

HOMILY SUNDAY EASTER 3-C (Homily 02)

“Easter as Call and Response”

(Acts 5:27-30, 40-41; Psalm 30; Rev 5:11-14; Jn 21:1-19)

The theme of call and response based on forgiveness and relationship looms large in today’s readings. Jesus renews his call to the disciples to follow him, and they respond with repentance, witnessing and praise.

The Gospel is a poignant scene that is vintage John, who is strongest on the role of memory. The experience of fishing all night and catching nothing had to remind the frustrated apostles of that first miraculous catch of fish on the Sea of Galilee when they first met Jesus.

That time also the disciples had fished all night and caught nothing. Then Jesus came along and borrowed Peter’s boat to teach the crowds. He then ordered Peter to set out into the deep for a catch. Peter obeyed and they were amazed at the number of fish they caught. Peter’s response was repentance - “Depart from me Lord, for I am a sinful man” – only to be made into a fisher of people by Jesus.

Now they were on a different lake, but the dynamics were the same. They just ran deeper. In their confusion after the resurrection of Jesus, Peter and the disciples decided to return to their old trade of fishing. Once again they fished all night and caught nothing. This time Jesus appeared on the shore and suggested they try the other side of the boat. The result was another miraculous catch of fish.

Again, Peter’s response is the key to understanding this incident. Peter is taken aside and reminded three times of his denial of Jesus during his trial. Three times he is forgiven that failing and mandated to care for the Church, the people of God.

Only after Peter faces his own weakness and limitations and experiences the love of Jesus as forgiveness and acceptance, is he ready to lead the Church. Discipleship in this new reign of God is based on a personal relationship with Jesus imbued with forgiveness and healing.

The response of the disciples in the first reading is impressive. They are filled with the Spirit of the Risen Jesus and are unafraid to witness to him in

public, calling the people to share in their life-changing experience of this Risen Lord and Saviour who gives so freely of his love as repentance and forgiveness. This was a far cry from the Judaism of the time that was based on duty, law and ritual. This was indeed something new that would lead believers into an experience of the reign of God.

That reign of God is glimpsed in the reading from Revelation where we see the hosts of heaven responding to this amazing Good News with honour, glory and praise to the Lamb of God. That too is the response that the Church must imitate along with witnessing. Worshipping the Lamb of God with praise is one side of a response to the resurrection of Jesus. Experiencing his forgiveness and healing, and inviting all peoples to come to the Lord, is the other side of that response.

This response is no small challenge in our modern world that is fast losing its sense of sin and its need for salvation. There is a wave of new atheism and secularism sweeping around the world that claims no need for a God of forgiveness and healing. That stubborn self-sufficiency is not new – it is simply a repetition of the Garden of Eden in new forms in every age.

The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous that has sought to capture the success of that movement in helping addicts recover from addiction holds much tried and true wisdom for us. The bottom line is an awareness and acceptance of our powerlessness to save ourselves, and our need for a spiritual power greater than ourselves who will do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. That is precisely the dynamic that is at work in today's readings.

We are called to experience the power of God to forgive, heal and make whole through faith in Jesus Christ risen from the dead, and to witness to that power through lives of loving service sustained by praise and worship.

The Eucharist that we celebrate today is a making present of that powerful love of God through Word and Sacrament, like it was for the apostles on the shore of Lake Tiberias.

Like Peter and the others, let us believe, let ourselves be loved, forgiven and healed, celebrate that love with worship and praise, then go out to witness to the world this new reign of God in Jesus Christ.