

042207 3RD SUNDAY OF EASTER

Well – for over a week, I’ve prayed about and have studied the Scripture readings for today. I had a particular idea that I first thought of sharing with you. My first theme was to spend time encouraging each of you to find your own favorite parts of Scripture. For me, most certainly, today’s Gospel is one that has touched me deeply. I’ll come back to that in a little bit.

I would guess that for most preachers, there is some leaning to try to find a theme in the readings. So, for this 3rd Sunday of Easter, we heard a reading from the Acts of the Apostles that had to do with the early hours and days in the new Church. We heard from the Book of Revelation, which is the very last book of the Bible, and it is filled with extravagant symbolism and vivid imagery. And the Gospel I just proclaimed featured that breakfast on the shore scene. How could these seemingly unrelated readings actually be related? I prayed the Lord give me a thread to share with you today.

In Acts, consider what Peter and the apostles said to the Jewish leaders... that they, the clergy of the day had crucified Jesus – but that He was raised from the dead and installed at the right hand of God. Jesus is the lamb who was sacrificed and is now exalted – that he has authority to grant his followers forgiveness of their sins.

In the light of those words – we can see there is a tie-in to the second reading from Revelation.

Revelation has some the most beautiful imagery of the heavens being opened and the writer seeing worship before the throne.... The angels and living creatures and elders are singing, “Worthy is the lamb that was slain to receive power and riches, wisdom and strength, honor and glory and blessing.” Then I, John heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, everything in the universe, cry out: “To the one who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor, glory and might, forever and ever.” I love to sing hymns that have these words.

And then it came to me. This ‘Lamb on the Throne’ and Acts aren’t just coincidence... this isn’t a flowery way of recognizing what Jesus, the Lamb suffered and has merited... this is, dear friends – this is a description of the Mass ... the very worship and liturgy that we are involved in today.

Some of you have heard of the book by Scott Hahn entitled The Lamb’s Supper. Excuse my repeating it here again after just mentioning it a few weeks ago. You may recall that Dr. Hahn is a gifted Scripture scholar. He was a Presbyterian minister. In his book is a chapter entitled Lifting the Veil. Scott quotes from the 1997 writings of then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger who said that the Mass... the liturgy we are involved in is not a case of what someone is thinking or has made up... This liturgy isn’t a thing that some monks created – Mass is entering into the liturgy of the heavens...

This Mass... every Mass is eternal liturgy because and only because it joins what is already in process ... the greater reality underway in the heavens.” In fact – in a few moments when Father as celebrant leads us in the Eucharistic Prayer which starts before the consecration, many theologians and scholars tell us that time is suspended and we join with a host of unimaginable heavenly proportions as Jesus again offers himself to the Father as the Sacrificial Lamb. Time is suspended... space means nothing. In a short while, we will be especially present to Almighty God in a most unique way. With us in worship will be the Blessed Virgin... angels and saints, the Apostles and martyrs... and... so also will be your grandparents, your deceased loved ones – my parents and brother and my wife’s dad... all right here in worship... think of that as we say those eternal words of worship “Holy, Holy, Holy.... “ In faith – can you see what will be happening for us...? To us?

At the times when I am able to meditate upon – to see this in my mind’s eye as it unfolds at the Consecration of the Mass – I realize this is the closest we humans can be to heaven and eternity while we yet live in the flesh. This is soooo awesome...

And now – to the Gospel reading... I told you this is one of my favorite Scripture readings... Let me give a short moment of Biblical background before moving into this Gospel. You who are close to Scripture, you may have heard that certain writings of the Bible were influenced by numerology – numbers.

Some experts believe this is so. For example – the number seven is considered the number for perfection... God rested on the seventh day – his work was all good (or perfect). And as a sidenote – after the last Mass – a man commented enthusiastically on this truth of this theory of numbers – he said he agreed that the number seven meant ‘perfection.’ He said this is so because that is the number that John Elway wore when he played for the Broncos! (I asked him where I could find this in Scripture!)

There are many other examples I could share with you. But in the interest of time – let me move to a point about the number three. Some experts believe the number three has meaning in Scripture.... That number basically says – ‘enough... nothing more needs to be done or said.’ For example – just moments ago, I quoted the words of worship, “Holy, holy, holy.” God is the Holy One – no more need be said. In one Gospel, how many times did Christ predict his passion? Three. And three o’clock is, by one account the time Christ died on the cross – his work was completed and no more needed to be accomplished.

So I ask you: how many times did Peter deny Christ at the charcoal fire in the courtyard as Jesus was in the Sanhedrin? The answer is three times.... Peter’s denial is depicted as total. His denial was so final that he cursed and swore that he had no affiliation with Jesus. And then, recognizing how completely he had betrayed the Master... “He went out and wept bitterly.”

Now – in this Gospel story this morning... this beautiful, gentle story of the caring Master – Jesus is waiting for his followers and he is prepared to be a servant again – this time as cook. He even has a charcoal fire going.... And you know what he is going to do – he is going to forgive Peter by the charcoal fire... the very same setting so that Peter will know that Jesus knows exactly what Peter did...

And how many times does Jesus ask Peter if he loves him? Three times. The same number of times that Peter denied knowing Christ. This setting by the charcoal fire and the use of three repeated questions to Peter reminds that when we go to Confession – it isn't the specific of telling my sins that is important to God... He knows each and every sin. Confession is the way to stand in the warmth of the charcoal fire of Christ's love and mercy.

Speaking of numbers, a few final thoughts: did you happen to catch that the writer says the apostles caught one hundred fifty three fish? What an odd number.... Do you think it means anything? Some biblical experts say that this was the number of known countries and lands at that time... one hundred fifty three. And Jesus tells Peter – feed my people. No – not with food alone... feed them the words of Christ... all mankind longs for the truth... teach them that they may be fed with the Words of Life.

Finally – there are some scholars who suggest that this morning meal was yet another Eucharist meal in which Christ fed the apostles before preparing them to become missionaries.

In this, I want to ask you: what does the word Mass mean? Where does it come from? _____ . The word Mass stems from the Latin words we used to know before Vatican II... Ite Missa Est... Missa – meaning sent... At the end – in our English language Mass of these years, the priest or deacon says words such as, “The Mass is ended; go in peace to love and serve the Lord.” You and I – we are sent. We are not dismissed to go home and forget about all this until next Sunday. We are not here to be fed and think about whether we liked the music or the homily... We are, like Peter and the Apostles – we are sent to share the Good News. What do you have to share with others?

Today – we heard of the early hours of the Church – the faith testimony of the Apostles. We considered what Scripture really tells us about the Lamb who sits on the throne. Using Dr. Scott Hahn’s theme -- I have shared with you that the Mass is the only... the only form of Christian worship which satisfies the instructions of Jesus to “Do This” – and that it is this form of worship which truly joins us with all those present in the heavenly court.... The Gospels share that it is Jesus who reconciles but he passed a restored authority on to Peter and the other apostles. Finally, in the person of the priest as celebrant – Jesus feeds us at each and every Mass. And he tells us – now go and feed my people.

You have so much to share; remember this during this Mass – and when we hear the words of dismissal from this Heavenly Liturgy.

Reading 1

Acts 5:27-32, 40b-41

When the captain and the court officers had brought the apostles in
and made them stand before the Sanhedrin,
the high priest questioned them,
“We gave you strict orders, did we not,
to stop teaching in that name?
Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching
and want to bring this man’s blood upon us.”
But Peter and the apostles said in reply,
“We must obey God rather than men.
The God of our ancestors raised Jesus,
though you had him killed by hanging him on a tree.
God exalted him at his right hand as leader and savior
to grant Israel repentance and forgiveness of sins.
We are witnesses of these things,
as is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.”

The Sanhedrin ordered the apostles
to stop speaking in the name of Jesus, and dismissed them.
So they left the presence of the Sanhedrin,
rejoicing that they had been found worthy
to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 30:2, 4, 5-6, 11-12, 13

R. (2a) I will praise you, Lord, for you have rescued me.

I will extol you, O LORD, for you drew me clear
and did not let my enemies rejoice over me.
O LORD, you brought me up from the netherworld;
you preserved me from among those going down into the pit.

R. I will praise you, Lord, for you have rescued me.

Sing praise to the LORD, you his faithful ones,
and give thanks to his holy name.
For his anger lasts but a moment;
a lifetime, his good will.
At nightfall, weeping enters in,
but with the dawn, rejoicing.

R. I will praise you, Lord, for you have rescued me.

Hear, O LORD, and have pity on me;
O LORD, be my helper.
You changed my mourning into dancing;
O LORD, my God, forever will I give you thanks.

R. I will praise you, Lord, for you have rescued me.

Reading II

Rev 5:11-14

I, John, looked and heard the voices of many angels
who surrounded the throne
and the living creatures and the elders.
They were countless in number, and they cried out in a loud voice:
“Worthy is the Lamb that was slain
to receive power and riches, wisdom and strength,
honor and glory and blessing.”
Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth
and under the earth and in the sea,
everything in the universe, cry out:
“To the one who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be blessing and honor, glory and might,
forever and ever.”
The four living creatures answered, “Amen, “
and the elders fell down and worshiped.

Gospel

Jn 21:1-19 or 21:1-14

At that time, Jesus revealed himself again to his disciples at the Sea of Tiberias.
He revealed himself in this way.
Together were Simon Peter, Thomas called Didymus,
Nathaniel from Cana in Galilee,
Zebedee’s sons, and two others of his disciples.
Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.”
They said to him, “We also will come with you.”
So they went out and got into the boat,
but that night they caught nothing.
When it was already dawn, Jesus was standing on the shore;
but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.
Jesus said to them, “Children, have you caught anything to eat?”
They answered him, “No.”
So he said to them, “Cast the net over the right side of the boat
and you will find something.”
So they cast it, and were not able to pull it in
because of the number of fish.
So the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord.”
When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord,
he tucked in his garment, for he was lightly clad,
and jumped into the sea.

The other disciples came in the boat,
for they were not far from shore, only about a hundred yards,
dragging the net with the fish.
When they climbed out on shore,
they saw a charcoal fire with fish on it and bread.
Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you just caught."
So Simon Peter went over and dragged the net ashore
full of one hundred fifty-three large fish.
Even though there were so many, the net was not torn.
Jesus said to them, "Come, have breakfast."
And none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?"
because they realized it was the Lord.
Jesus came over and took the bread and gave it to them,
and in like manner the fish.
This was now the third time Jesus was revealed to his disciples

after being raised from the dead.
When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter,
"Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?"
Simon Peter answered him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."
Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs."
He then said to Simon Peter a second time,
"Simon, son of John, do you love me?"
Simon Peter answered him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."
Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep."
Jesus said to him the third time,
"Simon, son of John, do you love me?"
Peter was distressed that Jesus had said to him a third time,
"Do you love me?" and he said to him,
"Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you."
Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep.
Amen, amen, I say to you, when you were younger,
you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted;
but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands,
and someone else will dress you
and lead you where you do not want to go."
He said this signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God.
And when he had said this, he said to him, "Follow me."