

Homily
Third Sunday of Easter Year C
May 4, 2025

The Apostle Peter was not a normal person. He had not been normal from the day Jesus entered his life. That didn't mean he was going to get a bed by the window in a mental institution. No, what it meant for Peter is that God had big plans for him. But in order to fulfill those plans, Peter had to let go of some things. One of which was the heart rending heavy burden of his denial of Christ.

There are two charcoal fires in the New Testament. One of them is in the gospel we just heard. This is one of my favorite scenes in the whole of scripture: The risen Christ having breakfast at the shore with his friends - brunch on the beach with Jesus – sounds good to me! Jesus has a charcoal fire going with some fish on it and some bread – but he invites the others to bring some of the fish they just caught – like a pot-luck.

So they are sitting on the sand, at dawn, watching the sunrise, listening to the waves lap the shore, just kind of chillin' with the risen Lord when Jesus turns to Simon Peter and asks him, “*Do you love me?*”

What a question to hear from the lips of Jesus... “*Do you love me?*”

And as soon as it is asked, I'm sure Peter remembers the other charcoal fire. Do you remember that other fire? You heard about it on Palm Sunday and Good Friday:

A fire in the courtyard of the high priest, on a Thursday night,

A fire at which Peter warmed himself in the chill of the evening air while Jesus was being held for questioning.

And by the light of that fire three different people asked Peter another question:

“Aren't you one of his followers?”

And, in reply,

Peter, three times, denied even knowing Jesus.

Now, by the fire on the beach, comes Jesus' question: “**Peter, do you love me?**”

And the question comes not once, not twice but three times, almost an echo of Peter's three-fold denial.

Peter loves Jesus but he finds the questions a painful reminder of how he had failed Jesus in his hour of greatest need. So, when Peter says, “Lord, you know everything,” he's confessing his failure, hoping Jesus believes him in spite of his failure. And the Lord does believe him and he invites Peter to follow him and to care for, to tend the others.

We are more accustomed these days to gas grills than charcoal fires but I suspect Jesus doesn't care much about that. All he wants to do in the gospel story here - and all he wants to do in our lives - is to meet us, to join us, to be with us.

And he is. He is with us. He is with us this morning as sure as he was with his friends on the shore of the Sea of Tiberius.

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Whether we invite Jesus to our next cook-out or not, he is going to show up.
Whether we welcome him or ignore him, he is going to be there.

And if we do welcome him, he is going to ask each of us what he asked Peter:

“Do you love me?”

“Don, do you love me?” “Fred, do you love me?”

“Jim, do you love me?” “Nicole, do you love me?”

“Noah, do you love me?” “ “Kelly, do you love me?”

“Sharon, do you love me?” “Micah, do you love me?”

And on hearing that question, any one of us, or all of us, might remember other times, other fires, when we were more concerned with warming ourselves and with taking care of our own desires and needs than with loving the Lord faithfully and acknowledging who he is for us in our lives.

But our failures never put the Lord off from us – never. In fact, it is precisely when we fail that Jesus makes a special effort to draw us back, to reconcile, to make things right between him and us just as he had done with Peter at the charcoal fire on the shore.

When Jesus asked Peter three times, ***“Do you love me?”*** he wasn’t testing him or trying to make him feel bad. Rather, he was giving Peter three new chances to speak his love, to put his three denials behind him, to reconcile and move on:
To follow Jesus once again.

We have no charcoal fire here today and no fish but we do have bread and we do have wine.

Jesus is with us, not sitting with us at the shore, but here at the altar, sitting with us at his table, where he waits to feed us, where he calls us to his heart, on fire with love for us and he asks each of us, ***“Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me?”***

This morning as we celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Communion put yourself in Peter's place. We have each smelled the charcoal smoke or our own denial. We each have those moments in our lives which only Jesus can redeem and forgive. Bring them to him today. Receive the bread Jesus has to offer, and experience that forgiveness for yourself.

Jesus has prepared bread for you. Come. Breakfast is ready.

Then, come - and follow me.

Deacon Don