

3rd Sunday Easter Year "C"

April 9-10, 2016

Readings: Acts 5:27-32,40-41; Revelation 5:11-14; John 21:1-19

I love the account of Jesus appearance on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias, instructing the apostles to cast their nets to the starboard side of the boat. But after the miraculous catch of fish and breakfast, Jesus asked Peter: "[D]o you love me more than these? [D]o you love me? [D]o you love me?" I try to place myself in that situation. How would you feel?

Yet, to each question and with increasing fervor, Peter professed his love of Christ. To each expression of love, our Lord responded with words which indicated Peter's special office and mission in the Church: "Feed my lambs ... Tend my sheep ... Feed my sheep."¹

The threefold questioning of Saint Peter in today's Gospel underlines very much that the foundation of Peter's service in the Church is to be found in his love of Christ. From His glorious seat at the right hand of the Father, our risen Lord gives to Peter and to his successors the grace of shepherding the flock throughout the world. After the threefold questioning, our risen Lord indicates the full significance of shepherding the flock, after the Heart of the Good Shepherd. Peter's shepherding means laying down his life for the sheep.

Our Lord tells Peter: "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you girded yourself and walked where you would; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go." Here Peter assumes a central position in the post resurrection community. In some ways it is the scene where he replaces John, the beloved disciple, as foremost among the disciples. The threefold denial of Peter is now replaced with a three-fold affirmation.²

¹ cf. John 21:15-17

² cf. John 21:18-19

This text is about much more than St. Peter. It is meant for each of us today. Our Opening Prayer indicated that we “in renewed youthfulness of spirit” might now “look forward in confident hope” towards the resurrection. The prayer recalls Psalm 42, “I will go to the altar of God, to God who gives joy to my youth.”

God chose us and He continues to choose us as His very own, and we look forward with hope to our resurrection. Indeed we look forward to the day of our resurrection in the hope of unfailing happiness. We can't let any troubles stamp out our joy in the Risen Lord.

Make no mistake. It is both a tremendous joy and at times a burden to be a shepherd. When all is said and done we are first and foremost followers of Christ the Good Shepherd, and not followers of individual priests, bishops or even popes. This is the way it ought to be.

St. John Chrysostom, in writing about the parable of the Good Shepherd commented on leadership in the Church:

A Great matter, beloved, a great matter it is to preside over a Church: a matter needing wisdom and courage as great as that of which Christ speaketh, that a man should lay down his life for the sheep, and never leave them deserted or naked; that he should stand against the wolf nobly.³

We must pray for all our shepherds, because we are not quite to the Promised Land. Life presents its challenges, and we pastors, weak though we are, try to assist people to walk the path of authentic holiness.

³ St. John Chrysostom, homily 60 on John X: 14-15

For good reason, the Church celebrates its longest season during Easter—ten days longer than Lent, for joy is triumphant over darkness and sin. We celebrate for a longer period of time than we prepare. Easter trumps Lent for important liturgical and theological reasons.

St. Peter might well have had his feelings hurt, because three times he was asked, “Do you love me?” Yet, he continued to answer the question each time that it was put to him. We will be asked again and again to show our faith. Perhaps only when really tested, do we ever get a sense of its strength and resiliency.