

Third Sunday of Easter – April 10, 2016

How might we account for the differences we see in Jesus' disciples before and after the resurrection?

Before the resurrection of Jesus, the apostles were dense, confused, and afraid. They misunderstood Jesus' teachings, and misread his intentions. They were clueless during his last desperate hours; they fell asleep when he prayed; they fled when he was arrested; even Peter denied he knew Jesus three times.

After the resurrection, the apostles were so different, that even an unbeliever would be forced to admit an x-factor. After the resurrection, we find the apostles bold and courageous. They did not hide; they preached confidently, without fear, as today's first reading from Acts tells us. Were these the same ones who shied away from any conflict? Yes, indeed, these were the ones who even now rejoiced that "they had been found worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name" (Acts 5:41).

There's an x-factor in play here and it's this: the difference in the apostles from before the resurrection to after the resurrection is the grace and the Holy Spirit given to the apostles by the risen Jesus. Behold the x-factor or Jesus-factor!

What happened? Today's gospel fills in some of the details.

First, we note that this whole scene takes place in a setting of hospitality. It's reminiscent of the Eucharist. Jesus is the host who welcomes and feeds the guests. A charcoal fire with fish and bread was very welcoming to fishermen who had spent the whole night on the sea. Jesus makes it clear, too, that he's a risen human person, not a ghost or an apparition. He builds a fire, prepares a meal, and has breakfast with them.

Next, the large catch of fish is a reminder of the gracious bounty of God. Always with Jesus, is not just enough, there is abundance, even leftovers. 153 fish possibly represent all the known species on earth. No one needs to be excluded. And the net will hold.

Finally the dialogue between Jesus and Peter is an act of hospitality and rehabilitation. Peter denied Jesus three times. And Jesus makes it clear that he knows Peter's failures. Yet, in his characteristic love and mercy, he forgives Peter and restores him to his role of leadership. The three-fold "Do you love me" gives Peter the chance to again reaffirm his love and commitment to Jesus.

The x-factor, or Jesus-factor, plays out in a stunning way in today's gospel. Perhaps Jesus will replay this scene at the Sea of Tiberius with us, too, from time to time. In awareness and prayer, we will recognize Jesus standing on the shore of wherever we are in life. He will be gracious, show us mercy, and strengthen us in the work he has set out for us. We can respond with Peter, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." He will say simply: "Follow me."