

Homily of Third Sunday of Easter Year C, 2022

Acts 5:27-32, 40-41; Psalm 30:2, 4-6, 11-13; Revelation 5:11-14; John 21:1-19

We see a new Peter in the first reading. Out of fear, he denied Jesus. Now, transformed by the power of Christ's resurrection, he stood, boldly, before the Sanhedrin and stated, "We must obey God rather than men." The reading continues, "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." The Sanhedrin is a court or an assembly of Jewish elders. They were infuriated that the disciples of the man they crucified had continued to preach about him, working miracles in his name, and making more disciples. For that reason, they began to persecute the apostles and the Christians.

Unfortunately, all kinds of persecutions are going on in many countries and places. There are religious persecutions, political persecutions, racial persecutions and so on. Persecutors force their victims to obey 'men' rather than God. It is so sad the helplessness of victims in many countries and places. In particular, Christianity is under attack in many parts of the world. Let us pray for strength and courage; and for the conversion of persecutors. Our prayers can go a long way.

There are times when situations challenge us to defend our beliefs, doctrines, and practices as Christians and as Catholics. At such times, Peter and the other apostles encourage us to obey God rather than 'men.' The Lord enjoins us, "Remain faithful to me until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelations 2:10).

Jesus did not count it against his disciples who deserted him during his passion. After his resurrection he appeared and revealed himself to them wherever they were. Today's gospel is one of the appearances and revelations of Jesus to them. John recognized him and said, "it is the Lord." We have hope, therefore, that although we desert him many times due to our weaknesses and sins, he does not give up on us. He continues to appear and reveal himself to us. May we be able to recognize him in whatever way he appears to us.

Today's gospel shows us how Peter, believing that his discipleship with Jesus was over, decided to return to his fishing profession. Some of the disciples went with him. Since returning to fishing was not what they were supposed to do, they caught nothing throughout the night. Jesus appeared and instructed them, "Cast the net over the right side of the boat and you will find something." This means that they had cast their net on the wrong side by returning to the sea to fish. When they did as Jesus instructed, they caught so many fish. Jesus' intervention and the huge number of fish the apostles caught was a foreshadow of the huge population of Christians later.

The experience of Peter and the other apostles in today's gospel reminds us that we toil in vain without Jesus. In John 15:5 Jesus says, "Apart from me you can do nothing." "But with God, all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26).

During Jesus' Passion, Peter denied him three times: "I do not know what you are talking about" (Matthew 26:70). "I do not know the man" (Matthew 26:72). "I do not know the man" (Matthew 26:74). In the last part of today's gospel, Jesus gave Peter an opportunity to free himself from those denials. He affirms, "Yes Lord, you know I love you." "Yes Lord, I love you." "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Like Peter, God gives us many opportunities to free ourselves from our sins and sorrows. God gives us opportunities to make amends. God gives us many opportunities to return to him. May we not waste such opportunities. A songwriter says, "You can be restored from your darkest circumstances. Our God is a God of second chances!"

The last part of today's gospel speaks to me in a special way. As a priest, Jesus wants me to know him more, love him more and follow him more. By doing so, I can, properly, feed his lambs, tend his sheep, and feed his sheep. I pray to be able to stretch out my hands to follow Jesus and to be led by him.

The invitation to stretch out our hands to follow Jesus and to be led by him, that is to surrender totally to God's will is for each and every one of us. May we respond generously to this invitation. Amen.

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