

Brothers and sisters, today's readings remind us that obedience to God and His Word is very essential in our relationship with God and others. In the first reading of the Acts of the Apostles, the writer, Saint Luke, recounts the life, perseverance, growth, and witness of the early Christians after the resurrection of Jesus without any fear. "We gave you strict orders not to teach in Jesus' name, did we not? The apostles courageously replied why they continued to preach. They said, "We must obey God rather than men." Acts 5:29. The apostles' failure to obey the Sanhedrin is obviously not due to pride but due to love of God's law and their own conscience. The apostles humbly and boldly remind their judges that obedience to God comes first. Obedience to God and His Word has priority over every other thing in life.

In the first reading, we see that the apostles were totally **transformed**. Now listen to how they speak before the Sanhedrin: Peter and the apostles said in reply "we must obey God rather than men..." (Acts 5:29). The Resurrection of the Lord Jesus threw a totally different light on the apostles. It led the disciples to a very different understanding of what at first seemed **tragic, disastrous and a failure**. The experience of the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus strengthened the faith of the disciples in the Risen Jesus. The disciples, who were at first paralyzed **with fear** of being arrested as accomplices of Jesus, suddenly made a **complete turnaround and began boldly to proclaim** that Jesus, who died on the Cross, was alive and with them. There is no doubt that their experience of the Spirit of the Risen Lord **gave them that unshakable courage that they were ready even to die for this truth that they proclaimed** (cf. Acts 2:14-41).

Today's Gospel ends with the conversation between Jesus and Peter. Jesus is asking Peter three times if he loves him. While the most common interpretation of this threefold question-answer is that since Peter denied him three times, Jesus asks if he loves Peter three times to balance it all out. The conversation might have gone like this: Peter, do you love me selflessly like God loves his people? Peter answers: I love you like a brother. Jesus responds: Feed my lambs. Again Jesus asks, Peter, do you love me selflessly like God loves his people? Again Peter answers: I love you like a brother. Jesus responds: Be a shepherd to my sheep. Lastly, Jesus asks: Peter, do you love me like a brother. Peter answers, you know, I love you like a brother. Jesus replies: Feed my sheep (Jn.21:17). This creates a little different scenario. At no time does Peter say he loves Jesus selflessly, but each time replies he loves him as a friend. It seems to me that it is very difficult to have the kind of selfless love that Jesus was asking about. The simple commands that Jesus gives after each answer from Peter also change slightly. The first time it is lambs while the last two times he mentions sheep. I like to think of the lambs as the innocent children and the sheep as the adults. Peter is to feed or educate or preach to both the children and the adults, and he is also to tend to the needs of the adults with cures and healings, for example.

Dear friends, why do we have to obey God? First of all, we must obey God to show our gratitude to Him, for His love, mercy and grace. Second, we must obey God to avoid sin. Third, we must obey God to give witness, so that many more would come to believe in Him. Fourth, we must obey God to manifest our love for Him. If we are to obey God to show appreciation for His love. God sometimes may test our obedience and love; God may ask you to do something that doesn't make sense from a human perspective. God may ask you to give up an addiction, to offer forgiveness to someone, to care for a sick person, to assist someone in need, to serve in your church although you feel inadequate. Israel's history proves that obedience brings blessing, and disobedience brings trouble. If we disobey God, we will fail in everything. If we disobey God, our children will follow our example and disobey Him, too. One act of disobedience will lead to more disobedience. This is how sins are formed. Someone might say "one sin won't hurt." This is not true. Many people fall into deep sin and trouble after giving in to a lot of small temptations. Today, you have a choice to obey or rebel against God.

Finally, beloved, a meal is the symbol of togetherness. Peter in today's Gospel experienced the Lord's mercy at the table of fellowship. As we are about to share the Eucharistic meal with the Lord, may we experience his love and mercy. May we always obey God and his Words and blessings will be our portion. Amen!