

Third Sunday of Easter - Lectionary: 48

Reading 1 - [Acts 5:27-32, 40b-41](#)

When the captain and the court officers had brought the apostles in and made them stand before the Sanhedrin, the high priest questioned them, "We gave you strict orders, did we not, to stop teaching in that name? Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and want to bring this man's blood upon us." But Peter and the apostles said in reply, "We must obey God rather than men. The God of our ancestors raised Jesus, though you had him killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as leader and savior to grant Israel repentance and forgiveness of sins. We are witnesses of these things, as is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him."

The Sanhedrin ordered the apostles to stop speaking in the name of Jesus, and dismissed them. So they left the presence of the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they had been found worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name.

Responsorial Psalm - [Psalm 30:2, 4, 5-6, 11-12, 13](#) R. (2a) I will praise you, Lord, for you have rescued me.

Reading 2 - [Revelation 5:11-14](#)

I, John, looked and heard the voices of many angels who surrounded the throne and the living creatures and the elders. They were countless in number, and they cried out in a loud voice: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches, wisdom and strength, honor and glory and blessing." Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, everything in the universe, cry out: "To the one who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor, glory and might, forever and ever." The four living creatures answered, "Amen, " and the elders fell down and worshiped.

Gospel - [John 21:1-14](#)

At that time, Jesus revealed himself to his disciples at the Sea of Tiberias. He revealed himself in this way. Together were Simon Peter, Thomas called Didymus, Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, Zebedee's sons, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, "'I am going fishing.'" They said to him, "'We also will come with you.'" So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. When it was already dawn, Jesus was standing on the shore; but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "'Children, have you caught anything to eat?'" They answered him, "'No.'" So he said to them, "'Cast the net over the right side of the boat and you will find something.'" So they cast it, and were not able to pull it in because of the number of fish. So the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "'It is the Lord.'" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he tucked in his garment, for he was lightly clad, and jumped into the sea. The other disciples came in the boat, for they were not far from shore, only about a hundred yards, dragging the net with the fish. When they climbed out on shore, they saw a charcoal fire with fish on it and bread. Jesus said to them, "'Bring some of the fish you just caught.'" So Simon Peter went over and dragged the net ashore full of one hundred fifty-three large fish. Even though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "'Come, have breakfast.'" And none of the disciples dared to ask him, "'Who are you?'" because they realized it was the Lord. Jesus came over and took the bread and gave it to them, and in like manner the fish. This was now the third time Jesus was revealed to his disciples after being raised from the dead.

I'd like to focus on the second reading for this 3rd Sunday of Easter, centering on worship, but I think it's also helpful to briefly reflect on the first reading and the Gospel which connect in important ways to the second. In the Gospel reading we see how it was possible for the beloved apostle, John, to declare that it was 'the Lord' on the beach. As it says in the Gospel it was not because he suddenly recognized the face of the person on the shore, but was most likely initially prompted by his natural reason and memory which brought to his mind the first miraculous catch of fish, which was then aided by the virtue of his supernatural faith and enabled to fully recognize the hand of God blessing them and the presence of the Lord among them.

Like John, we too can come to recognize him, not just during spiritually supercharged moments such as during retreats, adoration, or pilgrimages, but even in the ordinary moments of our daily life. Because of the infused supernatural virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity when animated by our intentional cooperation with the work of the Holy Spirit in us. We become increasingly able to discern in our soul the presence, will, and word of God.

Especially in the Acts of the Apostles we see the effects of these supernatural virtues manifested. These same virtues that every baptized person, infant to adult, receives in addition to or because of these theological virtues. Such as, the indelible spiritual mark on our soul indicating our belonging to Christ which also consecrates us for worship and unites us to Christ. We are freed and forgiven from sin, reborn of water and spirit as sons or daughters of Christ. Each of us becomes members of the mystical body of Christ the Church – one people of God and enables us to live our baptismal priesthood through holy lives and acts of charity.

Those who have also received the sacrament of Confirmation also receive another indelible spiritual mark / character on their soul. We are strengthened in our relationship with God, and we are more firmly united to Christ. We receive the Holy Spirit which acts to strengthen our bond with the Church and is essential for the fullness of baptismal grace. The Holy Spirit also empowers us to be true witnesses of Christ, bold in our confession of faith as well as spreading and defending the faith in word and deed. These two sacraments lay the foundation for Christian life, a foundation continually strengthened by reception of the Eucharist. CCC 977, 985, 1121, 1212-15, 1265-67, 1272-73, 1277-80, 1285, 1303-04, 1316-17, 1582 Authentic disciples of Jesus who choose to allow these effects and graces of the sacraments and infused virtues will strive to live and proclaim our faith in its fullness, even knowing that we will be misunderstood, that we may be pitied or despised, and that some may want to get rid of us—even violently.

This prayer of Cardinal John Henry Newman beautifully expresses the desire of the intentional missionary disciple: *“Dear Jesus, help me to spread Your fragrance everywhere I go. Flood my soul with Your spirit and life. Penetrate and possess my whole being so utterly, that my life may only be a radiance of Yours. Shine through me and be so in me that every soul I come in contact with may feel Your presence in my soul. Let them look up and see no longer me, but only Jesus! Stay with me and then I shall begin to shine as You shine, so to shine as to be a light to others; The light, O Jesus will be all from You; none of it will be mine; It will be you, shining on others through me. Let me thus praise You the way You love best, by shining on those around me. Let me preach You without preaching, not by words but by my example, By the catching force of the sympathetic influence of what I do, the evident fullness of the love my heart bears to You.”*

At the heart of this life in faith, is supernaturally enabled relationship with God and therefore necessarily, worship. Religion, traditionally understood, sought to render to God the worship, homage and thanksgiving that was due to him as God, the one who made us, cares for us and saves us. In the second reading we get a glimpse of the heavenly example of worship, what is perfect for the angels and for all creation. But this vision and the desire to offer God this worship more often seems incomprehensible to us because, in many

ways we allow the supernatural virtues to be replaced by natural faith, hope and love. Consequently, religion becomes more focused on 'me' than it is on God. Sadly, we become increasingly concerned about how we feel and what makes us comfortable in worship and the virtue of religion weakens or even withers. Many of us have heard or ourselves expressed the lack of desire for heaven, since it seems it must be so boring if all you do is what this second readings reveals. Without effects of supernatural faith and its fruit of the virtue of religion, the heaven we desire is of our own imagining. In addition, if we do not humbly admit and live with the awareness that we are in fact dependent on God and that our lives ought to be so ordered in affirmation of this truth, then worship will become an increasingly foreign and undesirable experience.

Our hearts and minds become hardened and narrowed when the life of a Christian is lived on the foundations and effects of natural faith, hope, and charity. This disables in us the desire for and ability to make our whole lives religious. The Saints have long understood, and the Church has consistently taught what St. Thomas Aquinas said about the virtue of religion. It does not focus solely on worshipping and serving God, as it also directs all our actions toward God for his glory, making our entire life religious. Too many members of the mystical body of Christ recoil at the suggestion of such a seemingly extremist idea of faith, instead preferring to compartmentalize their religion and keep it for Sunday and possibly some private devotional or prayer habits. This also makes it exceedingly easier to remain comfortably Christian while at the same time enjoying most of what secular life has to offer and to do so with little to no thought of God, faith, and what I claim to believe.

Because religion ultimately points to the communion that God desires to have with us, we need to recover, in whichever ways each of us needs, the virtue of religion and refocus it on the primacy of God. God wants us to live our entire lives with, in and through him and our worship together and apart can put us into right relation with him by recognizing his primacy and humbly putting ourselves before him. But what of our valid concerns related to our communal worship, inspired by this virtue of religion? Although we need to understand our own motivations, whether we be moved by this virtue or the human desire for what just seems reasonable to us in worship, there are very valid concerns. This virtue ought to inspire a desire for excellence in worship. Yet, in the absence of appropriate corrections in the rituals of communal worship or the very slow movement toward that goal, we can and we will remain firm in our practice of worship, firm in our participation in the Eucharistic Celebrations, and firm in our resolve to avoid letting anything separate me from being in right relationship with God and from receiving communion.

There is no doubt that during the history of the Church, people 'lost faith' and walked away. This is especially true in the most recent centuries during which the supernatural has been increasingly marginalized in our imaginations and sense of what is real and all but completely separated from reason in so called 'modern man'. Many other more mundane reasons are given to explain leaving the Church or losing the faith, but I would argue that one spiritual reason towers above: love for God has diminished in the hearts of those who purposely stay home, supplanted by love for self. The truth is, the life of a disciple of Christ which is rooted in and directed by the supernatural virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity – no matter the issue or struggle that arises – will not allow you to be led away or astray. You will go to Church because you know that you are responsible to live in accord with the commandments. You will overcome any and all valid or selfish desires related to our worship because you know it is only there, where you are able to receive the Holy Eucharist, the Body and Blood of Christ, recalling to mind the words of Jesus, *"Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you."* ^{John 6:53} You will also be strengthened in your resolve so as not to allow yourself to become fooled into thinking that it is possible to leave the Church while maintaining that you believe in God, no matter how 'reasonable' it might seem.

Faith is a supernatural virtue given by God through which one lives in a relationship of love and trust with God, the Creator of all that is, visible and invisible. In this relationship it is God who is the initiator, who

calls man to respond to Him. We freely decide in the depths and entirety of our being – aided by grace and the work of the Holy Spirit – to respond, to repent and believe - to accept God and everything that God has revealed through the Church. Faith involves both grace and virtue and must be cultivated within the life of each person. Faith deepens and develops in varying degrees in each believer through human action: receiving the sacraments, accepting instruction in the content of faith, praying, responding to the preaching and witness of others, reading Scripture and other spiritual works, and performing acts of charity.

All gifts can be misused, discarded, or lost. The gift of divine faith bestowed in baptism can become lost through lack of use, but it can never be discarded completely. This should give hope to us who pray for – and worry about – the wayward, that they somehow may yet heed the words of St. Leo the Great before it is too late: *“Christian, recognize your dignity and, now that you share in God’s own nature, do not return to your former base condition by sinning. Remember who is your head and of whose body you are a member. Never forget that you have been rescued from the power of darkness and brought into the light of the Kingdom of God.”*

Reflection Questions

1. Consider the interconnectedness of the supernatural virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity, Baptism, and Confirmation in laying the foundation for Christian life as described in the text.
2. Consider the tension presented in the text between the supernatural understanding of religion, focused on God and heavenly worship, and a more "me"-focused, comfortable approach to faith.
3. Consider how the homily uses the concept of an "indelible spiritual mark" from Baptism and Confirmation to describe the Christian's identity and calling.
4. Consider that a diminished love for God, supplanted by love for self, is a towering spiritual reason for people leaving the Church.
5. Consider the essential components of the virtue of faith and how it is cultivated within your own life.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Supernatural Virtues:** Infused virtues (Faith, Hope, and Charity) received through God's grace, enabling a supernatural relationship with God and allowing one to live a life directed towards Him.
- **Infused Virtues:** Virtues directly given by God's grace, as opposed to those acquired through human effort alone.
- **Indelible Spiritual Mark/Character:** A permanent spiritual seal on the soul received through certain sacraments (Baptism and Confirmation) signifying belonging to Christ and a consecration for service.
- **Baptismal Priesthood:** The call for all baptized Christians to live holy lives and offer spiritual sacrifices through acts of charity and worship.
- **Mystical Body of Christ:** The Church, seen as the unified body of believers with Christ as its head.
- **Sacrament of Confirmation:** A sacrament that strengthens the baptized in their relationship with God and the Church, empowering them to be witnesses of Christ.
- **Eucharist:** The sacrament where Christians receive the Body and Blood of Christ, understood as essential for spiritual life.
- **Missionary Disciple:** A follower of Christ who is actively engaged in spreading and defending the faith.
- **Virtue of Religion:** Traditionally understood as rendering to God the worship, homage, and thanksgiving due to Him; more broadly, it directs all actions toward God's glory, making one's entire life religious.
- **Communal Worship:** The public and shared worship of God by a community of believers.
- **Divine Faith:** The gift of faith bestowed by God, enabling a relationship of love and trust with Him and acceptance of His revelation through the Church.