

Homily for April 18, 2010 (3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter, C)  
*Acts 5:27-32, 40-41; Ps 30 (vv), Rev 5:11-14; John 21:1-19*

Last weekend I was in Switzerland, a country that is one of the banking centers of the world. Over the past couple of years, the city of Geneva and the nation itself were shaken by the fall-out from what we now know as the Great Recession. Like the financial sectors in many other countries, a number of Switzerland's prominent banks like UBS and HSBC were hammered by losses that stemmed from risky and what many would say were highly speculative and irresponsible management and investment practices in areas like the sub-prime mortgage market. Their losses were in the tens of billions of dollars.

When I was in Geneva a year ago, the financial bloodletting was near its peak and the atmosphere in the city was pretty subdued. A year later, things seemed to be picking up, albeit in a more modest way. The biggest sign for me was the number of construction cranes that dotted the skyline of this old but also very modern European city. It seemed that it was "back to business" for Geneva; but it definitely wasn't "business as usual." It couldn't be.

The opening of today's gospel reading found Peter and the other disciples "back in business." But for them, too, could never again be "business as usual."

At the beginning of this passage, Peter, Thomas, James, John and two other disciples were fishing, just as they had done thousands of times before. They had witnessed the passion and death of Jesus and, as we heard in last Sunday's gospel reading, they had also seen him raised from the dead, heard him bless them with the gift of peace, and felt him breathe into them the Holy Spirit (see Jn 20:19-29).

It all must have been pretty overwhelming for them. When confronted with a lot of change in a short period of time, we often return—or at least *try* to return—to familiar and even routine things. They provide a sense of order in what can feel like chaos. So it's not too surprising for us to find these fishermen going back to the very work they were doing at the time they were first called by the Lord (see, e.g., Lk 5:1-13).

As the gospel passage tells us they weren't having a very good day. But when Jesus came and they paid attention to what he had to say, things changed pretty dramatically. The disciples, too, were changed; and none more radically than St. Peter.

It may seem hard to reconcile the impulsive and chastened man we see in the gospel reading with the strong and courageous apostle in our first reading from Acts of the Apostles—the one who was able to stand up to his own religious leaders and proclaim, “We must obey God rather than men” and who suffered “dishonor for the sake of the name (of Jesus).” But by looking at what happened to Peter we can also learn some important lessons about our own—and our Church’s—path to renewal, particularly as we confront yet again deal with sin and scandal within the body of Christ. Here are some of the lessons:

*Keep doing what you’re doing but do it differently.* When Jesus called to Peter and his companions from the shore and discovered that they hadn’t caught anything, he didn’t tell them to give up. Instead, he told them to cast their nets over a different side of the boat. Reform and renewal do not demand that we “throw the baby out with the bathwater;” but they do demand an end to “business as usual.” Our mission is the same, but how we fulfill it must change.

*Have faith that the Lord can do for you what you can’t do for yourself.* Just as following a simple command of Jesus led to an unexpected and even miraculous result for the disciples, we also must realize that no number of programs, protocols, review boards, or accountability measures will make a real and lasting difference unless they are also accompanied by a renewed reliance on God’s grace and a deepened commitment to realizing it in holiness.

*Face your failures of the past with present love and service.* When Jesus asked Peter three times, “Do you love me?” he also forced him to recall the three times that Peter had denied even knowing him. Jesus also invited him to show that love by feeding and tending the flock entrusted to him. Instead of engaging in a futile and self-protective battle with the media, the leaders of our Church might consider following their own exhortations to return to the Sacrament of Penance and follow its pattern of contrition, confession, penance, satisfaction—all of which are required to make any absolution, forgiveness and transformation effective.

*Surrender the need to control.* Like Peter, our spiritual and moral maturity require that we let go of our own willfulness and exaggerated notions of freedom and submit to the authority of others and especially the authority of God.

*Follow Jesus.* The Lord’s final words to Peter in today’s gospel capture the essence of discipleship and why one of the earliest names of the Church was simply, “The Way.” It means getting back to business...and realizing that it can’t be business as usual. After all, that’s what happens with a resurrection. +