

Homily121519

ARE YOU THE ONE WHO IS TO COME?

We are all familiar with the scene from Holy Thursday night in the courtyard of the High Priest's house where Jesus has been taken. Peter and the other apostles had fled from the Garden of Gethsemane when the soldiers and Temple police came to arrest Jesus. Then Peter and the Beloved Disciple, John, followed and went into the courtyard. It was night time and it was cold. There was a charcoal fire there and in the light of that fire someone thought he recognized Peter as one of the disciples of this Jesus. You know the story. An accusation is made and Peter denies it vigorously. Again another accusation is made that Peter is a disciple of the man from Galilee. Peter again denies that he even knows the man. Then the third accusation and Peter's third denial.

Then, we all know that it was early in the morning and a rooster began to crow. Peter remembered that Jesus had prophesied that before the cock crows thrice this day you will deny me. It is said that Peter went out and wept bitterly. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus is described as being within earshot of Peter's denials and after the third one Jesus turned and looked in Peter's direction.

After the resurrection and the appearances of Jesus to the apostles gathered again in the Last Supper room, Jesus breathes his peace upon them. No recriminations. No questions about why they all fled. No questions about why they failed him. Just peace. A few weeks later many of the same apostles are back up north on the Sea of Galilee. Yes Jesus is risen. But where is he now? What are they supposed to do? They decide that they should go back to fishing. They do and they work hard all night and they catch nothing. In the morning there is a man on the shore who calls out to them to toss their nets to the starboard side. They do and they catch an enormous amount of fish. The Beloved Disciple says to Peter: "It's the Lord!" Peter swims in to shore. The others bring the boats and fish. At the breakfast fish fry Jesus asks Peter three times if he loves him and three times Peter says that he does. For centuries those who write commentaries on the Scriptures make the point that Jesus asked Peter if he loved him three times because Peter denied him three times. It makes sense to me.

But here is the question. Do you think Jesus isn't sure that Peter loves him and asks Peter so that having heard him then Jesus can believe that Peter

does in fact love him? OR, could it be that Jesus knew that Peter did love him but that Peter was unsure and Jesus was giving Peter the opportunities to profess his love anew and for Peter to grow in conviction because he had beaten himself up so badly for his failure.

I go in to all this today because of the gospel about John the Baptist who is now imprisoned in a dungeon in one of King Herod's fortresses. John was recognized far and wide as a prophet and a holy man. But he angered the king who threw him into jail. John had pointed out Jesus as the Lamb of God whose sandals he was unworthy to touch. John was the one who said of Jesus: "He must increase; I must decrease." Now we have this story of John telling his disciples to go to Jesus and ask him: "Are you the One who is to come or shall we look for another?" The way the story is presented is as if John has doubts now and is unsure of who Jesus is. But I don't believe that is the case. It is John's own disciples who have come to him in orison. These disciples of John want to be faithful and true to John. But John is the one who is to point out the One who is to come. John is not that person. John has disciples—but only for a time. This is now the time of decrease for John and the time of increase has arrived. John is sending his disciples to Jesus for his own disciples to hear from Jesus' own lips what he is doing. The deaf hear. The blind see. The lame walk. Lepers are cleansed. The poor are cared for with a message of Good News. Is it John who needs to know this? OR, is it John's disciples who need to know this so they can now transfer their discipleship to follow the Messiah. John's task was to point to Jesus, the Holy One of God, the Messiah. The Church reads this reading this week as a reminder to us. It is about Christ. It is about Christ alone. He is the One who is to come. The One to set us free. The One to live for us. The One to die for us. The One to rise for us. The One to save us. His feast comes in ten days. Let us do what we must to make ourselves ready to celebrate and to declare ourselves to be his 21st century disciples. He is the One who is to come.

May the Lord bless us today and give us his peace.