

3rd Sunday of Easter, yr. C, Xavier Church, Acts 5, 27-32. 40-41; Ps. 30, 2. 4-6, 11-13; Apoc. 5, 11-14; Jn. 21, 1-19

Fr. Ward Biemans SJ

Dear brothers and sisters, if you go out into the countryside these days, you may come across little lambs in the fields. They are hopping through the grass, playing with each other and following their mother who does not seem to bother. However, in the time of the apostles, lambs were primarily sacrificial animals that were slaughtered in order to be dedicated to God. In the vision of St. John, such an innocent Lamb is placed on the throne, clothed with dignity and power and in possession of wealth, wisdom and strength. To Him be the glory for ever and ever.

Right at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, it becomes clear that Jesus is the Lamb who will give His life. John the Baptist points to Him and says: 'Behold the Lamb of God'. The disciples who hear this, follow Jesus. In today's gospel, we heard that the risen Lord Jesus asks Peter to follow Him again. This is such a special event that we need to pause and reflect on it. The disciples meet the Lord after His death on the cross. They were actually somewhat disillusioned and had taken up their old profession again: fishing. They caught nothing, until a stranger on the beach tells them to cast the net to the right of the boat. This had already happened once before in Galilee. Then, too, Jesus had told Simon Peter to cast out the nets again after toiling in vain during the night. Then, at his word they caught an enormous amount of fish. Now, this is happening again and it is John, the beloved disciple, who recognises Jesus.

Something very special is going on here, because when they are having breakfast with the risen Lord, no one dares to ask: 'Who are you?' Apparently they did not know how to react. Therefore, after breakfast, Jesus took Simon aside and asked him three times if he loved Him. Love is the basis of ministry, of following Jesus.

The disciples had not yet received the Holy Spirit. That only happens at Pentecost. But to us, brothers and sisters, the Holy Spirit has been given to us at our baptism and usually and hopefully, this has been confirmed at our Confirmation. It is up to us to recognise the Lord in all that is human, thanks to the Spirit who dwells in us. And then to bear witness to his love. We can do this in many ways. On King's Day last week, some Catholics at the free market in Hoofddorp talked to people to ask if they wanted to participate in an Alpha course, an introduction to the faith and Christian life.

On Facebook I saw a video of a young Dutch Dominican Sister who explains in seven minutes who God is. There are all kinds of ways to witness to the risen Lord today.

When the apostles do this, it leads to envy by the high priests and they forbid the apostles to teach in Jesus' Name. But the apostles continue regardless of the consequences. At first they were set free; later some of them had to pay with their lives for their actions. Still today, Christians are victims of persecution, like in Afghanistan, Nigeria and North Korea. The bishops, successors of the apostles, continue to call for justice, peace and tolerance. The Pope has regularly called for peace in Ukraine, too. Fortunately, the willingness to help is enormous.

In loving God with all our might and our fellow men and women as ourselves lies the answer to what Jesus asks of us. Regardless of the incomprehension or resistance that this may evoke. Love is both vulnerable and powerful. The love of God asks a lot of us, but gives a reward that is so great you cannot imagine it. That is why Sacred Scripture expresses this in figurative language, such as the fish catch and in John's vision of the heavenly Lamb. In the Eucharist, we can recognise Jesus and agree with John: 'It is the Lord'. Jesus asks each of us if we love Him and each other. And if we do, then it is up to us to respond wholeheartedly to his call: 'Follow me'. Amen.