

Third Sunday of the Easter Season: "Father, He is Risen!"

The man who entered the Church the week after Easter was old, very old. He was stooped over. He carried an oxygen pack. He had a cane, but he could barely walk. His face was thinned and his hair was a distant memory. He had to have been in his late 90's. He saw me and looked up, and with a smile said, "Father, He is risen." He said all that needs to be said.

The reality of Easter impacts the core of our being. Jesus Christ has risen from the dead. The spiritual is real. And we who are united to Him through our baptism have risen with Him. This life is full of limitations, but there are no limitations to the resurrected life. What I heard the elderly gentleman saying was, "My life here is coming to an end, but I have great hope. My life with Jesus is forever. He is risen. And so am I." And so are we!

Everything is changed. Everything is renewed. We speak about the new life of the Lord at Easter, but perhaps we do not really understand the profound implications of His rising from the dead. Nothing that happens in this world has value unless it flows from Him and leads back to Him.

And so Peter and the rest of the Twelve disciples stood before the same people who had Jesus put to death, the Sanhedrin, the leaders of the Temple. Ananias was there, as well as his son Caiaphas and the rest of the gang. These were the people that Peter feared so much that he denied Jesus three times to avoid being brought before them. These are the people that the other disciples were afraid would put them to death too, so they deserted the Lord, all except John, that is. But now they were not cowering. They were standing their ground. What changed? Jesus had Risen. There was New Life. There was the Holy Spirit. The disciples had received the New Life of the Lord and realized that no matter what happened to them, this new life was forever. There are a few verses skipped over in today's first reading. The Sanhedrin was disturbed by the apostles' determination to preach Jesus Christ. Gamaliel, the teacher of Saul of Tarsus, the future St. Paul, reasoned with the Sanhedrin, "If these men are not from God, their cause will fade away. But if they are from God, we need to be careful that we are not opposing God." Another little tidbit was left out. The Sanhedrin decided to release the disciples, but they had them flogged first. The apostles left, happy to suffer for the Lord. This was a huge change for Peter, for all of them.

Let's focus in on that big fisherman, the head of the apostles, the first Bishop of Rome, the first pope. We come upon him in today's Gospel reading some time between the first Easter experience of the Lord in the Upper Room and Jesus' Ascension to the Father. Peter and his companions were fishing. They had been fishing when Jesus first called them and told them they would become fishers of men. Here they were, once more fishing, and once more, the Lord called them to cast their nets to the right side of the boat. After they brought up a haul of fish, Peter realized that this is the Lord, tucked in his clothes, and jumped into the water. He would not wait to row ashore. He wanted to be with Jesus. His companions followed shortly afterward with the fish, 153 huge

ones. Why 153? Why not 150 or 175, or some other number? 153 was the number of the then known nations of the world. The apostles would be hauling in all people throughout the world.

Peter's three affirmations of the Lord follow. "Simon, son of John. Do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." "Then feed my lambs." "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" "Yes Lord, you know that I love you." "Then, tend my sheep." And then the third time, simply, "Do you love me?" Simon was put distressed that Jesus asked him a third time, "Lord, you know everything, you know that I love you." "Then feed my sheep." Peter's three affirmations were more than the antitheses of his three denials. Peter was now being called to show that he really loved Jesus by caring for the Lord's people.

And so, the Lord calls out to me and to you. "Joseph, son of Theresa and Henry. Do you love me?" "Yes, Lord, you know I love you." "Then care for my people." And the Lord calls out, "Katherine, daughter of Ralph and Lily, do you love me?" "Yes, Lord, you know I love you," she responds, "Then care for my people." And the Lord calls out, "Brandon, son of Marvin and Sandra, do you love me?" He responds, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." "Then do something about it, care for my people." And the Lord calls out to every single one of us. Do you really love me? We say we love him. But anyone can say anything. If we really love Him, we are going to do something to show we love Him. We are going to care for His people.

The disciples did not want to be flogged, but if it was the result of calling people to Jesus Christ, it was worth it, infinitely worth it. Nor did they want to be put to death, as Jesus told Peter would be the end of his physical life. That would only be physical death. The Love of the Lord is forever. We do not want to be excluded from the inner circle at school, work, or even at home. But if it results in people coming to Jesus, it is infinitely worth it. We do not want to make so many hard choices in life, denying ourselves the immoral pleasures of the world, but we do so for the sake of the Lord. His sheep, need us to be wholesome, sincere, and People of God.

And in the long run, when we recognize that this world is limited but the Lord is forever, when we admit that the happiness we are tempted to seek is shallow and selfish and not happiness at all, we enter into the Church, we experience the joy of the Lord, joy that is ours forever, and we look up and say, "Father, He is Risen."