

**ECHOING GOD’S WORD
IN
THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY
Third Sunday of Easter
May 1, 2022**

SCRIPTURES:

Acts 5:37,32,40-41	The apostles chose to obey God rather than men.
Revelation 5:11-14	The Lamb is worthy to receive the praise of all.
John 21:1-19	Jesus cements his love for Peter at a startling breakfast.

READ THE SCRIPTURES:

John:

Peter most likely had expected a severe reprimand from Jesus after the resurrection. What fear he must have brought to this encounter with the Risen Lord on the shore of the lake. It would only have been right if Jesus had reminded him of his betrayal -- of how Peter had promised that he would die with Jesus only to have him deny that he even knew him at his trial! Now, there he is on the shore at dawn cooking on a charcoal fire! He calls out to them to see if they have any fish. He instructs them as to where the real catch is to be found. Peter is in the nude. Surely, John says this to externalize the shame that Peter already feels internally for his sin. He might as well be nude! The whole world knows that he has sinned against his Master. Jesus calls out to him! He should put some clothes on to hide some of his shame and guilt. But then, he goes crazy with love for Jesus, and he jumps into the water, clothes and all, in his eagerness to go and be forgiven!

“Peter, do you love me?” What else have we come to expect from Jesus? What would we want to hear from the Master when we have sinned? An invitation to profess our love for him, nothing else! Jesus invites Peter to profess his love, to commit himself to that love, in a way that he will never be able to forget.

Jesus gives Peter a charge, a mission, a task in this world. “Go and care for my people now that I will no longer be visible among them. You go and show them your love for me so that they will know beyond any doubt that I am loving them through you.”

That will be Peter’s work in this world, to serve God and the Son, Jesus, by guiding, loving, and urging people to be faithful. Jesus couples authority with the virtue of love. Only if we love the Lord do we have any right to exercise some authority in his name. Leading God’s people, whether it be in a family or in the Church, is not just a job that depends on training and education. It is a ministry that requires that we love Jesus Christ! Without that love, the result will be nothing at all.

Without the divine assistance that comes from the love of Jesus Christ, the Christian task of leadership is hopelessly difficult. John suggests as much when he says that the catch of fish was so large that the apostles could hardly haul it in...by themselves! It is God’s work that needs to be done. It requires a gift which God alone can give.

We do not know what the meaning is of the number of fish: 153! Numerology is a forgotten discipline. Perhaps it measures the hugeness of the Christian mission. Today, we might say “a million fish!” Who was counting that morning in the first place? Any guess is a wild guess. Better to leave it alone.

Acts:

Again, we are given a summary of the teachings of the apostles: Acts 5:30-32. This is the fourth such summary given in Acts. [See: 1) 2:22-36; 2) 3:13-26; 3) 4:10-12], I have often urged those who preach to learn these summaries by heart and to check the content of their homilies against the content of these sermons! The apostles have just been arrested again. This is the second time! This time it comes from the Sadducees who resent very much that “resurrection” is being proclaimed, since they did not believe in an afterlife or in resurrection. They were the archconservatives of their day, accepting only the books of Moses as official Scripture. Since the Torah does not mention an afterlife, they said it did not exist. They seemed to have had some measure of power among the people; they could manage to have the apostles arrested. They could presume to give orders: “Do not preach the Name of the One you claim has come back to life!” So, who has authority here, anyway? “We choose to obey Jesus who is God rather than you who are mere men!”

Revelation:

God is in charge of the universe, as we see that he is seated on the throne (Chapter 4). The Scroll with the Seven Seals represents God’s whole plan for the redemption of the world. Seven is a complete number; it represents “all” that exists, as we see from the “Seven Days of Creation” in the Book of Genesis. The only one who has access to that plan is the Lamb, Jesus Christ the Living Lord. He can open the scroll and put the plan into effect. He is the Lord of History. The whole universe joins in praise of the God who is in charge. It is the mission of the Church to proclaim that eventual outcome of God’s plan. It will be successful as we see from the “Amen” proclaimed by all creation.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. I told a young person whom I was advising in personal matters to add up all his bills, so he would have a concrete and visual appreciation of what he owed. He did not want to because he felt overwhelmed by his debts! Do we not dare to count the blessings that God has given us for fear that we might not be sufficiently grateful? Do you have a clear idea of what your responsibilities are in your family, in your neighborhood, in the Church? One-hundred-fifty-three tasks? Or 153 blessings?

2. Why do you suppose Jesus chose to meet his friends on the shore of their familiar lake back home in Galilee, rather than in the Temple at Jerusalem? Do you think he might be saying that he encounters us where we are most “at home,” in the midst of our habitual tasks, right on the job? Where has Jesus found you? What were you doing when Jesus came to ask you if you loved him? Did you really need him right at that moment? How did he approach you? Was he not offering you the comfort of a “breakfast by the side of the lake?”

3. Have you ever been caught off guard by the overwhelming generosity of God on your behalf? Did you ever find yourself having to bring in a “haul” that you had not expected? Have you ever had a sense that you were being “fed and comforted” at breakfast” by the Lord? What was your reaction? How did you feel about that? What was the challenge that followed? Did you come to realize that you had to do some “feeding and comforting” of others in return? Did you resent that?

PRAYER

“Lord, you know well that I love you! I am willing to care for your flock if that is what you want. All I need is that you feed me with your body and blood, and your love. Lord, I do love you! Why do you keep asking? I will love you even more if that is what you want!”

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE:

“The Church’s View on Authority”

The prevailing image on the exercise of authority in the Church can be found in the scene of the Washing of the Feet at the Last Supper by Jesus who is Lord and Master. “I who am Lord and Master (Supreme Authority of God on Earth) have shown you how authority and power ought to be exercised in the community of my followers: Serve one another in the posture of a humble servant and slave.”

We cannot have two views on the exercise of authority: One for the conduct of business in the Church and another for the conduct of business in the world. The image of the Washing of Feet is the only appropriate one. Serving the needs of others becomes our first duty and responsibility as Christians, whether we serve in the Church or serve in the world.

Leaders of families, of cities, and of states are but humble servants of God, guiding and helping others fulfill their destinies. Church leaders conduct themselves worthily when they kneel before others and offer to perform humble, and sometimes humiliating, tasks. “The first shall be last.”

The Church has a role in society. Civil governments sometimes see the Church as a threat to their proper role. Some governments tend to restrict the activities and ministries of the Church for fear that the role of civil authority might be compromised by the churches.

The only fear civil governments have to have is that the Church will challenge their attempts to exercise tyrannical and totalitarian authority over their people. The Church will always stand up to defend the defenseless, to proclaim the dignity of the human person, the rights of the poor and the meek. If any civil authority becomes arrogant and tries to abrogate any God-given right of the people, the Church will protest. The Church will always denounce any attempt to require that all of a person’s allegiance be given to the state. God has rights, too, and the Church will always speak up for those rights.

In times past, the Church may have been unclear about the legitimate rights of civil governments; the Church may even have usurped some of the functions of the state, especially when there was chaos in society and civil authority was too limited or too weak. Today, the Church has drawn a clear line between its function and those of civil governments. No need to fear any encroachments from the pope. But, the pope will always be loud and clear in calling the governments of this world to respect human rights for all persons.

(See The Catechism: #1897-1904,2234-46)

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