

## *Third Sunday of Easter*

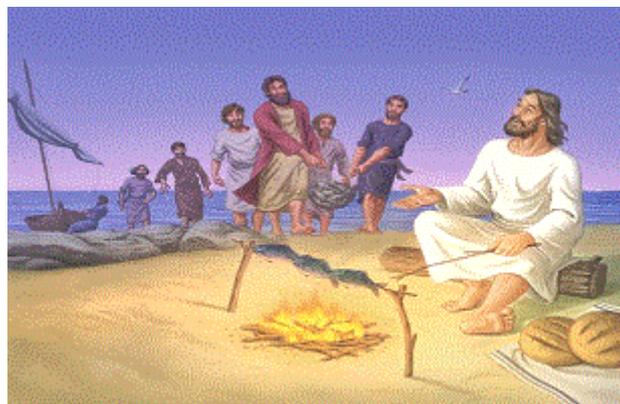
*Year C*

The Gospel this Sunday tells another story of Jesus appearing to his friends.

Peter doesn't know what to do with himself so, as we all do, he looked for something familiar. "I'm going fishing", he announces and the others, also at a loss, say, "We'll come with you". They don't catch anything that night and bring their boats in at dawn. They see someone on the shore who calls out, "Have you caught anything, friends?" Disgruntled, they answer, "No". "Throw the net out to starboard and you'll find something" said the stranger. So they did this and suddenly there were so many fish that they couldn't haul them in. The disciple Jesus loved recognised Jesus and said to Simon Peter, "It is the Lord." Simon Peter jumps into the water and rushes to Jesus, leaving the others to bring in the boat and fish.



Jesus had prepared a fire with fish cooking on it and had bread for them to eat. He invites them to bring some of the fish they have caught and to have breakfast.



Jesus breaks bread with his disciples once more. Having a meal with them is one of his favourite pastimes. When we gather to share a meal, we share more than the food on offer. We share conversation; we share our hopes and dreams; we show how much we care for those with whom we break bread.

The second part of the Gospel story concerns an intimate conversation between Jesus and Simon Peter. Commentators on the Gospels agree that in this story John uses two words for "love". Some say this isn't significant. Others say it's important and sheds a different light on what is said. Jesus first asks, "Simon, do you love me more than these others do? "

This first word for love, which Jesus uses, is “agapao”, a word that means a pure and holy love of God. Simon knows from bitter experience that he cannot make any claims about being better or stronger than anyone else. His loyalty and courage were brought into question on Holy Thursday and Good Friday. He cannot even bring himself to use that word “agapao” to mean the love he has for Jesus. Instead, he uses the word “phileo” which implies human caring or friendship.

“Yes Lord; you know that I care for you, I am your friend”.

Jesus asks Simon a second time, “do you love me” – still using the word “agapao” but dropping the comparison to how the others feel. Once again Simon cannot deny his love but cannot make any claims about himself and sticks to the reply

“Yes Lord; you know that I care for you, I am your friend”.

Now Jesus himself uses the second word for love in a question which cuts Peter to the heart: “Simon, do you care for me? Are you my friend?. Are you sure even of that?”

Jesus has reached the deep root of Simon’s anguish. Is his relationship with Jesus broken beyond repair? Simon, already hurting and fragile, seems to break. He was so wrong about himself before, what if he’s even wrong about caring for Jesus? He lost all confidence in himself as one of the three disciples closest to Jesus and so, in desperation, Simon throws himself on to the mercy and knowledge of Jesus.

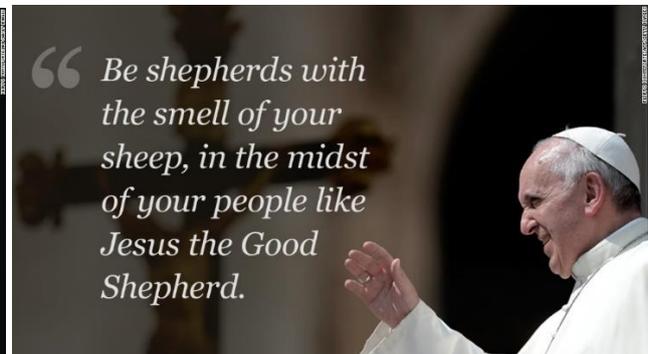
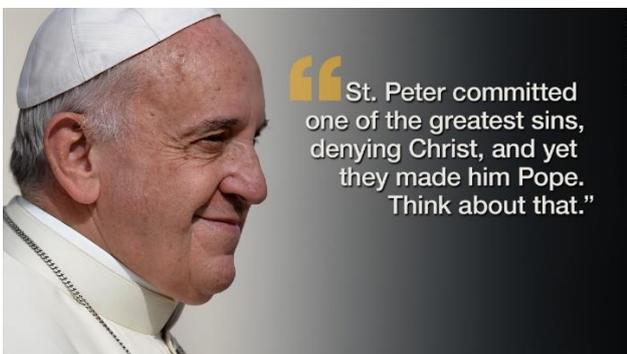
“Lord you know everything, you know that I care for you, you know I am your friend”.

But an unspoken question hangs in the air,  
An unspoken question maybe Simon daren’t ask for fear of the answer.  
An unspoken question maybe sometimes we daren’t ask for fear of the answer.

*But, Lord, after what I’ve done  
do you still care for me and love me?  
do you still want me to be your disciple?”*

Jesus hears and understands that unspoken question. He knows Peter far too well not to hear it. So for the third time he gives his commission to Peter: “Feed my sheep” and “follow me”.

We, too, may question our relationship with Jesus, but like Simon Peter, we need to have a private conversation with Jesus in which he can hear our spoken or unspoken questions and fears. Jesus continues to say to us, “Peace be with you”, “I am with you always”, “Follow me”.



We pray for all who care for others, especially Francis, our Pope and Canon Alan, shepherd of our community. May they always know the Lord’s love and care.