

Third Sunday of Easter
May 5, 2019
Fr. Rick Lorenz

Acts 5:28-32, 40b-41
Ps 30
Rev 5:11-14
Jn 21:1-19

Reflection

Have you ever been inspired by a priest celebrating Mass? Not his words or charisma, but just the fact that he was present? On Friday I concelebrated a Mass at St. Martin de Porres. It was the 45th anniversary of the ordination of Fr. Peter Cody, whom I worked with at the basilica. He has mobility and breathing issues, but continues as chaplain for their Knights of Columbus: a role he's had since 1975...the same year that I received First Communion! The deacon and I had to hold the Roman Missal for him, but he still stood - with difficulty - for the Eucharist Prayer. During his homily, he mentioned his pain and suffering, but also the love and mercy that he receives from God. He feels blessed. Watching him reminded me of the images of Pope St. John Paul II; another man who gave all for the Church founded by Jesus Christ. It was a time for reflection. I did my pastoral internship at St. Martin de Porres, was ordained there as deacon, and returned to celebrate my First Mass. My internship pastor was there, as well as Fr. Anthony. He was a school mate of Fr. Paul, and he lives at St. Martin de Porres; he's still saddened by the loss of their pastor on Holy Thursday. So many connections tied together by God; like a net then cast by we fishers of men.

In today's Gospel, the disciples are living with the joy of the resurrection, but the memory of the crucifixion is not far from their minds. The Holy Spirit has not yet descended on them with his gifts of power, unity and courage. We find the disciples on the Sea of Galilee. They're not all there. The Gospel lists five of them by name and includes two others.

They're not all there, and they're not focussed on their mission. "Peter said to them, 'I am going fishing.' They said to him, 'We will go with you.' They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing." They were still attached to the world and trying to solve their problems with familiar solutions. Their hope was centered on Jesus, but they were still learning to rely on him. So Jesus came to them knowing their need. They followed his instructions and cast their net again. "Now they were not able to haul [in the net] because there were so many fish."

Peter was struck by the appearance of Jesus, and jumped into the sea in his haste to join him. At the same time, he remembered his failure, that he had denied Jesus three times before the cock crowed. Love mingled with shame; hope in Jesus was mixed with an awareness of his own weakness. Jesus helped him to fish, but it wasn't enough. He needed to know that he was still the rock on whom Jesus would build his church. He also needed Jesus to make this clear before the other disciples; to restore his stature before them.

Jesus asked him three times, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" A formal question charged with solemnity and authority, like an oath or commission. A question repeated three times before the disciples, to overcome three denials before a crowd of unbelievers. He had said, "I don't know him" while the eyes of Jesus gazed with forgiveness. Now he answered, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you" while his eyes shone with mercy. Three answers led to three responses.

In his first response, Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." With these words, Jesus gave Peter the office of prophet. Helped by the Holy Spirit, Peter would teach the people with the word of God, bringing them to faith. We learn in the first reading that the apostles "filled Jerusalem with [their] teaching" even through danger and opposition. They explained themselves in this way: "We must obey God rather than human beings." Knowing they would face a death that would glorify God freed them from fear, so "they rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer dishonour for the sake of the name."

In his second response, Jesus said, "Tend my sheep." With these words, Jesus gave Peter the office of king. Peter received the keys to the kingdom; the power to bind and loose; the authority to govern the Church. From this the Church gives its ministers the power of absolution, freeing people from their sins to receive the mercy and forgiveness of God. The head of the Church makes doctrinal judgements, drawing from Scripture and Tradition to unveil the truth revealed to us by the Holy Spirit. Disciplinary decisions keep the flock moving in the same direction on its pilgrimage towards heaven. But the office of king must be understood rightly. Peter was called to strengthen the faith of his brothers. To rule is to serve, and the pope is the *servus servorum Dei*, the "servant of the servants of God."

In his third response, Jesus said, "Feed my sheep." With these words, Jesus gave Peter the office of priest. Jesus is the true priest, who made one eternal sacrifice. He gave himself on the cross. They killed him by "hanging him on a tree."

He is "the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing." But "Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them." They witnessed his resurrection, and saw it in the bread that they received that day on the beach. The bread they tasted was a foretaste of the banquet in heaven. There the Father is on his throne. Jesus stands by him crucified and risen...giving and given. The Holy Spirit flows from their love as the water of life. He works through the Church so that we can participate in the heavenly liturgy, here and now, with the angels and saints gathered around us.

But it was never up to Peter alone. When he wondered what to do, he remembered the parting words of our Lord: "Follow me." Peter could follow Jesus in his forgiveness at the cold night in the temple, and his mercy at the warming morning on the beach. In *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis keeps this mercy in mind. "There are two ways of thinking which recur throughout the Church's history: casting off and reinstating. The Church's way, from the time of the Council of Jerusalem, has always been the way of Jesus, the way of mercy and reinstatement. The way of the Church is not to condemn anyone for ever; it is to pour out the balm of God's mercy on all those who ask for it with a sincere heart (AL 296)." During his homily, Fr. Peter mentioned that he lost his confessor with the passing for Fr. Brian. For this Eucharist, we thank God for the mercy given by his suffering joyful priests.