

Homily by Fr. Gabor 2019.05.05

I really like the image of the Gospel reading when Peter jumps into the water and swims like mad to Jesus. There is so much power, love and dedication in this simple act of Peter.

In today's Gospel reading we hear Jesus asking Peter three times: Do you love me? It is a strange question, because it is unusual for a man to ask another man such a question. But if Jesus asks this question he must have a good reason for it.

Jesus knows that Peter as a friend (cf. John 15: 15) identifies with Him very strongly; their hearts have become gradually woven together through the huge amount of time they had spent together, through listening to Jesus' teaching as He spoke to Peter's heart, through witnessing His miracles that filled Peter's heart with confidence, awe and wonder, and finally through realising that Jesus loves him more than His own life when He dies on the cross.

Now it is time for Peter to commit himself to Jesus in return, by answering His three questions. Saying those words of love the bond of their heart to heart relationship is strengthened. By asking the same question three times Jesus basically tells Peter, it is not enough that I know you love me, I am inviting you declare it to me; because I have already proved to you how dedicated I am to you, now I am inviting you to dedicate your heart to my heart, for man speaks from the abundance of his heart, as we read in Mt 12: 35.

It is like a long-expanded marriage vow at a wedding ceremony, though not exactly the same, where Jesus the bridegroom, all the time during the three years of His public ministry tells Peter, representing the Church, the bride of Christ: 'I love you till death do us part' (remember Good Friday), and now Jesus is waiting for Peter's response, namely to commit himself to Jesus 'till death do us part' (we know that Peter was also crucified), but between Peter and Jesus that parent-child relationship is now restored which once existed between God and humanity.

Remember when Jesus is baptised the Father tells Him, you are my beloved son, then in turn Jesus tells the disciples through all his teaching, through all he does for them, including his death, 'you are my beloved children' (on one occasion he literally calls them 'my children' cf. John 13:33) and now Jesus wants Peter to declare in words that he loves Him, namely the heavenly Father, whom you can see when you look at Jesus (cf. Jn 14:9).

By putting this profound question to Peter Jesus also wants him to be clear about the most important thing; namely that his relationship to Jesus should not be about what he does for the sake of Jesus, but about his love for Him, so their mutual love is what really matters.

Notice that only after that Jesus refers to Peter's ministry when he says: 'when you grow old you will stretch out your hands, and somebody else will put a belt round you and take you where you would rather not go.'

It is good to know that someone loves you, but when that person even tells you on occasions, it is an affirmation for our hearts and souls. Of course love in action is just as important, but love only in action is not enough, because our soul is nourished mainly through the power of divine words. This is just how we are 'wired up' as human beings. So husbands and wives please do not shy away from occasionally asking from each other: 'Do you love me?' and saying to each other from the heart: 'I love you'.

Our children and grandchildren ask the same question; 'do you love me?' mainly not in words, but through the way they behave, by drawing your attention to themselves, by wanting you to play with them, and in many other ways.

Our hearts ask this most profound question from each other in thoughts or words or in actions not necessarily out of insecurity, but because it is uplifting, it is enjoyable, it is good to hear these words, because when you receive it, it is as if strength flows from one heart into another heart and the other way around and two hearts are renewed in the covenant of charity.