

### **April 10, 2016 Mercy and St. Peter Homily:**

My brothers and sisters, in this presidential election year, no candidate is likely to escape the intense public scrutiny of the media. It appears that journalists take fiendish delight in humiliating, embarrassing and discrediting candidates, who are, in their opinion, either morally unqualified for office or whose views on many of the controversial issues of the day run counter to their own. As one political operative put it to a journalist sympathetic to his own views, "Let us bring the bastard to his knees". This is what is known as the politics of personal destruction.

If Jesus brings us to our knees, it is not because he wishes to humiliate us. Rather, his sole objective is to heal us. Just consider the case of Peter, the first of the apostles. On the night of the Last Supper, Peter boldly swears his faithfulness. His solemn promise is worth repeating "Even though they all fall away, I will not", "Even if I must die with you, I will never deny you". (Mk 14:31). Later that evening, Peter denies being a disciple of Jesus three times in the courtyard of the High Priest. In the presence of a mere servant girl, he failed to deliver on his bold promise to Jesus. That painful episode ends when the cock crows, but without any tears of remorse from Peter.

In today's gospel reading, (Jn. 21:1-19) Peter's dramatic threefold declaration of love reverses his denial of a few days earlier. Jesus assures us that a broken past can resurrect and be lovingly redeemed. In Peter's company, he brings up a buried past and with loving and gentle delicacy heals painful memories for his friend and the reader.

To be honest, most of our "wounds" are self-inflicted, the result of bad choices and irresponsible behavior. Instead of addressing our moral failures, we choose to "bury" them, hoping that, in time, they will disappear and no longer trouble our conscience. Jesus knows better. Our sinful past can have all sorts of tragic consequences for us, not to mention those upon whom we have inflicted wounds that are deep and painful. The alarming rise in mental illness is simply one of the symptoms of a failure to come to terms with our life as it has been lived, warts and all.

Pope Francis never fails to speak movingly of the mercy of Jesus. Indeed, if there is one word that sums up the pontificate of this humble man, it is mercy! One of the first recipient's of the Risen Christ's mercy is the impetuous, bumbling St. Peter. Today, in the war ravaged lands of the Middle East, we are a witness to the devastating consequences of a land bereft of pity and mercy. It is truly horrifying. Not a drop of mercy, not even one! One can only weep.

Let us pray that the mercy of Jesus will wipe away the tears of those who weep because they have not experienced the healing power of mercy. Have mercy on us, Lord Jesus!

Amen!