

### **Third Sunday of Easter C/2013**

The readings of this third Sunday of Easter continue the message of the resurrection of Jesus. They focus particularly on his apparitions and on the bold witness of his disciples among the Jewish people. They invite us to entrust our life to the Lord, especially in those moments where everything seems to work against us and our projects of life.

The first reading of the Acts of the Apostles recalls the witness of the apostles in the aftermath of the resurrection of Jesus. In fact, the high priest and the elders forbade the apostles to talk about Jesus. In spite of this injunction, however, they continued teaching about him in the holy city. Even when they were brought to justice, they could not help talking about him. They judged themselves worthy of suffering dishonor for the sake of his name.

What is behind this text is the truth that the resurrection of Jesus did not bring to the apostles only joy, but also some trouble. Another idea is that in spite of all the difficulties they went through, the Spirit of Jesus gave the disciples the courage to bear witness to his name. Jesus himself strengthened them by his continual and hidden presence.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus appears to his disciples at Sea of Tiberias. In fact, after the death of Jesus the disciples went back to their former professions. It was in that circumstance that Peter and some of the disciples found themselves at the sea fishing.

Unfortunately that night, they did not catch anything until Jesus came to them at dawn and showed them another spot on the sea where they caught many fish. At the catch, they recognized him as John, one of them, realized that it was the Lord.

Once ashore with the boat and dragging the net, they saw a charcoal fire with fish on it and bread. At the order of the Lord, they added more fish and had breakfast together. But none of them dared to ask Jesus who he was because it was obvious to them that it was him. In a usual gesture, the Lord took the fish and bread and gave to them, revealing himself thereby to them for the third time after being raised from the dead.

The Gospel finishes with the question of Jesus to Peter whether he loved him. All three times Jesus asked that question, Peter gave an unequivocal answer that he did. All three times also, Jesus invited him to feed his sheep. Nevertheless, at the third time, Peter was a little bit saddened, although his answer remained the same.

In the end, Jesus predicted by what kind of death Peter had to die in order to glorify God. Using a veiled language, he told him how when he was young, he was used to doing things the way he wanted, but when he will get old, he will be dressed and led where he does not want.

What do we learn from this Gospel? The first thing I want to highlight is about the reality of the resurrection. I will not repeat here what I said at Easter, instead I want to point to another dimension of the resurrection with regard to the Gospel of the day.

In fact, when we say that Jesus appeared to the disciples or the apostles, we are not saying that they saw a spirit or a ghost, but rather a real person, the same one they were used to living with before.

That is why when he appears he shows them his scars or he invites them to have breakfast. As it appears, a ghost cannot have a breakfast as humans do or address people in the same way that the human persons do. In that perspective, the resurrection of Jesus is not a hallucination, a vision or a product of imagination, but rather a real event that took place in the midst of the disciples through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The risen Lord is a real person and the same Jesus the disciples met before he died. The only difference between before and after his death is that now the risen Lord transcends the limits of time and space. That is why he can appear or disappear any time, but he is the same. This confirms the writing of the Letter to the Hebrews when it says that, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever” (Hebrews 13: 8).

The second point I want to bring is about the universality of the Church. Why do I speak of this? Because of the symbolism we found in today’s story. Let me stop on the symbols of the net and boat. As the Fathers of the Church have said, the boat and the net symbolize the church. As the net gathers all sorts of fish, the Church is universal in its nature. It gathers people of every language, nation, race and background. As the net cannot discriminate the fish within it, so cannot the Church discriminate people, but rather brings all the people together in the name of our faith in Jesus Christ.

As the boat needs a captain to run it, so needs the Church a leader to guide it. In today’s Gospel, Simon Peter is made the shepherd of the flock in order to feed Jesus’ sheep. That role of leadership is given by the Lord himself to Peter and he was already recognized as such by the apostles, as we see it in the Acts of the Apostles.

That role of leading and feeding is continued today by the pope as he is chosen by his peers to guide the Church. Does it mean that the pope does not have a personal history? Not at all. As Simon Peter had a personal history that pushed him to tell Jesus that he knew everything and he knew how he loved him, the pope, as a human being, has also a personal background.

What is relevant here, however, is that, in spite of that personal background, the Lord gives him a mission that transcends the personal history for the good of his Church. All that is given because he truly loves. In that sense, we understand that love creates responsibility.

However, we know by experience that the more someone loves another, the more he becomes responsible for his or her wellbeing. It is impossible to love and not to be responsible for that person. That is why love is demanding. It requires sacrifice. Those who love have to be ready to accept sacrifice in their life. That is true for ordinary life as well as for the life of faith. Let us pray for our pope and our Bishops so that they carry their duties with joy and courage. Let us pray for married couples that they accept with joy and courage the task of love. God bless you all!

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



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