

[Acts 5:27-32, 40b-41; Ps. 30; Rev. 5:11-14; John 21:1-19]

Appropriately, on this the Third Sunday of Easter, our Gospel recounts the third time that the Risen Lord appeared to His disciples.

There is something very significant in the numbers mentioned in this appearance story. Why does it matter that there were 153 large fish in the miraculous catch?

Why did Jesus ask Peter three times if he loved Him? There were 153 known species of fish at the time. Recalling the promise of Jesus at the first miraculous catch, "I will make you fishers of men," the 153 fish represent all the people of the world.

As Pope Francis said so many times, this emphasizes the fact that salvation and the Gospel message is for the whole world. Again, Pope Francis often said, "Todos, todos, todos. There is room for everyone in the Church."

At the Ascension, Jesus says, "Go therefore, and make disciples of ALL nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." The Risen Lord reminds His disciples of their mission, and in fact commissions them. And US.

Then Jesus asks Peter three times so that he would have an opportunity to take back his three denials of Jesus during the Passion. St. John points out the charcoal fire. Why is this mentioned? He points out that Peter was warming himself over a charcoal fire as he was confronted by the crowd and denied three times that he even knew Jesus. Now they are back over a charcoal fire and Jesus asks the question three times, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Peter has the opportunity to tell Jesus three times that he loves Him.

Another question is, “Why does Jesus call Peter, Simon, son of John? When Jesus first looked at him He said, “You are Simon, son of John, from now on you will be called Cephas, (which is translated Peter).” (Jn 1:42). Standing on the rock of Caesarea Philippi, Peter once proclaimed, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Jesus said to him in reply. “Blessed are you, Simon son of John. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church.” (Mt 16: 17-18).

So why does Jesus revert to calling him Simon, son of John? Jesus is reminding Peter of the necessity of remaining connected to the source of grace. And of his roots. You and I must never forget where we come from. They shape who we are today.

Have you noticed that the only time that the disciples, fishermen by trade, ever catch any fish is when Jesus is with them and instructs them where to drop their nets? As the weather gets warmer, Jesus would make a good fishing buddy for us, no?

Only after Peter allows himself to be loved by Jesus, is he capable of becoming a channel of that love. The the Risen Lord commands Peter, “Feed My lambs,” only after Jesus feeds him.

Filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Peter becomes a new creation as he boldly proclaims the Risen Lord. We hear such bold speech today. Filled with the Holy Spirit Peter will live out his life faithfully following Jesus through the Cross – and HIS cross. And now we, Christ’s Church, must follow in Peter’s large footsteps.

This week’s Reflection Questions:

- The disciples find themselves at a crossroad: They must strengthen their witness and attend to the business of gathering more souls for the Kingdom, but they must do it against the strict commands of the local authority. They choose their faith over the law, and following Jesus over falling back into their old routines. When have YOU chosen to follow GOD rather than PEOPLE?
- A slain lamb is hardly an inspiring symbol. How do you find power in Jesus' suffering and death? How can you find hope in your own weakness and vulnerability?
- And the ULTIMATE QUESTION: Are YOU ready to follow Jesus Christ with all your heart, with all your mind and with all your soul? The choice is yours. And mine. ALLELUIA and AMEN!

[Acts 13:14, 43-52; Ps. 100; Rev. 7:9, 14b-17; John 10:27-30]

What an awesome four weeks we have gone through! Pope Francis wishing us a Happy Easter one day, and dead the next. Nine days of mourning and prayer for his soul. Only two days of the Cardinal's Conclave resulting in the election of the first U. S.-born Pope Leo XIV. The Holy Spirit has been working overtime, for sure! And today we have a "Triple Header:" Good Shepherd Sunday, the World Day of Prayer for Vocations, and Mother's Day.

It's appropriate for us to consider the nature of authentic vocation. The word itself means "calling." Pope Leo reminded us in his first speech on the front porch, the loggia, of St. Peter's Basilica on Thursday that we are ALL called by God -- all of us, not just priests and religious. But what does it mean to be called? How should we listen for it, and what are we to do about it?

Jesus says His sheep recognize His voice, and because they do, they follow where He leads. Evidently, "call" involves more than a word spoken or message received. It also implies a word followed.

The way we respond is not merely to hear the call but to reply with our behavior. We *follow*, as we heard in last Sunday's Gospel. This response requires a daily renewal of our will.

Consent isn't an item we can hand off once and be done with it. It's never so easy, even when it comes to perpetual vows like marriage, consecrated life or ordination, or the pledge of a parent to a child. Consent involves the little-by-little, day-by-day surrender of the will to a particular purpose. That is a sacrifice!

Consent means “to feel with.” And feelings can change, especially if we allow the events of life to distract us from our purpose. If we intend to “feel with” our primary relationships, then we have to stay close to them, attend to them daily, heed the voice of those whose claim on us is already established. And remember: our response to God’s call for us is a choice, not a feeling.

We do this, mindful that we are imperfect and ordinary. Every day, we have to choose. We may be a priest, sister, brother, wife, husband, father, mother, sibling. Our commitments are still very real.

Like the artist and the musician pledged to create, the scientist and the student to explore, the doctor and the nurse to heal, the business owner to treat employees and customers justly, the novice who learns. Who has influenced YOUR life to get you to Heaven?

Two women who influenced me much in my growing up years were my dear mom Rosemarie and my mom’s sister, Aunt Dorothy. Two worldly-wise women who kept me on the straight and narrow.

Aunt Dorothy passed away the same weekend in 1997 as Princess Diana and Mother Theresa. Mom would follow two years later, in 1999. I officiated and preached at both Funeral Masses. Not Princess Diana and Mother Theresa, I Meant my Mom and Aunt Dorothy! I believe that with the crosses both women bore in this life, they deserve to be clothed in white robes, holding palm branches and worshipping God day and night, and still interceding for me. I pray that one day this will happen!

I have a great respect for and I believe that there is a special place in Heaven for mothers of priests, for wives of permanent deacons, and for parish secretaries. My Mom was all three!

So, I believe she has earned her “Get Out of Hell Free” card!

Three groups interact in our First Reading this weekend: the disciples who proclaim Christ boldly, the Gentiles who receive the message with joy; and the Jewish leaders who react with jealousy and anger. Today, the Church needs men and women, teens and youth who will enthusiastically proclaim Jesus to a hungry world, despite public insult, persecution and rejection. We need “good sheep” to be “instruments of salvation.”

In our Second Reading, we see that every vocation has Heaven as its ultimate goal, and is also ordered toward bringing other people to Heaven. Ask yourselves: when you stand before the throne of God, whom will you have helped get to Heaven?” Who is in Heaven now because of YOUR example and YOUR witness? Contrast this to the Jewish religious leaders who get the prominent women and men to do their dirty work expelling Paul and Barnabas.

The call from the Good Shepherd is being shouted and whispered to all of us, Jew and Christian, Muslim and atheist. We thank God for those were examples for us in this world of faith, hope and charity. And we hope and pray that we can imitate their shining example, so that others can get to Heaven with our help! AMEN, ALLELUIA!

[Readings: Acts 14:21-27; Ps. 145; Rev. 21:1-5a; John 13:31-35]

We have many funerals here at St. Martin de Porres. And as part of our celebration of the life of the deceased and the renewal of our own faith in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, we invite the family of the deceased to select the readings and funeral music for the day of the Mass of the Resurrection.

Ironically, many of the readings that we hear during these Easter Sundays are readings that appear in the Funeral Mass book of readings. Today, two of the three readings are such readings. But they apply not to a dead person but to a community on the decline. They apply not to a loved one who is about to be buried, but to a church community that is about to be risen from the dead. Listen.

From today's First Reading from the Acts of the Apostles: "It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God." In order for us to deepen our relationship with Jesus Christ and with the Church He founded, we need to change -- we need to encounter Jesus Christ, we need to grow in His Holy Spirit, and we need to witness our faith to others.

For decades, I always thought that the hardest thing for me to do in life is change. To change my way of thinking. To change my way of living. To change my way of relating to others. But do you know what we hate more than change? You and I hate the time and energy needed during the transition!

We have to move into a new house. I don't mind that we are going to be living in a new house. It's the sorting, the packing, the recycling, and the travel back and forth several times that I hate.

You, too? I have been transferred to a new job, or I am recently retired. I don't mind the new job, I am grateful to be able to afford to retire. But I hate the transition of having to learn a new routine, having to learn and remember a whole slew of new names, and, if I am retired now, having to see and to be with my spouse 24/7! You too?

Yet if, with the grace of God, we are successful in the transition, then the spirit of today's Second Reading from the Book of Revelation takes root. We will see a new heaven and a new earth. The old life is gone and a new life is embraced. Tears are wiped away. God is with us forever, making all things new!

Camping on the South Rim of the Grand Canyon almost a century ago, Theodore Roosevelt took in the view and declared: "There it is, magnificent. Man cannot improve upon it; leave it alone." Apparently, the old Earth was pretty good, too, at least as far as Teddy Roosevelt was concerned!

As pastor, I insist that every parish meeting I attend, must begin with prayer. I usually choose the Gospel for the upcoming Sunday Mass, with a brief reflection followed by reflection questions. The discussion is always inspiring. Until my most recent meeting. The Opening Prayer was the Gospel passage you just heard. Nobody had anything to say. Total silence. For the first time.

When I went home that night, I looked at the reflection questions. What was so intimidating about it that it froze us into a stunned silence? Here were the questions:

Which of my relationships are centered around my relationship with God? What movements of collaboration do I see in my parish?

In my workplace? In my family? What do we do to show that we are disciples of Jesus within our parish community and larger ones?

So, I'm not using those questions today. Here are some others: How does your attitude, your words and your actions more deeply open your faith and our Church to others? Or do we drive them away? Where do YOU suffer as part of your Christian vocation, and what suffering can you let go of and move beyond?

Patrice Touhy, a spiritual writer, shares this story. When my 14-year-old daughter Hannah was asked why she wanted to be confirmed into the Catholic faith, she answered: "Because God needs me." It wasn't the answer her class had prepared or the Catechism teaches. I am not even sure it is quite theologically sound: Does God *need* anyone? I don't doubt that God relies on Hannah, who has Down Syndrome, and others who don't meet society's standards of perfection to show us how woefully limited our perceptions of beauty, success, and happiness are. Instinctively, or more probably through the grace of God, Hannah knows that she is God's ambassador to the Kingdom where all you need is love.

At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus says to His followers, "Come and see, come follow me." As He leaves this earth for eternity, He says, "Go and make disciples." Today, He says, "Love one another." That is the essential job description of the authentic Christian disciple. Follow. Love. Go and make. AMEN! ALLELUIA!

[Acts 15:1-1, 22-29; Psalm 67; Rev. 21:10-14; 22-23; John 14:23-29]

“Because there arose no little dissension.”

“The angel took me in spirit to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.”

“Whoever loves Me will keep my Word, and my Father will love him, and We will come to Him and make our dwelling-place with him.”

“The Advocate, the Holy Spirit... will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you.”

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.”

Each of these lines from our Sacred Scripture readings today teach us something about Jesus, about His people, the Church, and about ourselves.

How many of us have had arguments with each other? What were those arguments about? What is frustrating sometimes is when both sides think that they are right. Then you have a problem. Who is right? The one who is right is the one who searches for, finds, and shares the TRUTH. They do not embrace “Fake News!”

How do we handle things when we disagree with the Catholic Church about our teachings and practices? I used to struggle with that myself, even as a young priest. But I learned two things: First, Momma is never wrong. Whether that Momma is my Momma, the Blessed Mother whom we honor during this month of May, or, most importantly, Holy Mother Church. Second, I pray, “Holy Spirit, help me to understand why the Church says what She says and to submit to Her authority.” That’s what happens in today’s First Reading.

There was a problem in the early Church about an issue. When I was a young and foolish priest and had Mass with the kids from the parish school, the word “circumcision” came up a few times. The kids sat in the middle section of the church, and the elderly and retirees who came to Daily Mass sat on the sides. So, I asked these kids, second grade to fifth grade: “Does anybody here know what the word ‘circumcision’ means? There was a collective gasp from the grown-ups. “He’s not going to tell these innocent young kids what that word means, is he?” And then I said, “Ask your mom and dad when you get home!”

So the people in our First Reading who had the argument went up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and to the elders, to help them solve their problems. All of them submit their will, their intellect, their heart and their conscience. This is no blind obedience; it is an act of humility. As mature Christians with a well-formed conscience, we search for the truth together.

Once we work out our problems, at the end of time, our Guardian Angels lead us up the high mountain of this very altar of sacrifice and they show us the holy city of Jerusalem, this side of Heaven. When we receive Jesus in Holy Communion, this is the closest we are going to get to Heaven on this side of death. Imagine! Jesus is coming to you in His Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity. He comes to visit you in the house of your body. And He stays there until He dissolves and becomes one with you. How awesome is that?

Jesus says He has to leave His friends in today’s Gospel. Jesus is limited to what He can do and where He can go as long as He is on earth. But once He goes up to Heaven, He promises to

send us the Advocate – the One Who speaks on our behalf – the Holy Spirit. That is the Holy Spirit that is here, right now, in this church on this holy ground, in this people.

To learn about Jesus Christ and the Church He founded is a blessing. To stay in the Church is an act of the mind and of the will. Like love, it's a choice. And some of you made a deeper choice yesterday.

Spoiler alert: How do we encounter Christ? Usually, through other people. Often, through the celebration of the sacraments, especially the Mass.

How do we grow in our faith? Intelligent and inspiring homilies. Music that moves our soul. Stepping outside of our comfort zones in ministry and service. How do we witness? Simply by being the best version of ourselves that God created us to be.

When we take our faith seriously, it is a big and awesome job. But we do not live it out alone. The Holy Spirit, the Advocate, the Comforter, is there to help us. Call on that spirit and pray for the peace, which only He can give. Learn, read, pray. Then you and I can understand, teach, and guide others to Christ. To be that role model to advise and counsel and bring comfort, support and safety to others. I and the staff of St. Martin's are here to help you in your role as evangelizer. You are not alone. Be at peace.

The word that Jesus uses to speak about "peace" isn't just the absence of arguing and shouting, or the absence of war and violence. The word that Jesus uses, "shalom," meant to the Jews "I wish you everything that you need to be perfectly happy in this life." Jesus uses the word to mean; "May you understand yourself and your

relationship with God.” And when you have that understanding, that’s all you really need. But you have to learn, you have to read, you have to pray to get to that peace.

And finally, “love.” What is love? It is not an emotion. It is not a feeling. WHAT? True and lasting love is a CHOICE. I daily choose to let you into my life and into my heart. I daily choose to put your needs ahead of my own. I daily choose to make our relationship more important and a higher priority than that with our children. I daily choose to help get each other and those God sends our way into Heaven.

The relationship between Jesus and those He called was a gradual process. They went from being disciples, students, learners, into Apostles – men prepared to go out into the world and call others to Jesus Christ. Ultimately, Jesus calls them “friends” – those who love each other as Jesus and His Father love each other and who allow the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit to live in their hearts and in their lives.

In that Spirit, I wish all of you “peace.” “Shalom.” I wish all of you the love of God. I wish you all the Way to Heaven. AMEN!
ALLELUIA!