**THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER**

**1st May 2022**

**First Reading Acts 5:27-32 & 40-41**

From pre-history to Putin’s invasion of Ukraine, those who command the military so often try to establish their authority by force. The establishment thus created is unstable and eventually collapses because no degree of physical power can control ideas. Effective power is best achieved by winning the support of the proletariat. It is astonishing how few dictators have learnt this lesson, so obvious to those under their rule.

The apostles had been arrested for preaching while under orders to desist. In a tremendous gesture of defiance that has been the inspiration of the Church in all times of persecution, they replied, "*We must obey God rather than men*," and they started at once to preach to the Sanhedrin itself, enabling Luke to give us another fragment of the primitive Christian message.

The most striking feature here is the idea of a double witness—the Apostles and the Holy Spirit (cf. John 15:26). The Spirit and the Apostolic message are both necessary. Without the Spirit, the word becomes an empty cliche, while without the word, the Spirit becomes uncontrolled enthusiasm unrelated to the historical events that triggered the new movement.

The underlying point of Peter's testimony, on this occasion, as always, is the resurrection of Jesus. The Jews had killed 'the Author of life' (3:15) but God has raised him from the dead to be *'Leader and Saviour'*. God's purpose was to bring Israel to conversion - precondition of forgiveness of sins.

The apostles are witnesses of the resurrection, but they do not stand alone; beside them is the powerful witness of the Holy Spirit, *'given to those who obey him'*. Peter and John had already insisted, before the Jewish authorities, on their determination to listen to God rather than to men (4:19). Now, rejoicing is their privilege of suffering for 'the Name', they are going to ignore the Sanhedrin's solemn prohibition to preach (5:40-41).

**Responsorial Psalm: 30:1, 3-5, 10-1a, 12b**

Belief in life after death is absent from the psalms all of which precede the idea. When the psalmist speaks of being brought up from Sheol and restored to life, he means being brought back to health from imminent death, as from a severe illness. But Christian apologetic interpreted the psalm as unconsciously predicting resurrection.

**Second Reading Revelation of John 5:11-14**

Chapter 5 depicts a transfer of power. Before our reading, the ‘*One on the throne*’ (God) had handed over to the Lamb (Christ) a sealed scroll, since the Lamb alone has been found worthy to open that book. The four angels represent the created world and the twenty-four elders (Priests) represent the Church within the world. Together they sing a new hymn in praise of the Lamb. This is the first of many heavenly liturgies. These are either early Christian hymns or have been modelled on such hymns. We are not certain of the symbolism of the scroll which possibly contains the names of the redeemed or it could be the scriptures of the Old Testament.

Now, with our reading, a new feature is introduced: the praise of a countless host of angels (see Daniel 7:10). This image is based on the scene of a victorious Roman Emperor or military commander returning in a triumphal procession to Rome.

Finally the whole of creation joins in the great canticle of praise (5:13-14). John hears the voice of the great acclamation; to it the four living creatures, heavenly representatives of the created universe, give their 'Amen' - and the Elders worship.

This is John's vision of the heavenly liturgy, of which the Eucharistic liturgy of the Church on earth is a reflection. The picture of the four living creatures and the Elders suggest the participants in the Christian liturgy of the time. John is not consistent with his symbolism in that the same object is not always represented by the same symbol, which makes for ambiguity. Christ is here addressed as "*the Lamb who was slain*," that is, the paschal lamb, a tradition going back at least to 1 Corinthians 5. If this is not an actual fragment of the early Christian paschal liturgy, it is at least the germ of it.

**Gospel John 21:1-19**

John’s gospel originally ended with 20:31. Chapter 21 is an appendix though still by John. After setting the scene with the characters in position, we have an appearance of Jesus. It is perfectly possible for a spectator, standing on a promontory to see fish invisible to those on the water but it is still presented as a miracle. This, with the meal of bread and fish and especially the words ‘*took the bread and gave it to them*’ explicitly evokes the Eucharist.

Then we have the reinstatement of Peter after his fall. (John 18;15-27) Peter was a household name for his leadership and martyrdom. John wants to make it clear that his rehabilitation came with Jesus’s authority who had also anticipated his death. Peter, who had thrice failed his Master (18:15-27) is now given a special pastoral mission. It is noteworthy that though he is entrusted by the Lord with 'my lambs, my sheep' the Lord remains, 'the Chief Shepherd' (1 Peter 5:4)

In a famous exchange, Jesus asks Peter three times, “Do you love me?” and three times Peter answers, “You know I love you” The three times, presumably compensates for the three denials made earlier. It may also be intentional that for the first and second questions, Jesus uses a strong word for love. (agapé) Peter however replies with a weak word (filo) so on the third occasion, Jesus also uses ‘filo’ This may be why it says that Peter was ‘upset’ because it seemed as if Jesus had lowered his standards to the level of Peter’s commitment. It also happens that the first commission specifies lambs and the last two sheep but the significance, if any, of that is unknown.

The ease and intimacy of Jesus’ meeting with his inner circle is reminiscent of his first meeting with them (1:37-39). But while the pre-Crucifixion stories have a sense of activity and drama and tension, the Resurrection stories are all of quiet satisfaction.

But as with all the appearances, the disciples again have difficulty in recognising Jesus (21:4,12). This is a constant feature of the resurrection narratives: the Lord is not at once recognized even by his intimates. It required some word or familiar gesture to make him known. This is an effective way of making the point that Jesus had not returned to the same life as before but had passed, through death, to new life with God. He is still the old Jesus - and yet he is different.

Though Peter has the more important role (vv. 2, 3, 7 & 11) it is the beloved disciple who is sensitive to the presence of the risen Jesus and recognizes him (v. 7). There are many alternative suggestions for the name of the ‘beloved disciple’ but they are all of similar probability and it may be that John intended his identity to remain obscure. My favourite option is that John the author was a disciple of John the Apostle and the beloved disciple is the author’s hero.

Nothing in John’s writing is wasted and there is a symbolic significance to the 153 fish caught which may have been clear to John’s readers, but not to us. Yet, the size of the catch of fish, with an illusion to *'fishers of people*' (Luke 5:10) is a summons to an apostolic mission. If either the known species of fish or the number of known nations was reckoned to be 153, then the haul may have suggested a universal and abundant mission.

At the lakeside breakfast Jesus 'took the bread and gave it to them'. His gesture answers the question how Jesus remains present only to his disciples: he is present among them as they share the Eucharistic meal at which he is the host. His presence is not limited to the Bread and Wine, but experienced through the whole action of the community as they obey his command.