

5th May 2019 (3rd Sunday of Easter, Year C)

Acts 5:27-32,40-41; Psalm 29(30):2,4-6,11-13; Apocalypse 5:11-14; John 21:1-19.

'Do you love me?'

The author of the gospel according to John gives us a very interesting narrative in today's gospel reading: early in the morning, around a fire, Jesus asks – or perhaps challenges – Peter about his commitment to him. The early morning scene reminds us of the day of the resurrection, while the fire reminds us of Peter's triple denial that he knew Jesus; this is the context of Jesus' questions to Peter.

The risen Jesus brings with him healing and reconciliation. At the last supper, Jesus had warned Peter that he would be denying him three times. Peter swore that he would never do such a thing! Yet when faced with a number of people who wanted to know whether he was one of Jesus' disciples, he quickly denied he even knew him!

I can certainly identify with Peter who was afraid that if he admitted that he was a disciple, he might have been arrested and executed with Jesus, hence the denials. Jesus does not hold this against Peter, instead, re-creating the scene around a second fire, Jesus invites Peter to confess his true deep devotion towards him.

There is a very long tradition of looking at Easter as being the moment when public sinners are reconciled with the community of faith. Lent was both a moment of proximate preparation for those being baptised at Easter, as well as a time of penance for public sinners before they were welcomed back into the community on Holy Thursday.

We recognise that, like Peter, we have often denied knowing Jesus. At times it suits us to hide away rather than to stand and declare our allegiance in faith. Around the risen Lord – early in the morning – like Peter we are invited to renew our commitment. In an uncanny way, our Easter celebration starts around a fire, perhaps another way of reminding us of the times we denied knowing the Christ.

What is important is that Jesus does not dwell on our denials but invites us re-commit ourselves to our original baptismal promises. Do you really love me more than these others do? Or perhaps, do you really love me above all else? Are you really and totally committed to me?

As usual, the call comes with a mission. When Peter answers 'I do,' Jesus commands him to look after his sheep. In baptism and confirmation, I have accepted to be a faithful disciple; I have also accepted my mission to participate in the life of the faith community. How do I look after the lambs and sheep that God has entrusted to me? How do I share my faith with those around me?

Jesus recognises that this is not always easy. Peter had to suffer because of his commitment to Jesus. I too may at times have to suffer as I am invited to stand up in the community and declare my faith. Those around me do not always accept my beliefs and my commitment, and will challenge me. Will I be ready to continue to affirm my faith?

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