

Third Sunday of Easter C/2010

There is a story of a speaker who presented a fifty dollar bill to an audience and asked if there was someone who would like to have it. Almost everybody raised the hand and wanted to have the money. Calmly he pursued, "ok; I will give it to you, but first watch what I am going to do". He crumpled the money in his hand and asked if anyone would like to have it. Still people wanted the bill. He threw the bill on the ground and trampled it with his shoes so that it became very dirty. He asked again: "Are there still people who want to have it after all that". The hands rose again in order to have the money.

Why did these people want to have a bill that was dirty and crumpled? Because, in spite of its crease and dirt, its value was not diminished. This story reminds us that, in spite of our indignity and unworthiness, we are never worthless before God. Our value does not depend on what we have done or did not do, but on God who loves us above all in spite of our past life. That is what today's readings bring to our meditation as they talk about the rehabilitation of Peter and his commissioning by Jesus.

First of all, we have the Acts of the Apostles that describes what happened to Peter and his colleagues as they were brought to court. Previously, they had received strict orders not to speak in the name of Jesus. But, ignoring the injunctions of the Sanhedrin, they preferred to obey God rather than men. They continued to give witness to the Risen Christ without fear. They even rejoiced for having being found worthy to suffer dishonor in the name of Jesus.

How did the audacity to speak in the name of Jesus come about? It came from the strength of the Holy Spirit given to the apostles by the Risen Lord. In fact, Jesus' disciples were convinced that by raising him, God has exalted him and made him leader and savior who grants repentance and forgiveness of sins to the whole world. Therefore, to speak in his name was just legitimate.

As the book of Revelation says, Christ is the sacrificial Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He was slain, but now he is alive. He is worthy of receiving power and riches, wisdom and strength, honor, glory and blessing. He is worthy to be praised by all the living creatures throughout the universe, in heaven, on earth and in the sea. To him belong honor, glory and might for all eternity.

The champion of all this work of testimony to Jesus after his resurrection was Simon Peter. We know, however, that this is someone who denied Jesus at his passion. And yet, it is the same person that Jesus now will commission and put in charge of the church.

The Gospel we have this morning describes one of the apparitions of Jesus. At that time, the Risen Jesus appeared to his disciples for the third time at the Sea of Tiberias, the Gospel says. The presence of the disciples at the sea means that after the death of Jesus, they all went back to their former duty as fishermen.

But curiously, that night they did not catch anything until Jesus joined them and recommended them to put the nets at the right side of the boat. Once it was done, they could catch an important number of fish.

What this episode teaches us is that, in spite of our human abilities to perform things, if we are not joined by the Lord, we run the risk of failing. It is only when the Lord comes to our rescue that we have the chance to succeed.

Once they caught the fish, their eyes became open and they recognized the Lord. They realized that the risen Lord was not a phantom or a ghost, but the same Jesus with whom they ate and drank before. Then, he could invite them to breakfast by breaking for them the bread and the fish.

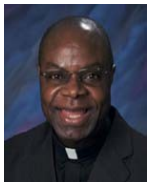
While the breaking of the bread and fish reminded the disciples of what they were used to doing together with Jesus, it symbolizes for us the Eucharist in which we are fed by the body and the blood of Christ. By feeding the disciples, Jesus shows us that he is sensitive to both our human and spiritual needs. Since, as disciples, we follow the example of our master, we too have to care for the physical needs of our brothers and sisters. By relieving their human suffering we give a powerful spiritual witness to our Lord Jesus.

The picture of the disciples in the boat has often been interpreted in a mystical way by fathers of the Church. The boat is the Church, whose unity is symbolized by the net which is not torn while having so many and different fish. While the different fish symbolize the universality of the Church, the sea is the world, while Peter in the boat stands for the supreme authority of the Church.

But before being made the supreme authority of the Church, Peter had first to confess his love for Christ. In fact, it was three times that Peter denied Jesus and it was three times that he was given the opportunity to affirm his love for the Lord. As he confesses his love, he is given a responsibility of caring for the Church. We know by experience that love involves also sacrifice. That is why, once Peter acknowledges that he loves Christ, he is told what kind of death he has to endure.

By his triple confession, Peter is restored to the leadership position from which he has fallen by his triple denial. Plus, he is declared a pastor, who shows his love for Christ by feeding his sheep. Peter's rehabilitation is a work of grace and not of his own strength. That is why it is important to each of us to realize that God's love for us goes beyond our faults. Let us never despair of our faults and sins. Rather, let us receive God's forgiveness in the sacrament of reconciliation. We pray for our Pope and our Bishop so that they might be assisted by the Lord to lead us in truth. May he bring them to love with God's love and to accept the sacrifice for the good of the people entrusted to them. God bless you all!

Acts 5, 27-32, 40b-41; Revelation 5, 11-14, 17-19; John 21, 1-19



Homily Date: April 18, 2010

© 2010 – Fr Felicien I. Mbala, PhD, STD

Contact: www.mbala.org

Document Name: 20100418homily.pdf