

HOM 3rd Sunday Easter B 2021 April 18

Today we need to go back in time. Imagine being one of the original twelve apostles, like Simon Peter or his brother Andrew, or maybe James or his brother John – all of them fishermen – or perhaps even Matthew, the tax collector.

Think of your first encounter with Jesus whom people were starting to talk about because of John the Baptist. John kept referring to the one who would come after him whose sandals he was not worthy to unfasten...and who would baptize in the Holy Spirit. John even referred to Him as the *Lamb of God*, an unusual title having to do with the great Passover event in Egypt 1200 years ago and its annual celebration by God's People.

On that occasion, when John pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God, Andrew and another disciple of the Baptist, heard this and started following Jesus. When the Lord asked them, "*What are you looking for?*", they said to him, "*Rabbi, where are you staying?*" So, at this point, Jesus was already recognized as a Rabbi or teacher.

Jesus then invited them to "*come and see*" and they stayed with him that day, from about 4 o'clock in the afternoon until late in the evening. It was right after this that Andrew went to his brother Simon Peter and told him. "*We have found the Messiah!*", and he brought him to meet Jesus.

So, before Jesus invited them to follow Him, Andrew and probably Simon Peter as well, had come to believe that Jesus was the promised *Anointed One, the Christ, the Messiah*. When Jesus then called them to leave their nets and boat to accompany Him full-time, it was after they had had an opportunity to consider how the long-awaited Messiah, now on the scene, was going to improve the life of the Jewish People. They probably were eager to be in on the ground floor of this, and so, were ready to accept Jesus' invitation. That invitation would soon include others from their small fishing company, namely their cousins, James and John.

Matthew and the other apostles who ultimately made up the Twelve were also probably well-aware of the buzz created by John the Baptist in regard to the one about whom he spoke. And to receive a personal invitation from Jesus to join him full-time was for them probably a surprising opportunity and honor.

As Jesus began to talk about the Kingdom of God, the Twelve were affirmed in their thinking that Jesus was the expected descendant of King David, sent by God to re-establish and perfect the powerful, peaceful, prosperous, and united Davidic and Solomonic Kingdom. However, something even more amazing seemed to be going on: water was turned into wine at Cana, thousands were twice fed with a few loaves and fish; the sea was calmed at His command, there were countless healings everywhere He went, and the casting out of demons by His command along the way; His teachings were profound and authoritative and morally demanding; He gave a new commandment to love by laying down's one life; He referred again and again to the Kingdom of Heaven, to His Father's House, to a new heavens and new earth; Solemnly, and to the dismay of many, He declared the necessity of eating His Flesh and drinking His Blood. He invited all disciples to follow him to the Cross. He revealed Himself in divine glory to Peter,

James and John. And to the Twelve – who did not want to hear it -- He spoke at multiple opportune moments of His being put to death and then being raised to life.

It was different, unusual, compelling. One of Twelve decided to betray Him and hand Him over to His enemies. Eleven of them stayed on board, but were not quite sure what to do after He was arrested and crucified.

Then came the empty tomb and reports of His being alive...and then encounters with Him, like the one recounted in today's Gospel reading. All of a sudden, Jesus was standing among them. "*Peace be with you,*" He said. They thought they were seeing a ghost. "*Why are you troubled? And why do questions arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and feet, that it is I myself. Touch me and see, because ghost does not have flesh and bones as you can see I have.*"

He showed them the wounds in His hands and feet, asked for something to eat, and ate the piece of baked fish they give Him in front of them to show that his flesh and blood body was functional. And yet it was different, not subject to physical limitations but as though already existing beyond time. While they were dumfounded and completely attentive, he taught them from the Scriptures all that was to be fulfilled in Him and what was to follow His Death and Resurrection, namely, **the preaching of repentance for the forgiveness of sins to all the nations beginning in Jerusalem.**

Imagine how you would have responded to this. I can imagine the apostles saying to one another something like: *We knew in our hearts that He was who He said He was – the Son of God. Now we are convinced. We must act on His words and carry out the work He entrusted to us. We must do so with our lives, even unto Death and Resurrection with Him.*

And they did this. Upon receiving the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, Peter proclaimed the Death and Resurrection of Jesus to a large crowd of Jewish people gathered in Jerusalem. When asked how they should respond, Peter said to them: *Repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*" Three thousand were baptized that day.

A little later, as recounted in our first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, Peter and John healed a man who was crippled, taking him by the hand and telling him in the name of Jesus, to rise and walk. The man did so and then accompanied them into the temple area, walking and jumping and praising God. A well-disposed crowd then gathered to see this miracle and Peter used the opportunity to tell them about the Death and Resurrection of the Son of God and told them to repent and be converted that their sins be wiped away.

Reading or hearing today's Gospel account and the words of the Risen Jesus to the apostles to preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins to all, we too, the faithful, must respond, like the apostles. *We must act on Jesus' words and carry out the work He has entrusted to His Church. We must do so with our lives, even unto Death and Resurrection with Him.*

But that's quite a challenge today, and in our second reading, St. John tells us that we must begin with ourselves -- that we must first repent and keep God's word, and if we do that, the love of

God will be perfected in us. Even keeping the basic Ten Commandments is quite a challenge when we understand what each one requires of us.

Some think they understand, but do not. For example, we have some Catholics in public office who profess to be practicing Catholics – including at least one who proudly carries a rosary, attends Mass regularly, and who even gave up sweets for Lent – but who nevertheless actively promotes the killing of unborn babies through legal abortion which is a grave offense against the 5th Commandment – an offense that calls for excommunication if it is done defiantly. Here, it is the responsibility of the bishops to inform him of this and urge him to repent to be forgiven. But all the faithful – you and I – have an obligation to pray for our civil leaders that they would do what’s right in God’s eyes – and especially for those Catholic leaders who are in danger of losing their souls.

But perhaps we also have failings to which we are blind, or else cling to despite seeing them. If so, this is where we must be enlightened and repent in order to be forgiven. Mercy cannot be received unless we want to overcome and atone for our sins. But it doesn’t end there. In order to be perfected in the love of God, as St. John says, we must also keep God’s word which goes beyond the Ten Commandments and includes Jesus’ commission to His apostles and Church – to help others repent in order to be forgiven.

And when our words and prayers are not enough to help them, we still have one more thing the Lord expects us to do, as He expected His apostles to do. And we should be willing to do this if, like the apostles, we are convinced of Jesus’ Death and Resurrection. What we are expected to do, of course, is to lay down our lives for the salvation of others, which conforms us to Christ, and perfects us in love of God and neighbor.

We can do this with the sincere intention of doing this, that is, by offering ourselves to and with Jesus unto the Cross and Resurrection for the sanctification and salvation of those we hold dear and everybody we know. This allows the Lord to unite us to Himself in His suffering, Death and Resurrection for them.

So, brothers and sisters, to offer oneself for this, or renew one’s self-offering, I invite you to join me in praying these words silently and sincerely as you receive Holy Communion: I AM ALL YOURS O MOST LOVING JESUS THROUGH MARY YOUR MOTHER....with the help of St. Joseph.