

The readings for this third Sunday of Easter revolve around the concept “worthy.” In the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, we hear the apostles rejoice that they were found worthy to suffer for preaching about Jesus. In the second reading from Revelation, we hear the whole population of heaven singing with thunderous voice, “Worthy is the lamb that was slain.” Finally, we get to observe this conversation between Peter and Jesus after the resurrection.

What does it mean to be “worthy?” The Greek word used literally means, “heavy.” Heavy as in valuable and making a scale tip over. Our English word is where we get the concept of price, as in, “What is this worth?” So, the theme of our readings is what is truly valuable in the end.

In the reading from Revelation, Jesus is acclaimed as worthy because he gave himself fully out of obedience and love to redeem the world. The sacrifice of the cross was the perfect sacrifice. It is worth everything. The sign of its redeeming power is the Resurrection – God's love breaks the power of sin and death. There is nothing more valuable, more worthy, than the love of Jesus Christ made visible in the cross and resurrection.

In the first reading we hear how Peter and the Apostles were arrested for preaching about the resurrection of Jesus. This is a bold move for the Apostles considering how last week we heard that they were hiding out of fear. Something has changed. They still might have fear but their courage, faith, and the power of the Spirit has sent them out. What is Peter's reaction to being arrested and threatened? He rejoiced that he was found worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name of Jesus.

This leads us to the Gospel and Peter's conversation with Jesus. At this moment, Peter must have mixed feelings in talking to Jesus. Jesus told Peter that Peter would deny that he ever knew him three times. Peter was offended and said, “I am willing to die for you.” But, deny him he did. Peter ran away after Jesus was arrested. He went away and wept bitterly because of his unfaithfulness and cowardice. So, a one on one conversation with Jesus was going to be awkward because Peter knew that he had been placed on a scale and was not worthy.

Now, Jesus asks Peter to profess his love three times to close up the wound of the three denials. But, the English translation of the original Greek cannot accurately render this conversation. In Greek, there are three commonly used words for love: *eros*, which is a sensually charged word; *philos*, which is the love that one feels for family and close friends; and *agape*, which is the love that God has for us, a love that is completely for the good of the other person.

Jesus asks Peter, "Do you love me." In the Greek he asks, "Peter do you *agape* me, love me unconditionally?" Peter responds, "Lord you know I *philo* you, I love you like a brother." Peter and Jesus use different words because Peter knows that he cannot love Jesus like Jesus loves him. A second time they have this exchange. Then, a third time Jesus asks him, "Simon, Son of John, do you love me?" We hear that Peter was distressed this third time. That is because Jesus changed the question. He said, "Simon, Son of John, do you *phile* me, do you love me like a brother?" And, almost in tears, Peter responds, "Lord, you know everything, you know that I *philo* you." Then Jesus says, "Follow me."

What is happening? Jesus is asking Peter to love him like Jesus loves Peter. But, Peter knows he is weak and unworthy and he cannot love Jesus like Jesus loves him. It is a raw admission of one's own need for God. Then the third time, Jesus changes the question slightly. He doesn't ask Peter to do something that is impossible for him to do. He asks him if Peter can love him like a brother. This, Peter can do. Then, he is told, "Follow me." Where that path leads is to glory and worthiness. Jesus takes Peter where he is and leads him on the path of true love and glory. But it begins with Peter recognizing that he is not worthy. He cannot love God the way that God loves him. He is not equal. It is for this reason that he rejoices when he is arrested, he was found worthy to be treated by the officials the same way they treated Jesus.

This weekend, we have the young people of our parish receiving their first holy communion. They are receiving a gift that transforms them. Just like Jesus feeding Peter and having that conversation, so each of us who receive the Eucharist are called to recognize that we are not worthy of the great gift we receive, but Jesus takes us where we are and says, "Follow me." So we pray at each mass, "Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed."