

Homily

Sunday 1st May 2022 – The Third Sunday of Easter – Year C

Acts 9: 1-6, Psalm 30, Revelation 5 :6-14, John 21:1-19

It was said of Joseph Stalin that if you made one mistake it was like mishandling a detonator, it was the last one you made. We too sometimes write people off because of one bad experience. But which of us would like to be judged on a single moment in our life?

After what happened on Maundy Thursday night, we would have expected Jesus to write Peter off as being weak, cowardly, and unreliable. Had he done so, most people would have said that he had no other option. After all, Peter was the leader of the apostolic team. He set a terrible example for the others.

Jesus did not write him off. He didn't even demote him. There were also no recriminations either. Judas' betrayal was a planned thing, and was carried out in a cold, calculating manner. Peter's denial was not a planned thing, and was the result of weakness rather than malice, and Jesus, the reader of hearts, knew this.

After breakfast he turned to Peter and said, "Peter, do you love me more than the others love me?" What a strange question to ask: "Do you love me?" Hadn't he proved beyond any shadow of doubt that he didn't love him? Yest this is the question that Jesus asked Peter. And Peter said. "Lord, you know that I love you." He sincerely meant those words. What's more, they were true. He really did love Jesus.

Jesus knew that there was another and better side to Peter. Strength and weakness and Co-exist in the same person. Jesus called Peter forward. He asked him to declare his love in public, since his denial also had been in public.

Jesus kept no record of Peter's sins. But he did ask him to do something for him, to feed the sheep and lambs of his flock, that is, to love and serve his brothers and sisters in the community. That, if you like, was his penance. That is the best way to make atonement for sin. As Peter later wrote: "Love covers a multitude of sins" (1Pet 4:8)

I'm sure that Peter never forgot the fact that he denied Jesus. Yet I doubt if it haunted him the way some people are haunted by their sins. He learned a great lesson from his fall. He learned that he was not as brave as he thought he was. It's a far better thing to learn a lesson than to be taught a lesson. When we learn from a fall, the recalling if of it is more likely to evoke gratitude than self-recrimination.

Peter also learned a wonderful truth about Jesus. He learned that despite his denials, Jesus still loved him. It was that love that brought Peter back to life. It's an amazing experience to be loved in one's weakness and sinfulness. To be loved in one's goodness is no big deal. But to be loved in one's badness, that's tremendous. That's what grace is about.

Peter also had the guts to get up again after his fall. We can imagine that he made a very good leader. A leader has to be aware of their own weakness. The experience rid Peter of pride and blind reliance on his own resources. At the same time, it enabled him to understand the weakness of others.

And Peter came good. In the reading from Acts we see how he stood up before the Sanhedrin and bore witness for Jesus. Peter is a great consolation to us. Courage fails us all. In the end, all of us are mere mortals who are inconstant in our beliefs. We must learn to forgive ourselves momentary weakness and failures. We must not judge ourselves or others by momentary lapses, but by commitment over a long time to our beliefs