

Christ is risen

In the Book of Revelation, Christ, the King, declares that He makes all things new. With His death and resurrection, Jesus has restored all things to God's original plan and established the Kingdom of God here on earth.

Jesus is obedient to the Father's plan, even to death on a cross. This undid the damage of the disobedience of our first parents.

Through the sacrament of Baptism our sanctifying grace is restored to us. We are no longer a fallen people, we live in Christ God as God lives in us. As God intended from the beginning.

In the Garden of Eden, we were prevented from eating the fruit from the Tree of Life and living forever in a fallen state. But Jesus is the fruit of the true Tree of Life, the Cross. Now, worthy to eat the fruit, we will live forever.

And then there is Peter. Peter and the other apostles will go on to proclaim the name of Jesus, the lamb who was slain, even in the face of persecution. When they are threatened with death, they will steadfastly preach that Jesus rescues us from death.

But today there is a denial that must be corrected. It is an obstacle to the restoration of the Kingdom that must be removed. Peter denied Christ three times and so it was necessary for him to affirm his love for the Lord three times.

It is a very human moment. Put yourselves in Peter's shoes, so to speak. For three years he has followed the Lord. He has seen the blind regain their sight, the lame stand and walk, and the dead raised back to life. He has come to see Jesus for who he really is, the Messiah, the Son of God. He pledges his entire life to Christ and His teachings.

And then he fails a test that he could never have imagined. For it is one thing to stand before God and confess your faith. But it is quite another to stand in the open, in public, in front of those who hate all that you believe, and proclaim that you are a Christian.

Three times Peter denies that he even knows "the man." And then the cock crows, Peter realizes what he has done, and the Lord looks at him. Imagine yourself in that moment. The cock crows a third time and you realize that what Jesus predicted has come true, something you would never have believed of yourself. And then Jesus looks at you with that expression of love mixed with sorrow, and your heart breaks. It is easy for us to feel the devastation he must have felt, the hurt, the anger at himself, and the doubt of his own self worth.

Remember that feeling then as we take another look at today's Gospel. The disciples are lost. They don't know what to do or where to go. So they fall back on the one thing they do know, the simplicity of fishing. Remember who were in those boats; the ones who fled when Jesus was arrested, the ones who fell asleep on Him when He needed some comfort and simple companionship. These were the ones who abandoned Him

when things got difficult. And there was Peter too, perhaps trying to forget by throwing himself back into his old life.

And then Jesus appears with a question for Peter. It is important to realize what the question is and what it is not. His question is not “What have you done?” His question is not “who were you in the past?” His question is not “have you reformed” or “do you remember your sins?”

His question has nothing to do with the past and everything to do with the present. What is the question Jesus asks of those who follow Him? “Do you love me?” Here and now, at this moment, in this place, “do you love me?”

Referring to the other disciples He asks Peter “do you love me more than these?” Remember we are reading from John’s account, John was there, the one follower who stayed beside Jesus to the end. John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was there at the foot of the cross consoling Our Blessed Mother when everyone else had fled.

“Peter, do you love me even more than John loves me?”

Three times Jesus asks Peter, and three times Peter’s yes is more and more emphatic. And all the guilt he may have felt over his past denial of Jesus is washed away. Tears of remorse are replaced with tears of joy and gratitude and love.

And Peter shows that he is ready to take on a new role, to live his life the way he was meant to in the restored Kingdom, to do what he was made to do.

The other followers gather fish into the nets, 153 signifies the totality of the nations of the world, but it is Peter who brings them to the Lord. As fishers of men the disciples will gather from the oceans of time and history, and fill the nets of the Church through the ministry of Peter and his successors, the popes. And Peter is the one who hauls this supernatural community onto the shores of eternity at the end of time, so that all may feast with the Lord.

We are promised that the Church, founded on the rock of Peter will endure. In spite of sufferings, scandals and sins. In spite of obstacles, challenges and persecutions, Christ's church will continue to grow and expand under the ministry of Peter, and it will stay intact until it is brought safely home to heaven. Peter's net will not tear.

Not that it hasn't been sorely tried. Through the centuries the Church has survived the Roman Empire, the Islamic Empire –twice, the Protestant Reformation, the French Revolution, Napoleon, Soviet Communism and German Naziism. All those regimes tried to wipe out the Catholic Church, but they are gone and the Church remains.

And it isn't over, the struggle continues in places like Africa, the Middle East, China, Vietnam and even here on our own shores.

In our own culture it seems a different tactic is being employed. It is an attempt to make us feel as if the Church is irrelevant. That it has nothing to say about modern life, that it is a relic of the past, best forgotten. And yet when it is time to elect a new pope, the next descendent of Peter, the next fisher of men, the eyes of the entire world turn to Rome.

In one sense, today's Gospel is all about Peter. But it is never really that simple. As Catholics we follow Peter because Christ has arranged things so that to follow Peter is to follow Him. Peter and his successors are our guides to make sure we do not go astray. Jesus commanded Peter to "feed His sheep," and "feed His lambs," if we didn't need a shepherd, Jesus would not have given us one.

But we do need one. Because in this fallen world there are many dead-end paths, seductive voices, temptations, and false shepherds. Only Peter and his successors have received the divine guarantee to point out the path of Christ in the midst of confusion and unrest.

It is commonly said that there are only two types of people in the world, the sheep and the wolves. But there are also shepherds, who stand in the way of the wolves, protecting the sheep.

And as Peter shows us today, the path the shepherd takes is a path of love. It is a path we can all follow. And no matter what our situation is, where we come from, or what we have done, it is a path that is always available to us. And by following that path we answer the question.

You cannot remember Peter's denial of Christ without also remembering his re-affirmation of his love for Our Lord. Because in that is a lesson for all of us. Let the mistakes of the past be put aside, let sins be forgiven, let stupidities be buried and hurts be forgotten. Let betrayals go unmentioned because all that matters right here, right now, is a simple question, "do you love me?"