

Homily for the 5th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Did you ever eat crow before? No – me neither, at least not literally!

Figuratively, on the other hand, that expression means something completely different, doesn't it? If you've never heard of that expression before "to eat crow" – it basically means you get humbled real quick by having been proved wrong in a particular situation after taking a real strong stand to the contrary. The expression was probably first used in the 1870s, coming from the fact that crow is presumably foul-tasting in the same way that being proved wrong can be just as hard to swallow, emotionally!

So, how about if I ask that question again – Did you ever eat crow before? Maybe your answer has changed this time around! I remember one time I was talking with a student at the Newman House up at Bloomsburg University (where I was before coming here to IHM) about cheese – of all things. I took the position that American Cheese is in fact cheese – did you ever see those creamy lines in a slice of Land O Lakes white American from the deli counter? And yet, the student insisted that American cheese was not truly cheese at all. In fact – he was right, after we took the matter to Wikipedia to settle, where it confirmed that according to law, American cheese "may not be legally sold as "cheese", and must be labeled as "processed cheese"" or the like. A fine example of eating crow!

Well, I bring this up because I believe St. Peter in today's Gospel also endured a case of eating crow himself. Now, as you may know, Peter and his brother, Andrew, were fishermen by trade. So were some of the other Apostles, like the brothers, James and John. That was their trade – it was their livelihood. Now apparently, Peter and his friends had been out fishing all night long on the Sea of Galilee, but had caught nothing. And yet despite this, Jesus instructs Peter to “put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch”. What do you do? The Master is telling you to do something in front of a crowd so big, He had to get into a boat just to be able to see and teach them all. But, on second thought, He's not a fisherman – He's a carpenter by trade – what does He know about this? And yet Peter – I imagine quite hesitatingly, maybe even with a little grinding of the teeth – says, we professional fishermen have worked hard all night and caught nothing, “but at *your command* I will lower the nets.”

And then what happens next? The Scripture says, “When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish and their nets were tearing.” It was right then and there that St. Peter was made to eat crow! What would your reaction have been if someone told you to do something you just “knew” wouldn't work out like he or she said it would? Would it be thankfulness, maybe gratitude? Or would it be more like embarrassment, pride, resentment?

But St. Peter shows us the example of how to handle it. In utter and profound humility, he acknowledged his doubt, his lack of trust in the Lord – and therefore his wrong-doing. He even says, “depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.’ For astonishment at the catch of fish they had made seized him and all those with him...” But Jesus’ response is oh so loving and tender. Jesus is so good. He doesn’t chide or embarrass Simon Peter, rather He tells him, “Oh, don’t worry Peter – it’s OK. You’ve been a fisherman up till now, but that’s not what I’m calling you to in life anyway. No, I want you to be a “Fisher of Men” – catching wandering souls and bringing them to me for mercy, and love, and salvation”. And Peter – probably just melts – and the last words of the passage are: “they left everything and followed him.”

Wow! But, aren’t we sometimes ourselves like the St. Peter, who was made to eat crow? Don’t we at least subconsciously think sometimes that when it comes to what God wants of **us** in life: “That’s all well and good that you have a plan for me, God. But you don’t live in this dog-eat-dog world. Jesus may have lived 2,000 years ago when going from a fisherman to a fisher-of-souls wasn’t such a big switch. But now, going from what society says is successful to what you say is successful is just so hard.” Don’t we question God to know what’s best for us in our lives in this world, just like St. Peter the fisherman did?

But the truth is that God does know. He knows this world – He created it. He knows His plans for us – He knitted us together in our mother’s womb. He even knows us better than we know ourselves – He’s loved us from all eternity.

My friends, God the Father is all ready to lead us and guide us in His ways. Our task though is just like that of St. Peter: to humble ourselves before Him; to admit our pride, our sinfulness, and our weaknesses; to repent of our sins by coming to Confession; and to be like Peter, whose first instinct was to say, “depart from me Lord”, but then because of the great love and mercy He experienced in Jesus, he chose to leave everything and follow Him. As we approach Lent this coming week, what will you do?