

# Homily for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter

May 4-5, 2019

Readings: Acts 5:27-32, 40b-41; Revelations 5:11-14; John 21:1-19

Preacher: Deirdre McKiernan Hetzler

“Simon Peter, Do you love me?” “Yes, Lord, you *know* that I love you.”  
Then, “follow me.”

Following Jesus cost Peter, didn't it? When we meet him and the other disciples in our first reading, it is not the first time that they have run afoul of the law because of their commitment to Jesus.

After a miraculous escape from prison, they have been hauled back into court again for continuing to preach the Good News. Peter makes it clear that, when human authority conflicts with God's, Jesus' followers: “...must obey God rather than men.” Our lectionary selection omits the part that the Council orders the disciples flogged before releasing them. And they leave rejoicing to have been found worthy to suffer for Jesus' sake!

What would possess anyone to act like that? Last week, we find the disciples all huddled behind locked doors in fear of the authorities. And now look at them, filling Jerusalem with their teaching! And rejoicing in their troubles. What's going on here? Love and Jesus' gift of the Holy Spirit have changed them.

Not counting his appearance to Mary Magdalene, today's gospel recounts Jesus' third post-Resurrection appearance to the disciples. The beloved disciple, always on the lookout for the Lord, is the first to spot him.

Luke has set up subtle parallels in telling the story. The scene is by the same lake where Jesus fed the 5,000. So there are Eucharistic overtones to their meal, despite a somewhat different menu. And Jesus has gathered them around a charcoal fire, just like the one in Peter's denial. All except the beloved disciple had deserted Jesus, but now all is forgiven. And Peter is given a threefold opportunity to counter his denials. At this meal, they are recommissioned by their Lord. Reminded of who they are and what

they were originally called to be.

Loving Jesus leads to following him. Leads to standing for all the things he stood for. Feeding the hungry. Giving drink to the thirsty, for starters. Several people got arrested doing just that for immigrants in the Arizona desert recently. Others have been arrested for feeding the homeless in the streets. Their defense was the same as Peter's: Christians must obey God's law first.

Following Jesus leads to caring for the poor, tending Christ's sheep. For Peter, to follow led to martyrdom. As it did for four American women missionaries in El Salvador. Like the disciples, they had been warned. But like them, they persisted.

Following Jesus motivates the many volunteers on the front lines at our southern border, feeding and clothing asylum seekers. Closer to home, it motivates those settling refugees. Fighting poverty in this city with one of the highest child poverty rates in the country. Working to counter racism.

What does it mean to follow Jesus when the Gospel conflicts with human law or social custom? There are more and more opportunities of this kind of conflict because of situations in our world today. But the answer to that question requires quiet discernment. Willingness to accept consequences. Humility in acknowledging that one is not perfect. Civil disobedience is the extreme example. Sometimes it's as simple as speaking up and speaking out. One always needs to ask first "How can I best follow you, Lord, in this situation?"

The answer will be different for each of us, depending on the gifts with which we have been blessed. When fear holds us back, we can call on the Spirit, which has been given to us, and on our Eucharistic community for courage and strength.

Jesus asks each of us: "Do you love Me? Then what are you going to do about it?"