

Third Sunday of Easter C/2019

The readings of this Sunday continue the joy of the resurrection. They describe some of Jesus' apparitions and the bold witness of his disciples before the Jewish people. They invite us to entrust our undertakings to Jesus, especially in those moments where our projects are unsuccessful.

The first reading of the Acts of the Apostles recalls the witness of the apostles before the Sanhedrin. It highlights the motive for which the apostles were accused as related to the prohibition of preaching in the name of Jesus.

It also shows the reaction of the apostles who preferred to obey God rather than human beings. Finally, it shows that the more there was opposition to Jesus, the more the apostles were talking about him to the point of judging themselves worthy of suffering for the sake of his name.

What is behind this text is the idea that, though the resurrection brought joy to the disciples, it equally brought them some trouble. Another idea is that in spite of all the difficulties the apostles went through, they did not abandon their faith, but instead they continued bearing witness to Jesus with courage and abnegation.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus appears to his disciples at the Sea of Tiberius. First of all, the Gospel says that the apostles were at sea for fishing. Then, it shows that, in spite of all the work they did the whole night long, the apostles did not catch anything.

After that, the Gospel reports on the apparition of Jesus and his invitation to the apostles that they try again in lowering the net at the right side of the boat. Then, it reports on what happened when they obeyed Jesus' injunction and how they had a very astonishing catch to the point that they were unable to pull the net ashore because of the number of fish.

After that, the Gospel relates the recognition of Jesus by the apostles and his invitation to them that they have breakfast. In the end, the Gospel reports on Jesus triple question to Peter if he loves him, Jesus commissioning to feed his sheep, and the prediction of the type of death Simon Peter had to die.

What do we learn from today's Gospel? Today I want to talk about the servant leadership in the Church. In fact, in the Gospel of this Sunday, after Jesus had appeared to the apostles and helped them to catch a lot of fish, he asked Peter three times if he loves him. As Peter answered "Yes", Jesus invited him three times to feed his sheep.

By this invitation, Jesus was giving a mandate to Peter and making him the shepherd of his sheep. The sheep we are talking about are not animals, but rather human beings, the believers, the flock of those who have accepted Jesus and the people of God.

In order to understand the importance of the mandate given to Peter, there are two things we have to know. First, let us look at the background of Peter. In fact, we all know that in the heat of the passion, Peter denied Jesus three times. By asking Peter three times if he loves him, Jesus wants to erase his denials, to reassure him that he is forgiven and to redeem his past.

Such a vision shows that the servant leadership in the Church does not mean that the leader is perfect at all cost, but only that, in spite of his human weaknesses and short comings, he can count on the Lord who has chosen him to stand for his people. Therefore, though he is an ordinary person, nevertheless he is chosen in order to do extraordinary things.

In that perspective, what counts the most is not what he can do by himself as an individual, but what he can do with the Lord's help. That is why, in spite of personal background, like that of Peter, the Lord gives a mission to the leader which transcends his personal history for the good of his Church.

Second, let us look at what preceded the mandate. In fact, Peter and his companions, who were at the lake for fishing, had worked the whole night long without success. As the morning came and they were leaving, perhaps discouraged, Jesus joined them and changed their failure into an amazing catch.

We have to bear in mind that those friends who were fishing were experts in their job. They certainly knew how and when to fish, and in which circumstances to hope for a good catch. That is the reason why they went fishing in the night. However, in spite of all their skills, knowledge and talents, they were unsuccessful.

This episode teaches us that, as good as we might be in our undertakings and jobs, as skilled and talented that we might be, we are always vulnerable and at the mercy of a possible failure. That is why we need the Lord so that he might lend his hand to our business, job, family, projects, etc. That is the only way our success can be guaranteed. It is for that reason, I believe, that a good leader is the one who is always on his knees before the Lord, in prayer, asking him wisdom and discernment on how he can conduct his affairs according to God's will.

The role of the servant leadership given to Peter by Jesus is continued today in the Church by the pope. The pope is chosen by his peers, the bishops, in order to feed and lead the Church on behalf of Jesus. The duty of the pope is to strengthen his brothers and sisters in faith by providing them with a sound teaching that can help them grow in holiness and strive to be always close to the heart of Jesus.

This is a very demanding task which cannot be accomplished without God's grace and prayer. In fact, those who are at the extreme left would like that the Church may espouse all the ideas going on in our culture and society, even those against the teaching of Jesus. Those who are at the far right would like that those who do not cope with the laws of the Church might be simply excommunicated. It is the role of the pope to help keep the right balance so that each one may feel that the Church is his home. That is why we have to pray for our pope and our bishops so that they might truly be the servant leaders like Jesus. God bless you all!

Acts 5: 27-32; Revelation 5: 11-14; John 21: 1-19



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