

3rd Sunday of Easter (C)
(Acts 5:27-32.40-41 / John 21:1-19)
10.04.2016
Questions

Children are good at asking questions but not so good at waiting for answers. As a child my younger brother was always asking my father strange questions: who would win if a polar bear and an African lion would fight? As adults, with internet and Wikipedia, we have found a way to appease the child within us and we have grown impatient with unresolved questions.

This morning, in our two biblical readings, we heard four questions. I invite you to revisit them with me to see how they relate to us.

The first question comes from our reading from the Acts of the Apostles. The high priest asks the apostles: "What have you done?" This question is still relevant for us today: what have we done? What are we doing?

The fact that the question comes from somebody who opposes the apostles can speak to us: it is part of our calling to give an account of what we believe, of how we live our faith to those who are not followers of Christ.

We must be open to the questions of a world which is not always ill-intentioned and which can be used by God as a means for us to grow in truth and in love.

It seems to me that the problem is not when journalists, politicians, scientists or people from other religious traditions challenge us and ask questions, the problem is when they stop doing so. Then we are tempted to settle into a cosy atmosphere of self-satisfaction. Moreover if the world does not ask us real questions, then it may be that the Gospel we proclaim has lost its taste and savour, its power to challenge and to change men, women and institutions. The first question addressed to us is: What are we doing?

The second question comes when the Risen Lord asks the disciples: "Have you caught anything, friends?"

This question is a powerful witness to the Lord's love and care for us, a love which takes the initiative, which longs to dialogue with us. After having been betrayed and abandoned by his disciples, Jesus could have remained on the beach, wrapped in his dignity and righteousness, waiting for the disciples to come sheepishly to ask for pardon. Jesus takes the first step towards those whom he considers as his friends and shows an interest in what they are doing. Today the Risen Lord does the same with each one of us, he asks us: My friend, what about your life? What are you up to at the moment?

Everything in our lives, the whole of who we are matters to the Lord. He longs to be part of the unfolding of all that we undertake, all that we do and say.

The Lord asks us questions, not in order to judge us but in order to love us more fully and more truly. To this end, he humbles himself to the point of coming to us and asking us over and over again if we are ready to journey with him.

The third question is present but not asked: "None of the disciples was bold enough to ask, 'Who are you?'" In fact we got the answer to that question earlier in the story when "the disciple Jesus loved said to Peter, 'it is the Lord'".

We may wish to be like the disciples and want to be able to recognise the Lord when he comes to us. In fact, behind the question about Jesus' identity – who is he? – lies this more challenging question: whether or not we are ready to recognise him. In our daily lives do we

open the door of our hearts to the Lord, as and when he comes to us, not as and when we would like him to come?

While we claim to know Jesus, very often we do not recognise him in the poor, the refugees, the migrants, all those who in one way or another do not match our requirements and expectations. Moreover, when we fail to recognise the Lord, we end up, unlike the disciples, asking many questions such as: who are you? Where do you come from? What is your religion, your denomination?

We organise a security check and if the person passes the test, if he or she worships like us, thinks like us, agrees with us, then we see what is possible in terms of developing a relationship. Is this really what Christianity is about?

The last question is the most important one. In fact it is the one which gives meaning to all that has been said by me so far today. Jesus asks Peter: "Do you love me?" The question is not about Jesus alone or about Peter alone but about how Peter relates to Jesus. And it is the same question that Jesus asks us every day of our lives: do you love me? Do you relate to me at all?

Like Peter, our failures and weakness, should not prevent us from answering: "Lord you know everything, you know I love you". The sure ground on which we can stand in order to give this answer is not our own strength and abilities, nor is it our self-confidence; no, the sure ground which allows us to be bold enough to say that we love the Lord is his love for us, his unconditional and perfect love. We do not have to worry, the Lord knows that our love is not perfect, that it is all too human. The problem is not that we are sinners and that he is the Lord, but whether or not as sinners we love the Lord.

At the end of this tour of the questions that we found in today's Scripture, as communities and as persons, it is important for us to keep on seeking answers, but maybe more important still, it is necessary for us to ask questions and to know that we cannot have all the answers. Questioning is one of the driving forces for our growth in humanity, in faith, hope and love.

However we should be careful to take the time to discern what the real and life-giving questions are. We have to know where to channel our energy and passion for the best.

Allow me to conclude with an advice from an Anglican canon: "At Easter, don't ask, 'Do I understand the atonement?' Don't even ask yourself, 'Have I gone to church enough?' No don't ask those questions at Easter. Ask yourself instead whether you are a lover. Ask yourself whether you can love much." (Melvyn Matthews)