

Third Sunday of Easter, Cycle C
Acts of the Apostles 5:27-32, 40B-41
Psalms 30:2, 4, 5-6, 11-12, 13
Revelation 5:11-14
John 21:1-19
April 10, 2016
Rev. Charles B. Gordon, C.S.C.
The Garaventa Center
The University of Portland

In our first reading, the Sanhedrin have had the apostles rounded up, whipped, and tossed out into the street. You would think the apostles would regard this as something of a setback to their cause. That isn't how they see it. We are told that they went home, "full of joy that they had been judged worthy of ill-treatment for the sake of the *name*." Now I don't know about you, but I would like to think that there are people I would be willing to be beaten up for. But I fear there are few, if any, that I would *rejoice* to be beaten up for. Clearly, the disciples' attitude is further evidence that there is something marvelous about the name for which they suffered.

The book of Revelation tells us that at the name of Jesus every creature in heaven and on earth -- everything in the universe -- cries out in adoration. The apostles were happy to be scourged for the name. They eventually died for it. I can't resist mentioning in passing that Jesus didn't do anything for the apostles that he hasn't done for us. And yet many of us persist in using his name in vain. We shout it when we stub our toes or can't find our car keys. We use it casually to emphasize a point or spice up our conversation. I don't want to harp on this, but clearly, the next time the occasion arises, it would be far better for us to say something merely vulgar, than to abuse the name of the Lord.

But let's go back to our reading, and see exactly what it *was* about Jesus that inspired the apostles to react in this extraordinary manner. They tell the Sanhedrin, that he whom God has exalted at his right hand as ruler and savior is to bring repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. So it's all about *repentance* and *forgiveness*. It's in this context that a Christian prays the response to our psalm: "I will praise you Lord, for you have rescued me."

If the Acts of the Apostles *proclaims* that if we repent we will experience the forgiveness of Christ, in our Gospel we see it *happening*. The resurrected Christ has appeared to the apostles by the Sea of Galilee. Jesus is speaking to Peter on the shore. Jesus asks, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" Peter responds, "Yes Lord, you know that I love you." Again Jesus asks, "Simon, Son of John, do you love me?" Peter replies, "Yes Lord, you know that I love you." But Jesus asks yet *again*, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter is a bit offended to be asked a third time. He protests, "Lord, you know everything. You *know* that I love you." Only then is Jesus satisfied.

What's going on here? Why is Jesus giving Peter a hard time? Peter says he loves Jesus. Jesus knows Peter loves him -- so why all the ceremony? What's going on here is *repentance* and *forgiveness*. Remember, Peter denied Jesus three times behind his back. Now Jesus is allowing him to undo his treachery by three times affirming his love, face to face. Only then is Peter prepared to take up leadership of Christ's Church.

I suppose Jesus could have simply said, "Peter, you realize of course that I forgive you for denying you knew me." But this was a way for Peter to not only hear the words, but to experience the reality. And

because the conversation occurred in the presence of the other disciples, Peter was reconciled to them as well.

Jesus offers us the same forgiveness that Peter experienced. One of the ways that forgiveness is available to us is in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Now you might protest that you don't need to go to Confession to be forgiven. You love Jesus. Jesus knows you love him. You're sorry for your sins, so you are forgiven. True. You can read it in the scriptures, or in your catechism. But in the Sacrament of Reconciliation Christ offers us the same opportunity he gave Peter to experience the reality behind the words.

Through his priest we meet Christ face to face. We speak our repentance out loud, and hear his words of forgiveness spoken, not to the whole world, but to *us*. And through their priest, we are reconciled to our fellow Christians as well.

You may be someone who doesn't find sinfulness a useful category to describe your actions. You may, on the other hand, be someone whose experience of life and self-knowledge have made it difficult to accept that, in Christ, your sins really *are* forgiven. You may be somewhere in between. But whoever we are, we all need deliverance from the ways we ruin our own lives, and make the people around us miserable. That deliverance is available in Christ. And that is cause for rejoicing.