

May 4, 2025 – Third Sunday in Easter

**LOVE, ACT AND FOLLOW by Pastor Julio Romero**

**Gospel: John 21:1-19**

Alfred Souza once said,

“For a long time, it had seemed to me that life was about to begin—real life. But there was always some obstacle in the way, something to get through first, some unfinished business, time still to be served, a debt to be paid. Then life would begin. At last, it dawned on me that these obstacles were my life.”

This insight mirrors what we see in our Gospel story. The resurrected Lord needed a moment with Peter. Before ascending into heaven, Jesus had unfinished business—not with the world at large, but with Peter personally. These matters concerned Peter’s own conscience, his standing among the disciples, and his future as an apostle and messenger of the Good News.

Remember, Jesus had named Peter the "Rock," the cornerstone upon which His Church would be built. But after Peter denied Jesus three times and abandoned Him at the crucifixion, he likely felt he had disqualified himself. There is no doubt that Peter wrestled deeply with guilt and internal struggle.

Perhaps his decision to return to fishing was his way of coping—a retreat to familiarity, an escape from the pain and shame of his past. Fishing may have served as his therapy, a way to distance himself from the memories of his failure.

But if Peter was stuck in those moments—arrest, denial, crucifixion—he needed a new beginning. He needed to press the reset button in order to fully become the "Rock" Jesus had called him to be.

Jesus knew this. He knew Peter's struggle. And so, He came to release him from the weight of his past.

How did He do it? Through love. By inviting Peter to follow Him once again. Jesus asked Peter three times, “Do you love me?” And three times Peter responded, “Yes, Lord, I love you.”

Each time, Jesus replied, “Feed my sheep,” or “Tend my sheep.”

It wasn't easy. Peter was already hurting. When Jesus asked the third time, the Gospel says Peter was grieved. Surely, the question echoed the pain of his three denials—the very place where he had been stuck. But in that moment, Peter was also being invited out of his shame and back into his calling.

At the end of the passage, Jesus says once more, “Follow me.”

And in that moment, life began again for Peter. No more obstacles. No more shame. No more pain. He experienced the power of forgiveness and the depth of Christ's love—love that set him free to become who he was meant to be.

And remember: before Peter ever said, “I love you,” the Lord had already loved him.

Isn't that what we all long for when we are stuck in the past or hoping for a new beginning?

Yes—we long to feel loved. We want to turn the page, to remove the burdens that keep us from peace and purpose. We crave a fresh start.

So, what is required of us as Christians to experience that new beginning?

The first thing this Gospel says is to love Jesus, the second is to serve and take care of our neighbours and the last one is to follow Him.

It's remarkably close to what the prophet Micah once said:

“What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

To act, to love, and to follow—these are the marks of a true disciple. And this is what should matter most in our relationship with God.

But the problem today is that we're often more concerned with the external—the superficial. We give power to things that don't matter in the grand scheme of life, yet they influence our behavior and relationships. They distract us from what truly matters.

In Jesus' encounter with Peter, we are invited to redirect our gaze to the internal—to love. When Peter says, “Yes, Lord, I love you,” we are reminded that to love Jesus means to love and care for those around us.

One more powerful lesson from this story is how Jesus comes to us. He came to the disciples where they were—on the shore. He comes to us, too, asking, “Do you love me?”

He comes into our homes, asking us, “Do you love me?” If our answer is “Yes,” Jesus will say, “Then love your family and take care of them.”

I can hear the Spirit of our Lord coming into our churches, asking us, “Do you love me?” If our answer is “Yes,” we will hear Him say, “Then take care of all your friends and fellow Christians.”

At work, I can hear the Lord asking us, “Do you love me?” If our answer is “Yes,” He will say, “Then look after your fellow workers.”

This is what matters to God: the heart, the internal life. The external things—skin color, clothing, status—are distractions. What matters is a heart that knows Jesus’ love and has been freed by His forgiveness.

Jesus hasn’t stopped asking the question: “Do you love me?”

I believe our answer is “Yes.”

Now, let’s go into the world and live out that love.

But first, let’s begin here—where we are now.

**Amen.**