded me of our trip to Rome for our son's wedding. I learned how St. Peter trusted God's will in his life and embraced God's love. On a tour of Christian Rome, we had visited four of the great Basilicas and were on our way to the catacombs. I asked our guide if we could visit the "Quo Vadis" church. He said it wasn't much of a church to see, but immediately understood when I explained that I was a Deacon in the Catholic Church. The site of the small chapel-size church is on the Old Appian Way outside of Rome, near the catacombs where St. Sebastian is buried. The ancient church is built on

the spot where legend has it that when Peter was fleeing for his life from Nero, he had a vision of Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, “*domine, quo vadis?*” or “*Lord, where are you going?*” Jesus replied, “*I am returning to Rome to be crucified again.*” With that Peter knew what he had to do...he embraced God’s love...he stopped running from death and returned to Rome himself... to lead...*to be lead where he did not want to go*. In the church there are paintings on either side of the altar. On the right a painting of Christ crucified. On the left, one of St. Peter crucified upside down. Some say that he demanded to be crucified this way because he didn’t feel worthy to be crucified the same way as Jesus.

Today’s Scriptures are all about God’s unconditional love. In response, let’s commit with gratitude, “Dear Lord, we too, will feed your sheep. We too, will serve others. We too, will follow you and reach out to all the people around us so they will experience your unconditional love, as well.”

“I love you Jesus.” Alleluia! Alleluia!