

May 5, 2019

Acts 5:27-32, 40b-41; Rev 5:11-14; Jn 21:1-19 (long)

There seems to be so much conflict that is possible between the teachings that come to us through the Church, and the expectations that society places on us. We are told “you can’t say that” ; “you must agree to this or you are to be shunned” ; “you can’t contradict someone who is saying so-and-so” ; “keep your thoughts to yourself if they contract the cultural narrative.” There is a tendency for the larger culture to set the agenda for all of us, and to tell us that if religious teaching and these cultural things contradict - the religious must be put aside - many believe we are so enlightened as humans that our collective decision is the ultimate right.

This is what the Apostles were up against in the early years of the Church. A culture that was certainly not Christian (they didn’t even have that term then), a political system that was based upon politicians retaining power over all else (sound familiar?), other factions that wanted to erase their religious challenge to the social order, not to mention they had a story that was so unbelievable that they would almost certainly be shunned and laughed at. Yet they go on. They are moved on by the support and power given to them by Jesus. In the Gospel Jesus appears to them after the resurrection, and we heard that *none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they realized it was the Lord ... This was now the third time Jesus was revealed to his disciples after being raised from the dead.* Why were they fishing and not preaching yet? Why were they not in the street corners and in the temple as we heard in the first reading? This wasn’t even the first time Jesus appeared to them - so what were they waiting for? Maybe they were a little afraid of the reaction they were going to get ... so they were just going to lay low.

In this appearance, Jesus meets them while they are fishing, and he is gently telling them to get going. He had told them they’d be fishers of people in the future - and that time had come. They catch nothing on this fishing trip until they follow Jesus’ instructions to throw the net over the other side of the boat - which all the best fishermen would agree, wouldn’t make a difference - then they get the catch of 153 fish. At that times it was a popular belief that there were 153 species of fish in the sea - so this symbolized for them “if you follow my instructions, no matter how others may tell you it is silly, you will be able to reach all varieties of people.” His words to Peter to feed his lambs is a further instruction to his new Church. He is saying to stop fishing in the sea and start catching people; he is saying that they’re dropping the net in the wrong place!

They do eventually get going and bravely preach about Jesus even amid the opposition of the culture, even at the risk of being politically incorrect, even if their culture was saying to them: “you can’t say that” ; “you must agree to this or you are to be shunned” ; “you can’t contradict someone who is saying so-and-so” ; “keep your thoughts to yourself if they contract the cultural narrative.” They go forward because they realize what we need to realize: God overrides the cultural narrative. God is the ultimate authority, society is supposed to align itself to God - not the other way around. They boldly say: *We must obey God rather than [humans]*, and even though they are publicly shunned they tell their hard-to-believe story, they continue to profess the risen Christ. They don’t accept that they have to adjust their message to fit into whatever people want to hear. We in our day are called to the same thing. To hold to our faith and not compare it to secular thinkers and change it if it disagrees with the latest opinions.

It is so easy to forget who Jesus is and to place high importance on the things that will get us recognition with our fellow persons. Our second reading tells us who this person Jesus Christ is. It is Jesus that the writer sees in his vision when he reports: *I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, everything in the universe, cry out: "To the one who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor, glory and might, forever and ever." The four living creatures answered, "Amen, " and the elders fell down and worshiped.* This is not the guy who gets overridden by secular bloggers, this is not the guy we toss to the side when political and social structures say they can override him. Since he gives free will - some will use that free will to reject him or decide that he is wrong and get away with it - but we are called to be faithful to the one to whom everyone will one day see as Lord of all.

The call made to the Apostles that day on the shore of the sea reaches to us as well. We are called to follow Jesus in our own lives, to cast our nets where he asks us to (even when it seems to be a fruitless thing to do), and to hold to his words and his teaching that has been transmitted from the Apostles and interpreted for us by the Church who Jesus tasked with feeding his sheep. Jesus also feeds us in this liturgy with the Eucharist - as he fed those disciples on the shore of the sea - only this time it is his own Body and Blood to strengthen us. No cultural fad can take away the fact that Jesus is Lord and King who has risen from the dead. No secular opinion should cause us to doubt our faith in his Word. The courage and conviction to follow Jesus will help us see that the honors and rewards of this word are temporary, and help us hold to that which will help to bring us and others to the salvation God has promised.