

# Homily for the Third Sunday of Easter, Year C

May 4, 2025

St. Bavo Parish

Rev. Peter J. Pacini, C.S.C.

*First Reading: Acts 5:27-32, 40b-41 (The apostles rejoice to suffer dishonor for Jesus.)*

*Responsory: Psalm 30 (I will praise you, Lord, for you have rescued me.)*

*Second Reading: Revelation 5:11-14 (A vision of worship around the heavenly throne.)*

*Gospel: John 21:1-19 (Jesus appears at the Sea of Tiberias.)*

Today's gospel features another resurrection appearance by Jesus, but the main character is actually *Simon Peter*. It appears that John has taken a story from early in the Gospel of Luke, which highlighted Peter's call to discipleship, and he has recast the narrative to highlight Peter's leadership of the post-resurrection Church. In the *original* story, the great catch of fish occurs right after Jesus has commandeered Peter's boat and delivered a sermon to the people gathered on the shoreline. At the Lord's command, Peter puts out into the deep water, lowers the nets, even though he and his companions had caught nothing the previous night, and, lo and behold, they catch enough fish to fill two boats nearly to the point of sinking. In both versions of the story, the miraculous catch of fish opens everyone's eyes to see Jesus in a new light. But Peter's reaction is very different in the two versions. In Luke, Peter falls to his knees and pleads, "Leave me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" In John, as the Beloved Disciple exclaims, "It is the Lord!" Peter eagerly jumps out of the boat and swims toward Jesus as fast as he can. Then, at the Lord's command, he *singlehandedly* drags ashore the net full of fish, bringing them to the Risen Lord.

In both versions of the story, the fish represent the people of God, and the net holding them represents the Church. But Peter's role is markedly different at the *beginning* of Luke's Gospel versus the *end* of John's Gospel. In Luke, Jesus is just beginning his public ministry. He tells Peter to follow him and become a "fisher of men." In other words, Peter and his companions are all being summoned to discipleship and evangelization, in support of Jesus' mission. At the end of John's Gospel, the Risen Lord is preparing Peter for a much greater vocation, one that we now refer to as the "Petrine Ministry." Despite the large number of fish, the net is not torn as Peter drags it ashore. Just so, *the Church* would remain united, despite its grand scope and great diversity, because of Peter's pastoral leadership. Every Pope since St. Peter has accepted this same challenge of holding the entire universal Church together and bringing all of God's people safely home to the Lord.

The story which follows further illuminates Peter's future role as Shepherd and Supreme Leader of the Church. Jesus takes him aside for a private chat, which turns into much more than Peter expected. It begins with Jesus asking a simple question: "Simon, son of John, do you love me *more than these*?" The framing of the question already suggests that Jesus has in mind something special for Peter, some new role which will set him apart from the other Apostles. Peter does, in fact, love Jesus very much, so he truthfully answers, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Remembering his betrayal, I wonder if Peter feared that Jesus might reply, "Then why did you deny me three times?" But, that doesn't happen. Jesus seems to accept Peter's

profession of love and simply commands him to, “Feed my lambs.” Crisis averted! But then, Jesus asks a second time, “Do you love me?” If he believed Peter the first time, why does he ask again? Will he bring up the betrayal *this* time? No. After Peter professes his love a second time, Jesus again tells him: “Tend my sheep.”

After this happens a *third* time, it becomes clear to the *reader*, although not to Peter, that Jesus is not asking for his own benefit, but for Peter’s sake. Peter was right, Jesus knew that his love was genuine. He knew that Peter had deeply repented after his threefold denial. But he also knew that Peter needed assurance of the Lord’s forgiveness. Maybe, saying “I love you” to Jesus three times and being told three times to shepherd the Lord’s flock was just what Peter needed to put that awful sin behind him and embrace his new role as the chief *earthly* Shepherd of the Church. Jesus seems to think so, for he predicts that Peter will not falter the next time. He will not run and hide. He will not deny his love for Christ again. Instead, he will face martyrdom with the courage that eluded him earlier, when he had his first chance to die with and for Jesus. Now Peter is ready to follow the Risen Lord in a whole new way – with love, conviction and courage.

We can see those traits in Peter in the opening chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. Peter is not just proclaiming the Risen Jesus to adoring crowds. He’s also standing before the powerful Sanhedrin, the very same people who condemned Jesus for blasphemy and handed him over to the Romans for crucifixion. Yet, this time, Peter is *not* afraid, and neither are his companions. In fact, they *rejoice* that they have been found worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of Jesus’ holy name. They understand that they are now Jesus’ witnesses to the world, and they are eager to carry out their mission.

We, too, are commissioned to be Jesus’ witnesses to the world. We have a *collective* mission as members of the Church, but we also have *individual* calls to serve the Lord in particular ways, suited to our own gifts and talents. Today’s gospel scene can be a wonderful tool for vocational discernment. Whether we’re discerning a *lifetime commitment* – like marriage, religious vows or holy orders – or whether we’re discerning our way through a change from one stage of life to another, we might try putting ourselves into that gospel story. We can start at the charcoal fire, where Jesus breaks bread with us, inviting us to share fellowship with him, as we do at the Eucharistic table and in private moments of prayer. Notice that the Apostles struggle to recognize Jesus, even though their faith assures them that it *has to be* the Lord. Just so, when we worship together and when we pray alone, we *know* that Jesus is present, although we still might struggle to perceive him.

Next, we can take a walk with Jesus and see what happens. How does it feel when he asks, “Do you love me?” How does it feel the *second* and *third* times? Do we find ourselves *doubting* more or feeling more *assured* of our love for the Lord and his love for us? Finally, what does the Lord ask of us in response to our profession of love? What does he want from us *now*, at *this point* in our lives? Whatever he asks, we know that his final words will be both a command and an invitation: “*Follow me.*”