

Homily for 3rd Sunday of Easter Year C

By Fr. Jerome Ituah, OCD

Readings: Acts 5:27-32,40-41; Ps 29(30); Rev 5:11-14; Jn 21:1-19

Theme: Love of the Risen Jesus Demonstrated in Obedience!

Jesus had appeared to the women and the disciples. But they were still afraid of the Jews. This fear will not be totally eliminated until the day of Pentecost, when they receive the Holy Spirit and be prepared to die for their Lord and Master. However, we see signs of pushing back already in the gospel. The disciples were eager to go out of their hiding that once Peter said, 'I am going fishing,' the others with him were willing to follow him. One could say they went out at night because, as professional fishermen, the night was the best time for fishing. They fished all night but caught nothing. Jesus only appeared when they had laboured all night and would have been giving up hope.

Jesus then told them to cast the net on the right side, they netted so much fish, and the beloved disciple recognized that it was the Lord. Jesus then had breakfast with them by the sea. When they had finished breakfast, Jesus turned to Simon Peter and asked him if he loved him more than the others. Jesus addresses Peter. There is no ambiguity as to whom he was asking the question. Do you love me more than these other disciples? That is a serious question related to his denial of Jesus. At the time Jesus needed Peter most to show his love, he denied, swore and turned his back on Jesus. Peter had vowed to stay my Jesus. Peter said to him, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!" (Matt. 26:35). But he failed and broke his oath. Now Jesus wants him to retract and profess his love anew.

Peter renewed his love for Jesus, 'Yes, Lord, you know I love you.' Jesus is convinced that Peter is sincere, repented, and ready to give his all in the future. So, he says to Peter, 'Feed my lambs,' 'shepherd my sheep.' The command to feed the lambs and shepherd the flock reiterates the role of Peter among the disciples and in the church. The shepherd has to lead, feed the lambs and take care of them. Therefore, Peter must lead by feeding the sheep Jesus has entrusted to him. Henceforth, Peter will take this injunction seriously, as we see in the Acts of the Apostles.

The context of the first reading is the miraculous healing of the sick and casting out of unclean spirits from those who came to the apostles. The situation upset the High priest and those around him. They arrested the apostles and put them in a maximumly secured prison. (cf. Acts 5:17-26). They brought the apostles before the Sanhedrin, the supreme Jewish court in Jerusalem. That was the same Sanhedrin that tried Jesus (Lk 22:66-71). The High priest reminded the apostles that they had ordered them not to preach in the name of Jesus. Two reasons why they wanted the apostles to stop preaching were that they had filled the whole of Jerusalem with their teaching and laid the blood of Jesus upon them. Filling Jerusalem with the teaching about Jesus means that they were losing people from mainstream Judaism. Fixing the guilt of the death of Jesus on them means that the people will despise the religious leaders as those who killed the Messiah. But also, the people would easily see Jesus as the fulfilment of the scriptures. But Peter responded: we must obey God rather than men. Peter and the other disciples will not deny the Lord again. They have confessed absolute loyalty to Jesus in the gospel. Peter confessed three times that he loved Jesus, and then he was given the task of caring for and shepherding the flock of God. The confession of Peter to love Jesus demands obedience to God and the Risen Jesus rather than to human beings.

Obedience to the voice of God was at the heart of the Law. 'Now, therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine.' (Exo 19:5). Remember the words of Samuel to Saul: 'to obey is better than sacrifice' (1 Sam 15:22). Therefore, the apostles must preach what they have seen and experienced in obedience to the command of their risen Lord. Jesus asked them to go out

to the whole world and preach the good news (cf. Mk 16:15). The apostles said: we are witnesses to all that happened and the Holy Spirit God has given to those who obey him. They cannot deny the power of God and the work of the Holy Spirit. Second, it is true that the chief priests and elders and the whole Sanhedrin were behind the crucifixion of Jesus. Therefore, their preaching is based on the facts of what happened to Jesus and on the truth prophesied in the scriptures, which they cannot deny. The issue here is preaching the gospel's truth in obedience to God's command without diluting it to please human authorities. The apostles unite their voices to all the living things in creation in heaven, singing to the Lamb that was slain: 'To the One who is sitting on the throne and to the Lamb, be all praise, honour, glory and power, for ever and ever.' Amen.