

“You know I love you” John 21:1-19

1 After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way. **2** Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. **3** Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.” They said to him, “We will go with you.” They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

4 Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. **5** Jesus said to them, “Children, do you have any fish?” They answered him, “No.” **6** He said to them, “Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish. **7** That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea. **8** The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off. **9** When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. **10** Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.” **11** So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them. And although there were so many, the net was not torn. **12** Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” Now none of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. **13** Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. **14** This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

15 When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” **16** He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.” **17** He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep. **18** Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.” **19** (This he said to show by

what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, “Follow me.” (John 21:1-19)

Grace and peace to you all from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

The last Sunday we spent some time uncovering what kind of a man the apostle Thomas was. I hope we could make up his reputation at least a little bit. Today our Gospel reading tells us about the apostle Peter and his encounter with Jesus.

Probably it is noteworthy to observe what the four gospels reveal us about Peter. There is a lot about him, and we don't have a time to go in all the details. We know that he, together with John and James, was one of the three closest disciples of Jesus. We know that Peter was bold and often spoke on behalf of all the disciples. Sometimes, perhaps, as someone who speaks not considering well enough what he is going to say.

However, it was exactly Peter who provided the answer to Jesus' question: "But who do you say that I am?" Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." He got it right. Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven." (Mat 16:15-17) The Father revealed it to you.

But then again, when Jesus told that He was going to Jerusalem, to suffer and to die, Peter opened his mouth to speak from himself, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." And Jesus had to answer harshly: "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." (Mat 16:21-23)

But today we are much more interested in another dialog. The one which took place in that fateful evening. When Jesus and the disciples had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away, for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.'..." Peter said to him, "Even though they all fall away, I will not." And Jesus said to him, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times." But Peter said emphatically, "If I must die with you, I will not deny you." (Mar 14:26-31)

This is very familiar story. We know too well how it ended. As Peter followed Jesus to courtyard "one of the servant girls came, and said, "You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus." But he denied it, saying, "I neither know nor understand what you mean." Then he was addressed again and again... "Certainly you are one of them." But he began to swear, "I do not know this man of whom you speak." And immediately the

rooster crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him, "Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times." (Mar 14:66-72)

Can you imagine this situation? Here is Peter, together with his Teacher, brave and loud. 'I will never fall away. I will never leave you. Even if I have to die, I won't deny you. Even if they... those others deny you, I will never... never!' There is no reason to doubt Peter's sincerity and his love and loyalty to his master.

But then things changed.

Soldiers arrived to arrest Jesus, and we again need to give a credit to Peter, even seeing superior strengths, the soldiers and the servants of high priests, he tried to protect his Teacher. He was the one who grabbed the sword and cut off the ear of high priest's servant..

But then Jesus was taken away. Peter and John follow him to the high priests house and there, waiting for what is going to happen, Peter had to face these questions: "You were with Jesus, right? No, no... not me... I don't know this man... I don't know him... I don't know what you are talking about." And the rooster crowed.

What a shame! How embarrassing! How humiliating it was for Peter to realize that all his boldness and noble intentions have disappeared.

Peter thought that he is very strong in his loyalty to Jesus. He was a courageous man, no doubt. But he misplaced his trust. He thought that he himself, by his own good qualities, will do all of this. Because He is Peter, as Jesus called him, a Rock. This was his mistake.

Remember words of the apostle Paul: "Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall." (1Co 10:12) These words refer to us; they refer to all of us.

We tend to think that we can do this, and we can do that, we can confess our faith, we can live the life Christ wanted us to live, or we'd never do this or we'd never do that. No, not me. Then we fail; in eyes of others, and in our own eyes. This is our mistake – we often think that we can do what God expects on our own, that we are so smart, so capable, so educated, so good, so devoted to Christ. Just like Peter.

"Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall."

As if this was not humiliating enough for Peter, after three days he found out that Jesus is risen. The same Teacher and Lord, to whom he promised unconditional faithfulness and loyalty, is risen. He will have to meet Him, after he had denied Him not just once, but three times. How could Peter feel?

We know that Peter had met Jesus several times after His resurrection even before this meeting which is described by John. But from Peter's reaction, as revealed in today's gospel reading, we can assume that up to this time he still hadn't got a chance to make things up with Jesus. This dialogue which we heard today, perhaps, is a continuation of the one Jesus and Peter had on the night when Jesus was betrayed. Remember, 'I will never...'

That explains why Peter was jumping into the water and hurried to get to the shore first. His shame is burning him from inside, he wants to have some time with Jesus, to be able to ask for the forgiveness and to receive it.

However, it seems that Jesus was in no hurry to solve this situation with Peter alone, He waited for the other disciples to arrive. "Come over, Guys, we got some fish here." Only then we have this dialogue.

What is Jesus asking: "Simon, do you love me more than these?" Jesus knows everything. He knew what had happen. He knew it even before it happen. He knew that his brave disciple was scared and helplessly denied him. He knew how Peter had felt these days... Jesus didn't ask: "Peter, did you keep your promise? Did you remain loyal to me?"

Jesus was not asking about what Peter has done or spoken. He asked about Peters heart. "Do you love me?"

Jesus knew that the disciples will fail that night, and He hadn't come to judge them. This happens with us all the time. We promise to reject all the works of the devil, but then we covet things and people, we believe that they will give us joy and peace, meaning, security and status. We lie, we try to justify what we have done wrong, we point to others, we are angry, we despise the teaching of our Lord, we despise His presence and invitation to the Divine service, we see God as the means to the end, as the resource who can help us to get what we want, but not as the object of our ultimate love.

Jesus knows that we'll fail. He is very realistic about us. That's why Jesus is looking for our hearts. "I know you have failed to live the life you were supposed to live, but do you still love me?"

Peter is not boasting anymore when he says: "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." And then once more... and then "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you."

What a wonderful answer! "You know that I love you." Jesus has loved us first, He has showed His love to us, ultimately taking our place on the cross, His love has kindled our hearts, and His never-ceasing love sustains our faith and our love to Him. "You know

everything, Lord, you know that I love you.” Not by my power and strength, but by your mercy, by your Holy Spirit.

Jesus answer to Peter was: ‘Feed my sheep, tend my sheep. I forgive you, I trust you, I restore to you all what you have lost. Regardless of what had happened. Don’t be scared away by what you have done. I want you, and not your works.’

Do you know how could this be that Peter was so brave before Jesus crucifixion and again after His ascension? He went preaching on Pentecost, he boldly confessed Jesus before the rulers and elders of Israel, he healed deceases and did a lot of miracles. All this in the name of Jesus. Without fear. As Church tradition tells, Peter was crucified because He wouldn’t stop giving the testimony of what he had seen, namely, God crucified and risen. When he was brought to be crucified, he asked to be crucified upside down, for he didn’t consider himself worthy to die the same way as his Lord and God.

There is this one detail which makes all the difference. Peter was bold when he was *together with* Christ. He was weak when he was *without* Christ, only with his own will and power. Without Christ he failed shamefully, with Christ he could joyfully endure everything.

Jesus said: “As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15:4-8)

Even if we are as bold as Peter, without Christ we can only deny him. If not with our words, then with our silence, if not by what we do, then by what we leave undone. But when we are with Him, we can bear much fruit.

When we realize that not we, or anything else in this world, but Jesus is the true source of our power, true source of our joy, of our peace, that in Him is our security, dignity and meaning, then we are not afraid anymore. Then we are free gladly receive Christ’s grace. For He is God! God Almighty, Creator of the Universe, giver of all life, and He is our God, and you are His people!

By the way, it was not the case that others wrote about Peter these things. ‘O, you know, Peter did this and that.’ No, this is first and foremost the testimony of Peter himself. When He was with risen Christ, He gladly have his testimony – ‘This much I could do without him, but with Him – anything is possible.’

The question for us remains, - how can we abide in Christ? How can we get to the source of all this power, joy, peace, hope and security?

Jesus promised that whenever two or three will gather in His name, He will be among us. Here, in His church, we are together in His name. Here we can listen to His words and even more, to be joined with Him in the Lord's Supper. This is the source of all life, and eternal God, who Himself is the life, is present here.

Here, in the Church, we can read, discuss, meditate and pray His words. Jesus is the Word of God who was in the very beginning and who is God. He comes to us in His words. He has promised – 'I am with you always, to the end of the age.' (Mat 28:20)

He is not looking for our works, but for our hearts, for our love, for our trust to Him. We'll fail in our life again and again. We will fail to love God as He loves us, and we'll fail to love our neighbour, and we'll look for the joy and hope, the peace and security somewhere else. We are weak, but He is strong.

But He is here to forgive again and again. He forgives and sends us again to serve one another. We pray that when we stand before Jesus and He asks us - "Do you love me?" - we could gladly answer: "You know everything, and you know that I love you. Not by my own power and strength, but by your gracious presence."

Amen.