

Third Sunday of Easter: Peter and John, Realism and Idealism

"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain
to receive power and riches, wisdom and strength,
honor and glory and blessing."
Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth
and under the earth and in the sea,
everything in the universe, cry out:
"To the one who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be blessing and honor, glory and might,
forever and ever."
The four living creatures answered, "Amen,
"and the elders fell down and worshiped."

And he called to them from the shore. A few weeks after the Resurrection, the disciples had returned to their lives, perhaps waiting for the Lord's instructions. The One who they knew was the One, called to them. Put out your nets on the starboard side. After a fruitless night with nothing to show, they suddenly had a huge amount of fish. This happened before when Peter and Andrew, James and John were first called. The One who was Worthy was calling them again.

The Beloved Disciple calls out, "It is the Lord," and Peter swims out from his boat to the shore. Once more Peter finds himself by a fire being asked questions about his loyalty to Jesus. The first time this happened was around that fire in the courtyard of the Sanhedrin on Good Friday when Peter denied the Lord three times. This time he reaffirms the Lord three times. But that is not enough. He has to do something about his faith. He has to feed the Lord's sheep. Later on in the chapter we hear about Peter's eventual death, being made to stretch out his arms and go where he did not want to go. After that there is going to be a few comments about the Beloved Disciple, most probably John, who had been entrusted with Mary under the cross.

John and Peter, Peter and John. One the ideal disciple, the other a disciple constantly at war with his own humanity. John was the ideal disciple. He was the only one of the twelve who did not desert the Lord at the Passion. He was the first of the Twelve to believe in the Resurrection. He was loving, trusting and faithful. Peter was the disciple who said one thing and then did another. He was full of bravado until his fear kicked in. He was a leader, but a flawed leader. Still, he made the decision to turn back to the Lord and was willing to accept all sorts of hardship and death to proclaim the Gospel. Peter would eventually journey to Rome, the center of the then known world. He would be arrested there and killed. Tradition says that Peter was crucified with his head down. George Weigel in his *Letters to a Young Catholic* suggests that the huge obelisk that stands in St. Peter's Square used to be in the center of the Nero's Circus where the early Christians were tortured to death. It could very well have been the last thing that Peter focused on before his death. It is the first thing that a new pope sees when he assumes the Chair of Peter and greets the people

on the balcony of the Basilica of St. Peters in the Vatican.

We would all like to be disciples like John, always faithful and true, so full of love that we recognize the Lord wherever he is, so courageous that we are willing to risk our lives to stand beneath his cross. In reality, though, we are all more like Peter rather than John. At least we are more like Peter when we are at our best. Peter had to struggle with his own humanity, his fear, his impetuosity, but still, he was a true disciple. We continually struggle with our own humanity. We have many temptations to sin. We give in sometimes and then hate what we become. But with the compassion and love of the Lord, we can turn away from all that is black and turn to the Lord. We have to turn to the Lord. He calls us to feed his sheep.

We need to eliminate the unrealistic expectations we thrust upon ourselves and others. We grow up having everyone tell us that we are so good, and as little children we might believe that, but when reality kicks in at adolescence and throughout our lives, we tend to get so negative about ourselves that we consider giving up. So we don't stand for the Lord because we don't see ourselves as good enough. We forget, He makes us good enough. He makes us infinitely better than we can imagine.

He makes others infinitely better too. When we were little, we were convinced that our parents were perfect. Then, somewhere in adolescence, we realized that they were not perfect. For many that was hard to take. The loss of their ideals blinded them to their parents' virtues. Many young people act as though their parents are the most imperfect people in the world. Maybe we all did that when we were kids. Mark Twain said, as you know, when he was young he was convinced that his father was a fool, but when he became an adult he marveled at how wise his father had become. The change was not in his father, it was in Mark Twain's recognition of his father's virtues over his flaws. Applying this to the spiritual life, there are times that we see the imperfections of individuals and are blinded to their virtues. We think that others should be like John, when we should be pleased that they are like Peter. We think we should be like John, when we should thank God for the times that we are like Peter.

Peter's threefold affirmation of the Lord wasn't just to renounce his three denials of the Lord. He was asked to live his faith by feeding the Lord's flock. Jesus does not call us to affirm His Presence in our lives for ourselves. He calls us to give witness to His Presence for others. This is difficult at times. We choose to serve Christ by avoiding evil and by sacrificing ourselves for others. Both give witness to the Life within us that is more important than physical life. Being a Christian means proclaiming Christ with our lives. Maybe that means talking with a hurting friend when you would rather be doing something else. Maybe that means going to a wake or a funeral when you would rather be doing anything else. Perhaps that means training a young man or woman who someday will take your job. Maybe that means helping someone in school who might end up beating you out for a scholarship, a position in a med school, etc. Maybe that means helping a person who needs the help but is rather obnoxious. It makes no difference, if we really do love the Lord, we are going to feed His sheep.

When we recite the creed we proclaim that we are members of one, holy, Catholic and apostolic church. We are called to be apostles. Yes it would be wonderful if we could be ideal apostles like John, but we are real people like Peter.

And like Peter, despite our limitations, we can feed the Lord's sheep.