

Three times Jesus asked if Peter loved him; three times Peter said yes. The setting of today's gospel tells us that Jesus was giving Peter the opportunity for reconciliation. There is only one other reference to a charcoal fire in John's gospel. We heard it on Good Friday. After Peter denied that he knew Jesus three times, John tells us that Peter was in the high priest's courtyard with the slaves and guards and they were standing by a charcoal fire to stay warm. The breakfast in today's gospel also took place around a charcoal fire. John wanted us to see the connection between these two fires because Peter needed to be reconciled to Jesus for denying him. That reconciliation happened the three times Peter said "Yes Lord I love you"

Jesus responded to Peter's "I love you's" with a commandment: "Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep." Peter's professed love for Jesus had to be more than just words; that love had to be accompanied by action. As we hear in the Acts of the Apostles, Peter would spend the next several years feeding and tending Jesus' flock by his preaching and his works which helped to build and spread the new church. The end of the gospel gives us a hint at the type of action which would most demonstrate Peter's love for Jesus: Jesus said to Peter, "when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go...He said this signifying by what kind of death Peter would glorify God. And when Jesus had said this, he said to Peter, "Follow me." The true test of Peter's love would come in Rome where he was bound and led to the cross to be crucified.

Peter was the first pope and he died as a martyr. Thirty-one of the first thirty-six popes are traditionally recognized as martyrs; we hear some of their names in the first Eucharistic prayer. The last papal martyr is generally considered to be Pope Martin I, the 74th pope, who died in 655. Sunday marks the end of the official mourning period for the 266th pope, Pope Francis.

Think of Pope Francis' last days, or the last days of St John Paul II, or Benedict XVI and consider them in the light of those words at the end of today's gospel: Jesus said to Peter, "when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." John Paul II was such a strong, outgoing, and active man and a powerful communicator—by the end of his life he couldn't even speak. That was a form of martyrdom. Similarly the witness of Pope Francis, stuck in a hospital for a month and then after his release he kept popping up all over the place—in spite of his poor health and against his doctor's orders—until the last day of his life. John Paul's and Francis' very public embracing of the way of the cross inspired

millions. They were both very public examples of the meaning of redemptive suffering. They offered their pain and weakness to Jesus and Jesus gave that suffering meaning. That's what redemptive suffering is. Jesus gives it meaning when we offer it to him. Doing this doesn't take away the pain; but if we know our pain is going to a better purpose, it helps us endure the pain.

What about Pope Benedict? He chose a different way of embracing the cross, but his way is no less inspiring than John Paul's or Francis' ways. Benedict's way might be the most relatable. He saw that he could no longer carry out the duties of his office in the way they needed to be done so he stepped aside for someone who could do what was required. That takes a great amount of humility. Who here has ever come to the realization that we can no longer do the things we could do when we were in our twenties? Who has ever helped someone decide when it was time to move into an assisted living facility or helped them realize when it was time to give up some of their independence by turning in their keys or driver's license? Those are hard things to deal with. Pope Benedict teaches us that it's okay to say, "I can't do that anymore." It is okay to ask for help. In no way should those things be considered defeats, it's just embracing a new way of living out God's call. It is another way to carry the cross and because it requires such humility from us, it is a way very near and dear to Jesus' heart.

All of us have wounds and weaknesses which present challenges. How do we deal with them? Do we hang on to them with anger and bitterness and let them trap us in the depths of the dark side. Or do we acknowledge them and see how God is trying to work through them to make us the best versions of ourselves. All three of these men embraced the crosses God gave them. In doing so, they gave us examples of how we can deal with the challenges we face ourselves. Hopefully we can carry those crosses with the grace and humility that John Paul, Benedict, and Francis—and above all Jesus—did.

Since this is the end of the official mourning period for Pope Francis, a little bit more about him. Pope Francis inspired us by encouraging us to go out to the margins of society, reaching out to those who feel left out and ostracized by the church. He acknowledged that he himself was a sinner and asked "whom am I to judge?" Near and dear to my heart is how Francis built upon the work of Pope Benedict and John Paul II with regard to care for creation. Francis emphasized a theme from the second Vatican council—which has actually been present in the church since the council—of a more robust role for the laity within the church. All of these teachings—and more—have inspired millions...but there was a catch:

being inspired by his words and professing how much we agree with them (or not) is not enough. We have to put those inspirations into action. Reaching out to the margins—what are we doing to make that happen? Caring for creation—go pick up some trash, plant some trees, drive less. The laity wants to be more involved in the church? Again, there are tons of opportunities available in every parish to get involved. Many parishes—including perhaps this one?—are made up of a lot of demanders and complainers but are very short on doers. In whatever way Pope Francis might have inspired you by his words, DO SOMETHING!, don't wait for someone else to do it for you.

How is Francis challenging us to serve the poor, the isolated, and the abandoned? How is he challenging us to care for our common home, meaning the planet earth? How is he challenging us to care for and build up our common home, meaning our parish community?

Pope Francis gets the (almost) final word. From *Laudato Si* (229): “We must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world, and that being good and decent are worth it.”

Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him. May his soul and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.