

## The Third Sunday of Easter (Year C)

Saint Mark's, Tampa

18 April 2010

✠ I speak to you in the name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

*Amen.*

There was a charcoal fire burning that other night, too – that night Peter had tried so hard to forget. He was confused that night, and frightened, and cold; and he had done the unthinkable. People had recognized him. They had seen him hanging out with Jesus. He even sounded like a follower of Jesus – had that Galilean accent, used words like ‘narthex’ and ‘sacristy’. So they had asked him, “Are you not one of that man’s disciples?” And he had said, “I am not.”

Three times: “Are you not one of that man’s disciples?” “I am not. I am not. I am not.”

Peter had broken down after that, and he had tried hard to put it out of his mind.

We would like to think that our sins and failings can just be forgotten, the slate cleared. Time heals all wounds, right? But it doesn’t. As Austin Farrer said, “This is not fairyland; evil cannot be annihilated by the waving of a magic wand; it has to be met, suffered, and redeemed.”

So Jesus sets out to meet the evil of Peter’s denial – to make its suffering fresh – so that he can redeem it. He asks Peter three times: “Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me?”

And when he asks that third time, it all comes flooding back to Peter – the smell of the charcoal fire – you know how it is with smells – and the memory of that third question, “Didn’t I see you in the garden with him?” – and the shame and sorrow over his denials are as fresh and as vivid to him now as they were at that horrible moment when he heard the cock crow.

But he sees, perhaps, what Jesus has done. Jesus, knowing the death by which Peter was to glorify God, asks him, not about his courage, but about his love; and he elicits three confessions, the pledges of Peter's love, to set against those three denials, the fruit of Peter's cowardice. The denials are not annihilated: but they are met, suffered, and redeemed. And now every time Peter smells a charcoal fire, every time the memory of his threefold denial returns, he can be almost glad to remember it, because the evil of those words has been met, suffered, and redeemed by being made the occasion of an outpouring of love: "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you."

Time doesn't heal all wounds. It doesn't heal Jesus' wounds. But the Lord of time transforms those wounds, changes them from agony and brokenness into something glorious and transfigured. He offers them to Thomas as witnesses, and he bears them still:

Those dear tokens of his passion still his dazzling body bears,  
cause of endless exultation to his ransomed worshipers;  
with what rapture, with what rapture, with what rapture  
gaze we on those glorious scars.

Time doesn't heal all wounds. As Christians, we don't put our trust in time. We don't put our trust in moving on, or getting over it, or putting it behind us. We put our trust in resurrection. The new life is not amnesia; it's death, swallowed up in victory. And the Risen One whom we praise today, we praise because he is the Lamb who was slaughtered. Worthy is he to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!

If there is in your life something you've been trying to forget – perhaps a wound inflicted, perhaps a wound received – if every time you smell that charcoal fire you feel the shame and fear and brokenness as keenly as ever – don't wait for time to heal your wounds. Don't try to move on, to get over it, to put it behind you. Evil cannot be annihilated: it must be met, suffered, and redeemed. Don't put your trust in time. Put your trust in resurrection, and let Christ begin the new life in you by making that evil an occasion for a fresh outpouring of love.

And so to him who sits upon the throne, and to Christ the Lamb, be worship and praise, dominion and splendor, for ever and for evermore. *Amen.*