
WORD MADE FLESH

Do You Love Me?*

Third Sunday of Easter

Acts 5:27-32,40-41; Psalm 29; Revelation 5:11-14; John 21:1-19

Pascha. Easter. The Eighth Day of Creation. The time when death no longer has dominion, the time of the resurrection.

Odd time as reflected in today's readings. In the Acts of the Apostles we see the encounter of those who would proclaim the resurrected life with their accusers, the Sanhedrin. Here the fledgling Christian community, all Jews, are defining themselves in light of the faith of their ancestors. Accusations of guilt for the crucifixion of Jesus, the Christ? And what do the Apostles proclaim? "By his own right hand God has raised him up to be leader and saviour, to give repentance and forgiveness of sins through him to Israel." Repentance and forgiveness of sin to all who slay the presence of divine love in the world. Repentance and forgiveness to each disciple, indeed to each person who has not even glimpsed the results of slaying the incarnation of love in the world. Repentance and forgiveness for each of us. The tragic history of this text: those who for centuries have read it with blood in their eyes and turned quickly on the brothers and sisters of our Lord, denying the resurrection, the Gospel, and passing on death.

But the Psalmist says, "you have changed my mourning into dancing."

And John, whose visions reveal the nature of God's creation, glimpsed the dancing. In his vision, the vision of the Eighth Day of Creation, John saw "all the living things in creation -- everything that lives in the air, and on the ground, and under the ground, and in the sea" rise up in adoration of the Lamb. And why? It was through Christ's death that the dominion of death was conquered, that death, in all its myriad forms that haunt our lives, no longer holds us in bondage. Death was conquered so that we could enter fully into the mortal character of creation, into life. In the Eighth Day of Creation, the cosmos rejoices at the conquering of the bondage of death by Christ, the Second Adam, who incarnated our mortality and wed it to divinity.

In the Gospel, Jesus the Christ calls to his friends' not far off shore. They had been fishing all night on the Sea of Tiberias. This is another of those occasions when the Christ of Resurrection shows himself to his disciples, times when the recognition of the resurrected presence slowly dawned. The text is curious. The disciples vacillate between their failure to recognize, their certainty that it is the Lord, and their timidity to seek confirmation that indeed the one who is in their midst is the Christ. As in several of these "showings" following the resurrection, Christ "took bread and gave it to them." Bread and fish. It was breakfast. And after the meal, the encounter with Simon Peter. "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Twice Jesus asks, twice he is given the answer, "Yes, Lord you know that I love you" and twice Jesus says "Feed my sheep." And a third time, more demanding, more insistent both in question and in reply. Why?

Only days ago that we heard the cock crow and saw Simon Peter standing by the fire warming himself. Three times the cock crowed in the early morning of his denial: Simon Peter, not willing to recognize the one on the path to crucifixion; Simon Peter, not recognizing his own love, denying the incarnation of love.

To live in the Eighth Day of Creation, the time of the resurrection,
-is to live in the lap of repentance and forgiveness,
-is to live in the light of that divine love which causes the cosmos to rise up and rejoice,
-is to live in the recognition of the love in which we have been created and that we are called to return to through the death of Christ.

And then, only then, will we freely -- as slaves to Christ -- respond to Christ's insistent plea to Simon Peter, "feed my sheep." Then, only then, will we respond in a life-giving way to those who face bondage and death in the world. Then will we recognize the Christ, "the least of these", the naked, hungry, ill and imprisoned.

David J. Goa

*Originally published in The Western Catholic Reporter, April 18, 1992