

Homily for Palm Sunday
4/17/11
Cycle A

“You too were with Jesus the Galilean.” ... “This man was with Jesus the Nazorean.” ... “Surely you too are one of them; even your speech gives you away.” These were the words of accusation throw at Simon Peter as he stood in the courtyard of the high priest. In each case, Simon Peter denied the accusation, “I do not know what you are talking about!” ... “I do not know the man!” ... “I do not know the man!”

All the passion narratives present Peter’s denial. This is an integral part of the passion story. The leader of the apostles, the good friend of Jesus, denied he even knew his friend. Jesus was only a few yards away enduring the brutal interrogation of the chief priests and Sanhedrin, their spitting and beatings. While all the cruelty of the authorities bore down upon the Lord, the friend of Jesus stuttered, stammered and shirked away from the one who held him so close. Peter had once followed closely behind the Lord, perhaps hoping for part of the prestige of being associated with the Messiah. The gospel narrative now tells us that Peter followed Jesus to the high priest’s residence “at a distance.” Yet even at a distance, he was still associated with Jesus. They recognized him as a follower, as one who walked with the Nazorean. Peter even talked like him.

Peter could not endure their pointed words. He hid his face from their deploring eyes. He began to look for a place to hide as the gaze of all in the courtyard turn to him. He looked for some way of escape as they began to taut him, “Even your speech gives you away.” He found no other way but his own feeble denials, “I do not know the man.”

Peter went away and wept bitterly, not because of what he had endured. He moaned in sorrow because of what his denial caused his friend to endure. He had left his friend alone. He was ashamed.

None of us would be too quick to judge Simon Peter. We dare not cast the first stone, knowing our own feeble, timid hearts. We could ask ourselves though, ¿Would anyone accuse us as they did Peter? “You too were with Jesus the Galilean.” ... “This man – this woman -- was with Jesus the Nazorean.” ... “Surely you too are one of them; even your speech gives you away.” Would anyone say that of us? What is there in our conduct, our speech, our habits that could convict us of being one of the followers of Jesus of Nazareth? Are we seen as a follower of the Lord? Do we aspire to be recognized as such? Perhaps the experience of Simon Peter is what gives us caution, makes us hesitate. Is it not safer to be just one of the crowd?

There are many things the Church teaches that today make others accuse us of being out of step, out of line, even outrageous. Our belief about the sanctity of human life, our convictions about sexuality and marriage, our commitment to the poor and the immigrant, our efforts for justice as the foundation of true peace – these are often scoffed and we are often mocked for standing too close to the unborn, the unwanted, and the unacceptable. As we endure the questions and the accusations, we must remind ourselves that these are not just fanciful ideas or religious notions. We hold all these together in the singular vision of who is Jesus, the crucified Christ. Our relationship with Jesus is what draws us to see our brothers and sisters in those who are despised or ignored. His undying friendship is what gives us the hope for a peace that seems so unattainable. His wondrous wisdom is what guides our way to a common sense that is not so common today. When we are accused, when we are challenged, it is our relationship with Jesus that is questioned.

But the question is, are we challenged? Do we stand accused? Or have we become one of the crowd?

As Peter went away and wept bitterly in the darkness, Jesus stood in the glaring light of Sanhedrin as the chief priest shouted at him, "I order you to tell us under oath before the living God whether you are the Christ, the Son of God." The Lord standing alone, knowing only the loving gaze of His heavenly Father declared, "From now on you will see 'the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power' and 'coming on the clouds of heaven.'"

We will all see him so, together with the all the nations when the Lord comes in all His glory. We see him now as crucified, giving up Spirit for us, giving this Spirit to us. Let us pray for the courageous grace to say, "I know what he is about. I know the man. I know the Christ."

Holy Thursday
Penance Service Remarks
4/21/11

When we celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, there is a profound awareness that we are sacramentally present to the death on Calvary. We do not celebrate just a memory. We transcend space and time to stand at the foot of cross as the Lord offers up his body and blood for the many. This is what moves us to a silent trembling at the awesome demonstration of marvelous mercy and unspeakable love.

This is true of all sacramental moments. All sacraments draw their power from the blood and water flowing from wounded side of the Lord. In many old medieval paintings of the crucifixion, one will see the typical iconography of the streams of water and blood pouring from the heart of the crucified Christ into the baptismal pool and the Eucharistic chalice.

This is especially true as we gather for this communal penance service on the cusp of Sacred Triduum, set to begin this evening with the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper. The power of the sacrament of Penance comes from its intimate union to the sacrifice of Calvary. In the shadow of the Crucified Lord, we stand with the sorrowful mother, the other women, the beloved disciple, the repentant thief, and the Roman centurion who professed his faith when he witnessed the Lord Jesus offer his last breath. The water and blood flowing profusely from his sacred heart washes us clean of our sins.

This marvelous mercy and unspeakable love come to us now. We approach this sacrament like the humble publican entering the temple begging the Lord to have mercy on us sinners. We approach with the confidence, encouraged by all the angels and saints who speak to us those hopeful words from the Letter to the Hebrews, "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin. So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help."

The Lord hangs from the wooden throne of the cross. In this sacrament, we are present to Christ's passion. We kneel at the foot of the cross. Come to him now for by His wounds we are healed.