

Third Sunday of Easter, Cycle B – April 13, 2013

Harriet Burke

Reflections on **Acts 5:27-32, 40-41; Revelation 5:11-14; John 21:1-19**

Slavo & Olivia, congratulations on your 50th wedding anniversary! I thought of both of you as I was preparing for today as it seems there are many connections in the readings today about standing firm in God's word and love and sharing that with others.

We hear in the first reading that the apostles were summoned before the Sanhedrin, which was the legal voice of Israel.

This body had great power over *all* matters of Jewish life, religious, political and social. So it is surprising that the apostles did not seem more intimidated at their second appearance but were able to speak out very boldly about their call to preach the good news even if it got them into trouble or flogged.

Olivia, you embody that boldness by your involvement in the Roman Catholic Womanpriest movement, even taking on the role of our Bishop. Slavo, when I talked with Olivia at the Triduum last week she spoke about your support and encouragement of her as she answered this call. It speaks of your oneness as a couple in helping each other understand and grow in your quest for God in your life.

In the second reading from Revelations, John writes trying to describe *what* oneness with God is like. We may have trouble identifying with ethereal writings and want to dismiss John's writing, but we have all experienced ecstasy in some way or other. It is a gift given to us at peak moments in our lives; when we fall in love, when we experience beauty in nature, a piece of music that lets our spirits soar; during prayer and contemplation.

Those of us who were here last week for the Baptism of Eddie must have felt

something close to ecstasy when we looked at that beautiful child and his fathers.

Ecstasy is so difficult to describe.

Something I read recently suggested that if a married couple, were asked "When were you married? . . . Where were you married?" the answer could come in fairly factual terms but if they were pressed with the question "What does it *mean* to you to be married?" The answer could not be given with just facts. The language isn't there, so we resort to symbols, and images have to be used. We have to say things like, "It feels warm, like being wrapped in a blanket in front of a nice fire on a cold day".... or "It reminds me of the awe I experienced last week when I sat at the beach watching the amazing sunset."

That is what John is grasping for with his images of thousands of angels and every creature on earth, in heaven, under the earth, and the sea, shouting "glory and praise to God. He's trying to tell us about ecstasy. Today we might use other terms, other images to describe the richness and thrill of experiencing our oneness with God.

John the evangelist writes in the gospel to let us know that Jesus is alive and well. He is not a figment of our imagination, but has a body and eats real food and is caring for and feeding the disciples with the barbeque at the seashore.

Then Jesus asks Peter, "Do you love me." I remember several times asking my husband that question after a serious disagreement, when we probably each let the other down. But I don't think that is why Jesus asks this question of Peter three times. Remember, Peter denied Jesus three times on the night of Jesus' arrest. Peter, who swore that Jesus could count on him, even if

others failed him; he, Peter, never would. And yet, he did. Imagine how he felt after this. The reality of his limitations, his humanness, and his cowardice must have struck him at his core. Is that why he didn't recognize Jesus? Was he blinded by his brokenness? It wasn't until the Beloved Disciple said, "It is the Teacher," that Peter got it.

There has been a lot of speculation over the years about who the Beloved Disciple is. Some say John the Evangelist, others John of Patmos. Once I heard Michael Crosby speak and he suggested the Beloved Disciple was each one of us. We are to be the Beloved Disciple for one another – the one who points out the presence of Jesus in our midst.

This exchange of Jesus asking Peter three times, "Do you love me?" allows Peter a new beginning. With each question Peter knows a bit more that he is forgiven and that Jesus trusts he is capable of leadership in the community. It isn't erasing the three denials; but it gives Peter a chance to let go of the past, and to realize that Jesus has heard his sincerity when Peter says "Yes, Master, I do love you".

And for each of us, what would our answer be if Jesus asked us today, "Do you love me?" Right now we might answer "Yes, of course", but what is our answer

when we are dismayed by the pains and difficulties we have to shoulder in our lives. Then do we have limitations on how much or how well we love Jesus? Is our "Yes," a bit conditional?

During the Triduum retreat, at the end of our the Thursday liturgy, as our lectionary was given to you, Olivia, I watched as you held and embraced the Holy Scriptures as tenderly, as any one of us would a babe – not just for a moment, but truly held and caressed the book. I was touched and I thought of all the embraces you and Slavo must have shared over these 50 years - in young love just blooming; as an expression of your passion and desire for one another; in times of grief and sorrow; in moments of compassion; in brokenness and pain.

Those embraces and helping each other grow into your true selves are just a few of the ways you have lived out your vocation of marriage and why marriage is called a Sacrament in our church. Your marriage isn't limited just to a day, an event 50 years ago, but in all the embraces, the ecstasy, fighting, laughing, listening, talking, and being a Beloved Disciple for one another.

When *we* see you doing that, you give us a glimpse of God's love and fill us with hunger to experience oneness with God.

We all wish you the best on your 50th anniversary.