

**THE QUESTION OF THE WEEK**

“Simon, do you love me?” asks Jesus.

John 21: 17

It has been my great honor to have officiated at close to five hundred weddings here in my time as pastor. Over those years I have met and conversed with so many young men and women. One of the questions I often ask is this: Who knew first? Who knew first that this relationship was the one? Different from all the other relationships? It is rare when the couple does not know the answer to that question. Often the one who was second will be the first to speak: “She did.” “He did.” A second question follows: Who said ‘I love you’ first. The answer to this is almost always well known. Sometimes, the one who knew first said that they said those transforming words first. Saying “I love you,” is very common but always carries a notion of risk. What will the other say? How will they respond? Will they say that they love me? Will their words mean what my words mean?

Which brings us to today’s gospel. Jesus doesn’t look at Simon Peter and declare his love for him, although Jesus’ love for him has been made known on any number of occasions. Here, it is Jesus asking Simon if Simon loves Jesus. Why? Why is Jesus asking? Is it because Jesus does not know? Is it because Jesus is unsure of Simon’s love after all that has transpired? Jesus himself had to know what was going to happen. Remember, he tells Simon Peter on Holy Thursday night during the Last Supper that “Before the cock crows you will deny me three times.” So if Jesus knows why does he ask?

Because of Simon Peter. After how he acted, Peter himself isn’t sure anymore. The cocksure apostle was undone by the crowing of the cock. No. It is Peter who doubts; Peter who is unsure of his own love for Jesus. And so Jesus asks him aloud and in front of everyone else. Really difficult moment for Peter. Everyone heard his claim of being ready to die for Jesus and then how he gave in to his fears. But Peter, to his credit, speaks up that he does love Jesus. And no less than three times. How else does Jesus heal the heart of the one he has specifically chosen to lead the Church if not by drawing out of Peter a confession of his love. So that Peter himself can believe it again. My friends, I do not know if what I am about to write is so or not but I have read it as a tradition handed down in the Church. It is this: That as the moment of death approaches the Lord Jesus draws near and whispers gently in the ear of the dying person three times: Do you love me? No matter the past. No matter what you did or did not do. Right here. Right now. Do you love me? A simple yes got the good thief into paradise. Did you know that your own yes can do the same for you? The question of the week.