

Third Sunday of Easter, Cycle C  
April 17-18, 2010

*“A Story Within a Story”*

Before this Sunday’s gospel, we last heard about a charcoal fire located in the courtyard of the high priest, where Jesus was being interrogated. It is at that charcoal fire that St. Peter denies the Lord three times. “Surely,” said the maid servant to Peter, “You know this Jesus of Nazareth?” “No, I do not,” spoke Peter. A second time the question was asked of Peter, if he didn’t know Jesus? “I do not,” said Peter. A third time the question is put to Peter, “You know this man, Jesus, don’t you?” A third time Peter denies knowing Jesus. The rooster crows and Peter weeps bitterly. Peter loses his self confidence and loses faith in himself as well as in Jesus. Consequently, Peter is not at the crucifixion and remains in hiding. Peter is, however, at the tomb of the Lord Jesus having run to the burial place with John. But Peter is silent. When Jesus appears to the twelve in the upper room, Peter is not mentioned. Peter’s faith is silent, silent, silent. When St. John, in his gospel, mentions the charcoal fire, located in the courtyard of the high priest in Jerusalem, near the

temple, a story is beginning. A “Semitic inclusion” is a story within a story. St. John is telling us a small story about St. Peter, squeezed within a greater story, the gospel story of Jesus. The Semitic inclusion begins at the charcoal fire. Three questions are proposed to Peter. Peter denies the Lord three times. Time passes. Peter’s story is simple but sadly profound. Peter is altogether mortified, sickened, sad, and without faith in himself and his silence indicates that he cannot muster the once strong faith in Jesus. The story about Peter is relatively short. Silence by Peter and about Peter tells the reader that something is wrong with Peter. Something is helpless and hopeless in Peter.

The “Semitic inclusion,” our “story within a story” concludes with a second charcoal fire and three questions. Jesus poses three questions to St. Peter. Do you love me more than these other disciples? Do you love me, Peter? Do you love me? Each time Peter answers affirmatively. Jesus responds to each affirmative answer with a commission: “Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep.”

If the Lord Jesus did not believe in Peter, there would have been no commission. As it is, in this little story placed with the greater gospel story, Jesus has restored Peter to Faith, Faith in himself (Peter), and Faith in his Saviour (Jesus). Peter who is lost is found. Peter who is hopeless has been restored to belief. Peter who is dying for lack of faith now lives with faith renewed. Peter who was silent and not doing much of anything, except fishing, now has his life turned around. Christ makes him Prince of the Apostles, that is, first of the apostles, and leader of the apostles. In his “primacy” Peter is instructed to feed the lambs, tend the sheep, and feed the sheep. The instruction by Christ has overtones of celebrating the Eucharist and preaching the good news. To no other apostle was such a commission given.

But the meaning of the Semetic inclusion does not end with Peter. As with last week’s gospel reading, there is a personal application to the little story. It is as if the writer of the story, St. John, is calling us aside and explaining that Peter’s faith story is also our faith story. Peter’s restoration to belief and self confidence is our

restoration to belief and self confidence. What he goes through we will go through.

So we pray: *Lord, when we are lost and without faith, find us. When we are without direction and feel hopeless, restore our direction and hope in You. Lord when we are dying for lack of faith and conviction, give us confidence to believe in You, and in ourselves, and help us to share the good news of Christ's everlasting care for us. Lord Jesus, bring us back to faith in You today, and everyday of our lives. Amen.*

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