

FIRST READING: Acts of the Apostles 5:27-32, 40b-41

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles:

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.

The word of the Lord.

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

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.

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.

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.

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

SECOND READING: Revelation 5:11-14

A reading from the Book of Revelation:

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.

The word of the Lord.

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to John:

At that time, Jesus revealed himself again 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."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for the 3rd Sunday of Easter C

Today's first reading is basically the same as last Thursday's with the addition and omission of a couple verses. Thursday's passage included a verse where the Sanhedrin expressed their desire to put the disciples to death. It is omitted in today's reading. The verse added today tells us the disciples rejoiced that they experienced dishonor in the name of Jesus. It was omitted in Thursday's readings. Not wishing to cover the same material, I have focused on another theme. What I wrote for Thursday can be found on the parish website.

Why would anyone rejoice in being hauled into court? Why their delight in suffering? Were these early believers masochists? The church has always put a high value on martyrdom. Those who have died for the sake of our Christian faith, we believe, have given the greatest witness to Christ in giving up their lives for him. In the early days of the Church, believers expected Jesus to return very soon as in yesterday. Life in this world would be transformed, upon Jesus' return, into the Kingdom of God. The dead would rise with the living to rule with Jesus for eternity. The early martyrs died with this first and foremost in their minds and hearts. This is the context for this passage.

Paul had a reflective theme in his letters. We make up for what lacks in Jesus' suffering and death on the cross for the salvation of the world. We are participants with Jesus in the process of salvation. Everybody suffers. Everybody knows pain. We all ask why. Paul attempted to find meaning in suffering since no one can answer why. We do not know our own mind, part of the time, let alone know God's mind. Paul pointed out that we can and do know God's heart. Jesus was one like us in everything but sin. He suffered and knew pain too. In that, God has solidarity with us and we with God through Jesus. I mention Paul because his letters pre-date the four written gospels. His preaching was well known. Since, traditionally, Luke, who wrote Acts and traveled, preached and taught with Paul, knew this theme and incorporated it into the narrative he wrote.

This is the basis of our Catholic devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Since Jesus has promised that he is with us always to the end of the age, Jesus is a mere thought away. The disciples, in linking their arrest to the pain of Jesus, found a healthy way to deal with their own pain; Jesus was with them as they were with Jesus together. This connection did help them for here we are; believing. Their experience is still a valid way for us to deal with pain and suffering; especially prolonged pain like this pandemic. Part of this approach has been appropriated in the sense that "We're all in this together." For us as believers, we add, "in Christ," to the slogan and make it a prayer.

Divine Savior, Our Lady Mother of the Church and St. Eugene parishes will cease to exist as parishes on July First. There will be two locations that will remain open to be reviewed after a year. Our location will remain open as a worship site for the new parish until Labor Day. The other two communities can remain worshipping in their original facilities. We will give up ours to join with them for worship, formation, fellowship and prayer. These are the facts that we face. This is our sorrow, pain and suffering.

We carry on the life of faith experienced so long ago by those first believers. It is a new, unknown and yet unnamed parish that our three communities will form. We step out into thin air, as did the disciples, in hope. They faced their pain together; through, with and in Christ. The fact that their approach actually worked is in our lived experience today. Here we are; in this together in the presence of Jesus. Jesus and those early believers accompany us. They are a mere thought or prayer away. Hopefully their experience speaks to ours as we journey forward. The Kingdom of God is still ahead of us as Jesus is near.

I have presented bible studies on the book of Revelation. It can be difficult a book to understand and, for at least one person I know, scary. One gal confided in the study group that she almost didn't join it because the book scared her and kept her up at nights. Beasts and

blood can do that to people. I found a website called the Brick Bible; its designer has since published a couple books, where bible stories were told using LEGO blocks. The stories became cute for her. Still some of the imagery is fantastic and, to some, dreamlike. John has used symbols and images that can convey meaning on many levels. We can approach the text as we approach poetry, which does much the same thing; describes experiences that are difficult to put into words.

Today's passage portrays a scene of worship. The gathered throng has gathered around a lamb that was slain but is now living. This image alludes to two powerful experiences. First is the Passover lamb killed and roasted to be the guest of honor at the Passover Seder Meal. Its blood was smeared on the doorposts of the home, where people shared the meal, so that the Spirit of God would pass-over and save the inhabitants from death and lead them to the Promised Land. This image is ancient and is our link to Christianity's origin in Judaism. It's easy to forget our deep roots there.

The second allusion is to Jesus, who, through his suffering and death upon the cross, shed his blood. This destroyed sin's hold on us and led us to salvation through forgiveness of our sins. Jesus' blood is upon us to save us. Jesus rose from the dead to destroy the hold that death has on us. With his rising we too rise to new life, setting us on a journey to eternal life and the Kingdom of God. This reading is an image of liturgy. Have we just witnessed mass in the days of the apostles? Gathering together for worship, song and a meal; does this sound familiar? "When two or three gather in my name, there I am in the midst of them." "They recalled how they knew him; in the breaking of the bread.

What are the four living creatures? There are four cardinal directions. Is this from where those who gathered have journeyed? Has the gospel reached all people? We hope in that as we trust God's word and await the Kingdom. It is also an allusion to the book of Ezekiel. He mentioned four living creatures in his prophecy. They are depicted as a young man, lion, eagle and an ox. In Judaism they represent angels that were God's messengers and revealed God's immanent presence. In Christianity, they represent the four evangelists and God's Word among us. They are the iconography of the "End Times" when God will bring in the messianic age for Jews and the Kingdom of God for believers in Jesus. With this, who would say, "Amen?"

The gospel of John is a wondrous book. It has meaning on many levels and can be read and interpreted in many powerful ways. The ancient Christian tradition told the story, in the three synoptic gospels, that Jesus, risen, met the disciples in Galilee. In Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus commands them to gather there where he will meet them. John will not be out done. His narrative is different. The disciples returned there on their own. They seemed to gather as if they wanted everything to be as it was before the cross and resurrection of Jesus. They even took up their previous life as fishermen. As hard as they worked, they caught nothing. Without Jesus they could do no more.

One hundred fifty three fish is a very specific number. It may have had significance to the Gospel's meaning and known to people in its time, but it's lost to us. It can also be a red herring, or at least one hundred and fifty three of them. Only with Jesus did the disciples succeed. But, was it just at catching fish? With Jesus, their perspective had changed. They now had a vocation and mission; to the nations preach the gospel and serve the people they met.

Believing in Jesus, they could not return to life as they had known it. Their very jobs were not the same. They had a church to build and a gospel to preach. As fishers of people, feed and tend my sheep. Jesus had set the pattern for believers to this day. We share the gospel and its mission. We serve the people of God too. Only with Jesus will we succeed.

Their encounter with Jesus is a curious event. Why didn't they recognize Jesus? Remember, Mary Magdalene and Peter both witnessed the empty tomb with no sense of its significance. Mary met Jesus and recognized his voice and not his manner or face. This is the same dynamic. The Beloved Disciple saw the empty tomb and believed. He's the one who knew Jesus standing on the lake shore barbecuing fish. Not recognizing Jesus at first may reflect the experience of how we know Jesus now. None of us have seen Jesus alive and in his risen, wounded and glorious body. The evangelists wrote gospels many years after the events they narrate. They were written in a post Easter and Post Pentecost era and to a believing and growing Church.

They recognized Jesus in the same way we do; in one another and in the breaking of bread. Sometimes, with some people, those we know and like, it can be an easy task. For others it can be more difficult. It still takes an effort despite the person; we know Jesus. These stories are lessons for our lives. They are not just lessons in the bible either. We take their lessons into life. We can believe as we live our daily lives and know Jesus in all we meet, in all the events of our day and in all that surrounds us. Believing in Jesus, we witness Jesus with us as we give witness in all we say and do. Like the first disciples, our encounter with the risen Lord has changed us. We cannot live without faith in him.

I have a thought on the symbolism of the Beloved Disciple. Scholars believe that he's the author, the evangelist John. That may be true on one level of meaning. John's gospel, as I said, has many levels of meaning. This person may also represent someone else. Each of us is a believer in Jesus, baptized with water and the Spirit. This makes us, all, God's beloved children and Jesus' beloved siblings. That each of us is God's beloved is in God's infinite, eternal and unconditional nature; a perk of being God. Doesn't this make us all Jesus' beloved disciple? Don't we see the empty tomb and Jesus ashore cooking fish? I maintain that the Beloved Disciple is each of us. We believe and know Jesus.

Jesus invited them to breakfast. This is a simple and familiar way we gather; for a meal. Jesus isn't teaching us that breakfast is the most important meal of the day. They gathered together and Jesus was with them. They shared a meal and broke bread. This sounds to be a consistent theme and reflects, again, our mass; fellowship and food in Jesus' presence. Jesus invited them to gather with him. Does Jesus invite us to Sunday mass?

I've always enjoyed "The Fiddler on the Roof." I've seen the play, watched the movie and listened to the soundtracks of both. At onetime I could sing some of my favorites from memory. The most touching one was "Do you love me?" sung by Golda and Tevye. They were betrothed to each other as children so the answer was not certain. They had never "fallen in love;" it was thrust upon them. So, the answer was in doubt. What a brave thing for Tevye to ask. Golda's answer could have been no. How often do we ask someone that question? If our answer is rarely or never, why? Perhaps we fear, ourselves, to know the answer. How often do we tell others we love them? Something to ponder and then do, often.

So, why does Jesus ask Peter the question, not once but thrice? I use that word for effect and hint the answer I seek. Jesus had predicted, "Before the cock crows, you will deny me thrice!" That's exactly what Peter had done. He betrayed Jesus; denying he knew him three times to save his own skin! This is the most obvious answer to my query and perhaps the most powerful. It shows us the manner in which Jesus sought Peter for reconciliation. We can contrast Peter with Judas. Both betrayed Jesus.

Judas' betrayal was necessary for Jesus to be arrested, tortured and killed. This was God's plan from before creation. There is a powerful divine purpose behind his action. Without the betrayal of Judas, we'd never be saved; never redeemed in Jesus' blood. He, however, never returned to Jesus. Thus he never knew the possibility of Jesus' mercy. Of his fate, there are two different and conflicting stories. One is in the gospel of Matthew. There, out of remorse, guilt and shame he commits suicide; hanging himself. The other is in Luke's Acts. There he's not full of regret, but evil. So full of evil, he trips, falls and his belly bursts and the evil pours out as his guts. The other three gospels never mention him after his betrayal of Jesus. So abhorrent was he and his deed, that no one even spoke his name; at least in the gospels of Mark, Luke and John again.

Peter's betrayal had no such purpose behind it; or did it? Jesus gentle questions required nothing more from Peter but a simple answer, "Yes!" Jesus made no demands and required no penance from Peter; only honesty. The only burden for Peter was that Jesus asked him thrice. The final one prompted a profession of faith from Peter. "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." This is subtle and powerful stuff. It has also given us a pattern for our own reconciling with Jesus for our sins. Jesus offers compassion and mercy, does not evoke from us guilt and shame, though we may feel their weight regardless, like Peter's final discomfort.

My mother will be ninety two in two weeks, God love her. She did give up the keys to her car and quit driving. She did it reluctantly, while understanding why and agreeing that it was time. My brother has just sold her car to the dealer from whom she bought it for a lot more than I thought a five year old car was worth. She had a little body damage caused by a few events that led to her giving up driving. As I approach my next birthday, sixty nine on September 3, around the same time that all masses cease here, what a rotten birthday present, I read Jesus' prediction of the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God in light of these two events. Death comes for us all.

What do we fear the most about ageing? No one likes aches and pains or forgetting why we've entered a room. We can deal with those things, considering the alternative. We enjoy being alive. We also fear becoming helpless, feebleness of mind and body. This description of Peter's fate reminds me of potential life in a nursing home. Someone else will lead us there, dress us there and leave us there. To whom do we reach out our hands? We fear dying alone. With Jesus final invitation, "Follow me!" Jesus lets us all know that he'll be there with us, just a thought away.

On Wednesday evening, I binge watch "Blue Bloods." This last Wednesday aired one of my favorite scenes. The patriarch of the family shared his greatest fear to his oldest grandson, that one day he may not remember him at all. The grandson replied simply, "If that day comes, don't worry Gramps, I'll always remember you." Since I begin my work on this reflection on

Monday, Jesus prediction struck home. We are all, after all, in the loving arms of the Lord always; and one day forever.

When I began to prepare for this reflection, I noted that in these three readings, today may be a better day to celebrate Divine Mercy. I made more connections with the mercy of God today than last week. Last week was a stretch for me. The disciples escaped imprisonment and continued to preach the Risen Jesus, by God's mercy. The celebration of the Paschal lamb of Exodus and of Jesus' sacrifice proclaimed God's mercy for all of us more clearly. Anybody who can direct fishermen to catch a load of fish and then make breakfast for them serves them greatly. Jesus' mercy was a living act on that lake shore. Most significantly, Jesus reconciled Peter to himself. Jesus received Peter with gentleness. In proclaiming his love for Jesus, Peter discovered Jesus' love for him. Through these stories, can we know Jesus love, compassion and mercy for us?

May our path be clear and the Lord our guide as we journey.

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