

## **Third Sunday of Easter April 10, 2016**

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

In our journey through life we are confronted with several problems and difficulties which can make us lose our perspective. We can lose all direction to life and remain helpless. Then left to ourselves we become nothing and tend to remain with uncertainty. There are moments when we feel that all is lost and the Lord has forgotten us. In such situations we need positive support, a sincere understanding which can place us on the right path. In the Easter context we see Jesus as a consoler and help to the disciples filled with fear. He comes constantly to the disciples to be with them, guide them and encourage them. Today we have another account of Jesus appearing to his disciples on Easter Sunday wherein he prepares a meal for them and gives them support. All the three readings of today tell us of our vocation and our mission to be at the service of the word and not to hesitate to proclaim our nearness to Jesus. We admire the courage of the Disciples of Jesus who preach in the temple with boldness and are ready to face sufferings happily for his sake. In the book of Revelation John is telling us of the loyalty of many to the Lamb, symbolised in Jesus. In the Gospel we have miracle of the great catch at the Lake Tiberius. The disciples once discouraged totally because of the absence of Jesus and discovering that their hard labour provided no returns find everything in Jesus, which transforms them into his loyal disciples. Thus to be a genuine disciple of Jesus, it is not enough just to be "holy", to be good but to have the fidelity, loyalty and determination to be with him particularly in the moment of suffering. In sharing the suffering of Jesus we also share in his glory.

Today's First Reading narrates fact of preaching by the disciples of Jesus in the Temple. Indeed the Temple became an attractive place for them to preach the good news. While they were teaching the captain and the Temple police move to the place to arrest the disciples. They were taken before the Council and were accused for continuing to preach in the Name of Jesus even after the warnings they received. As leader of the group, Peter speaks on behalf of the disciples before the council. He courageously tells them that they must obey God rather than any human authority. They show the authorities that the reason for their courage is the Resurrection of

Jesus and the presence of the Spirit. Peter tells them that they were witnesses to the events surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus, His glorious Resurrection and His ascension into Heaven. Secondly, they had the commission from Jesus to "Go into the entire world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation." It was indeed an open challenge and at the same time a direct insult to the authorities. They were certainly furious at the reply of the apostles. They were flogged the normal forty strokes and then released. They had to bear the pain and yet Peter and the Apostles rejoice because they were considered worthy to have suffered for the sake of Jesus. Because of their pure and unshaken loyalty, they choose to suffer.

The Second Reading from the Book of Revelation calls us to be a witness to our faith with consistency and courage. In this reading we are told that John in his vision heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In this vision John sees Christ under the image of a lamb that is slain but now is the centre of worship and adoration of Angels and men. John sees a huge multitude of creatures thousands and thousands of them, surrounding Christ and singing his praises. His divinity which he emptied from himself in order to save mankind is now restored to him. He is considered worthy of all homage that all creatures can give him, the human beings of the past, present and future, and all the heavenly beings. The one who sits on the throne of God is the lamb, Christ, the God-man the object of our worship. The four living creatures and the Elders worship him and give him honour and glory for all eternity. These creatures in servitude were professing that all power, wealth, wisdom, might, honour, glory and blessing belongs to Jesus. John in this passage reminds us that every creature shall bow before the Lamb of God and give praise to him.

In celebrating the Easter season, the Church provides us with an opportunity - one of several - to relive the period of forty days which separated the Resurrection of Christ from his Ascension into Heaven. For the Apostles, this was a privileged period during which the risen Jesus remained with them, not in a manner that was always visible, as was the case in the Lord's apparitions, but rather in a mysterious manner, a spiritual one, sometimes visible, sometimes invisible. But the Church wants us to

relive liturgically at this particular moment something we can live and experience throughout our life on earth, day after day, year after year. In the Gospel we have the apparition at the Lake Tiberius and its primary purpose was to stress the actual conferring the Primacy on Peter. From his very first meeting with Jesus at the Jordan, the saviour had told him that his name Simon–bar-Jonah would be changed to Cephas which means Rock. Some year or so later at Caesarea Philippi Jesus said to Simon that he is Peter, Rock and on this rock he will build his church. He promised him that he will give him the keys of the Kingdom of heaven. This promise of Jesus that Simon would be the foundation, the source and strength of unity in the new Christian Community was made factual at the Lake Tiberius. Jesus now uses the new metaphor that Simon will be the new Shepherd and that he would take the place of Christ, as the head and director of the Christian flock. Peter would now on provide all protection pasturage to Christ's sheep and lambs. In other words he would be the guide and care taker of the church of Christ.

As we reflect on the Gospel of today we see the revelation of the Resurrected Jesus to the disciples. The disciples had seen the person of Jesus after the resurrection had eaten with him and had listened to his teaching. However there seems to be some uncertainty among them and their absence of the clear understanding of the resurrected Jesus was still haunting them. As far as they were concerned it was all over and it seemed to be the end of everything. They had the constant threat and danger to face from the Jews. Today's Gospel implies that they had left Jerusalem and went back all the way to their native Galilee to resume their former way of life as fishermen. The previous three years had been an interesting and even exciting interlude in their lives but now they were back to what they had always been doing. There they spend a whole night's fishing, they catch absolutely nothing. Suddenly they encounter a stranger on the shore; a shadowy outline in the morning's dew begins a dialogue with them. He asked them whether they had caught some fish in the lake. Reluctantly the fishermen did admit they had caught nothing. He gave them advice from the shore to drop their nets on the right side of the boat and they would find something. They simply obeyed the stranger and the result of this action made them realise it is no other than their master who is guiding them from the shore.

This apparition of Jesus is characteristic, for this episode had already taken place before the Lord's death and resurrection. Let us call to mind that other occurrence of miraculous fishing: "He said to Simon, «Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch. » And Simon answered, «Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets. And when they had done this, they caught a great shoal of fish and their nets were breaking. But these two cases of miraculous fishing differ from each other, for, during the time that elapsed between them, the Lord Jesus had died and had risen again. Here John recognised him and Peter immediately reacted to the revelation and he jumped into the water and swam back to the shore to be with the Lord.

Christ's passage through death and resurrection manifests itself in that, despite the great quantity of fish taken, the net did not break after the resurrection, whereas it did before the resurrection as their nets were breaking says Luke in chapter 5. At the time of the first miraculous catch of fish, Jesus had said to Simon Peter: "Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men." The Lord thus compared men and women, of all races and nations, to the fish that Peter had just caught. This comparison was such that, from the earliest years of Christianity, the symbol of the fish was the secret means of signifying one's membership in Christ. From age to age, this comparison would endure, even in the name of the ring used by the Pope to seal his decrees and ordinances: the Ring of the Fisherman. Absolutely unequivocally, the fish that Simon caught, both before and after the resurrection of the Lord, are indeed men, at least in a symbolic, mystical way! So if the net did not break after the resurrection, it was to show that all the men and women caught by Simon Peter are, and shall remain, truly united to each other, by the will of the Lord, who ordered this miraculous catch of fish.

Here we see the concern of Jesus. He welcomed them to the shore. He knew of their struggle through the night and their exhaustion through hard work. When they came ashore they found the stranger-Lord had prepared a meal for them of bread and roasted fish. He told them to bring some of the fish they had just caught and make their breakfast. They were aware

that he was no other than the Lord and they had a meal together. This meal symbolised the Eucharist into which all of us participate. The disciples were now in the presence of Jesus, the Word of God, and listened to him. He called them together to come and eat and share the togetherness. He broke the bread and shared the fish as if to say: "Take, all of you, and eat together." They and he shared what they had and ate in unity and community. Such a simple scene provides us a beautiful picture of the Church. The disciples had the lesson to have the meal together to share in the breaking of the bread.

Again, there is a great similarity between this miracle and the calming the storm as recorded by the Synoptic writers. The disciples were struggling in the storm. Lord was not there in their struggle or they thought he was far away and sleeping in the boat. He came to them walking on water and calmed the storm. Once Jesus was with them all was quiet. In this miracle we see the feeling of the disciples that the Lord was not there with them when they went fishing. They struggled without the Lord's presence and caught nothing. The Lord came to them and there was a large catch of fish. This symbolises the early church during the days of the persecutions and was considered to have been struggling in the middle of a storm. There was the absence of the Lord. They thought the Lord was far away. But he came to them and told them what to do and they had their joy and fulfilment.

In the second part of the Gospel we have the scene where Jesus was asking Peter three times the question, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" And three times, Peter affirmed his loyalty to Jesus, promising to serve Him, even to death. Each time Jesus gave him the mission to care for his sheep. He was given the call to leadership and to continue his mission. Jesus demanded a threefold profession of love from Peter was in response to Peter's threefold denial prior to the passion. Undoubtedly, Peter knew that he was being reminded that on three past occasions, he had denied his knowing the Lord Jesus. When Peter is asked the third time, he was pained and finally he said: "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Knowing the transformation and conversion that had taken place in the heart of Peter, Jesus accepted his word and placed His authority and leadership on him. He was commissioning Peter to be the

shepherd of his newly founded church. Simon Peter would be the new shepherd and he would take the place of Christ. He would provide protection and pasturage for the Christian flock, the people of God.

Today when we receive the Holy Eucharist, let us publicly show our loyalty to Jesus. Through the reception of the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, we are professing our faith in the Divine Presence of Jesus manifested in the Living Bread. By our presence here today, we are saying to Jesus, "My Lord, all authority is yours! You are our Lord and our God. Guide us and we humbly obey your commission." In our moments of emptiness and when we see the Lord is not close to us but has left us alone we seek his presence. Let us realise that he close to us and supports us. If there is a grace of the Resurrection, it is that of the unity of all Christians! And if there is indeed an unequivocal sign that will announce to us the Return of the risen Jesus, it is the perfect realization of the unity of all those who belong to Christ and who remain in Him, and He in them: "I am with you always, to the close of the age." (Mt. 28:20) We can conclude our reflection with a short prayer: "Dear Jesus, help me to spread your fragrance everywhere I go. Flood my soul with your spirit and life. Penetrate and possess my whole being so utterly that all my life may be only a radiance of yours. Shine through me and be so in me that every person I come in contact with will feel your presence in me. Let them look up and see, not only me, but also Jesus."

The only survivor of a shipwreck washed up on a small, uninhabited island. He prayed feverishly for God to rescue him, and every day he scanned the horizon for help, but none seemed forthcoming. Exhausted, he eventually managed to build a little hut out of driftwood to protect him from the elements, and to store his few possessions. But then one day, after scavenging for food, he arrived home to find his little hut in flames, the smoke rolling up to the sky. The worst had happened; everything was lost. He was stung with grief and anger. "God, how could you do this to me?" he cried. Early the next day, however, he was awakened by the sound of a ship that was approaching the island. It had come to rescue him. "How did you know I was here?" asked the weary man of his rescuers. "We saw your smoke signal," they replied. "GOD works mysteriously." He knows

exactly what we need. And because God loves us so much, He said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." Trust in God.

A little girl was ill in hospital with a rare blood disorder and was badly in need of a blood donor but a match could not be found. As a last resort, her six year old brother was checked as a match and much to everyone's relief, he was. Both his mother and Doctor sat the little boy down and explained how they would like his blood to help his sister so she would not die. The little boy waited a few moments then asked if he could think about it. It wasn't the reaction the mother or Doctor expected but they agreed. The following day the little boy sat in front of the Doctor with his mother and said he agreed to give his sister what she needed. The hospital staff moved quickly for his sister was fading quite fast. So the little boy could understand what was happening, he was placed in a bed next to his sister and so the transfusion began. Quickly, the colour and life began flooding back into the little girl and every one was over joyed. The little boy turned to the Doctor and quietly asked, "How long will it be before I die?" You see, the little boy thought that by giving his blood, he was giving his own life, which is why he took a little time to think about it.

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