

### 3<sup>rd</sup> SUNDAY OF EASTER

It was said of Stalin that if you made one mistake it was like mishandling a detonator – it was the last one you made. We too sometimes write people off because of one bad experience. But which of us would like to be judged on a single moment of our lives ?

After what happened on Holy Thursday night, we might have expected Jesus to write Peter off as being weak, cowardly, and unreliable. Had he done so, most people would have said that he had no other option. After all, Peter was the leader of the apostolic team. He had set a terrible example for the others.

Yet Jesus did not write him off. He didn't even demote him. And there were no recriminations either. Judas' betrayal was a planned thing, and was carried out in a cold, calculating manner. Peter's denial was not a planned thing, and was the result of weakness rather than malice. Jesus, the reader of hearts, knew this.

After breakfast he turned to Peter and said, "Peter, do you love me more than the others love me?" What a strange question to ask. Hadn't Peter proved beyond any shadow of doubt he didn't love him? Yet this is the question Jesus asked of Peter. And Peter said "Lord, you know that I love you". He sincerely meant those words. What's more – they were true. He really did love Jesus.

Jesus knew that there was another and better side to Peter. Strength and weakness can co-exist in the same person. Jesus called Peter forward. He asked him to declare his love in public, since his denial had also been in public.

Jesus kept no record of Peter's sins. But he did ask him to do something for him – to feed the lambs and sheep of his flock, that is, to love and serve his brothers and sisters in the community. That, if you like, was his penance. That is the best way to make atonement for sin, As Peter himself later wrote to the early church community: "Love covers a multitude of sins".

I'm sure that Peter never forgot the fact that he denied Jesus. Yet I doubt that it haunted him the way some people are haunted by their sins. He learned a great lesson from his fall. He learned that he wasn't as brave as he thought he was. It's a far better and more salutary thing to learn a lesson than to be taught a lesson.

When we learn from a fall or a failure, the recalling of it is more likely to evoke gratitude than self-recrimination.

And he also learned a wonderful truth about Jesus. He learned that in spite of his denials, Jesus still loved him. It was a love that brought Peter back to life. It's an amazing experience to be loved in one's weakness and sinfulness. To be loved in one's goodness is perhaps no big deal. But to be loved in spite of one's weakness – that's tremendous. That's what grace is about.

Peter had the guts to get up again after his fall. We can imagine that he made a very good leader. A leader has to be aware of his or her own weakness. The experience rid Peter of pride and blind reliance on his own resources. At the same time it enabled him to understand the weakness of others.

And Peter came good. In the reading from Acts we see how he stood up before the Sanhedrin and bore witness for Jesus. Peter is a great consolation for us. Courage fails us all. In the end, all of us are mere mortals who are inconstant in our beliefs, We must learn to forgive ourselves our momentary weaknesses and failures. We must not judge ourselves or others by momentary lapses, but by commitment over a long time to our beliefs. We're in this for the long haul.