

3rd Sunday of Easter, Cycle C: 18 April, 2010

If you are a sports fan, you're probably aware that the NBA Playoffs have begun and it seems to me that they will continue till mid-October before a champion is finally declared, but I digress. During this basketball playoff marathon, it's not unusual to witness a violent clash between players and more recently between fans and players. And after the smoke has cleared, one of the combatants will say something similar to "he disrespected" me. Now no one likes being disrespected or "dissed" as it is shortened in today's urban playground verbiage. In fact, disrespect is one of the reasons that people dueled to the death in the early history of the United States. Alexander Hamilton and even eventual president, Andrew Jackson, were two (2) of the better known duelists who fought to protect their honor. For the record, Jackson survived three (3) duels while Hamilton and later Hamilton's son died in duels. And nations in their diplomacy or lack thereof, will attempt to "push" another countries "buttons" to illicit a response to a perceived "disrespect".

But, what do we hear in our 1st Reading from the Acts of the Apostles after the Apostles were dragged before the Sanhedrin? "So they left the presence of the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they had been found worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name." It appeared that the Apostles were willing to suffer at the hands of others, but why?

Well, one clue comes from the mouth of Jesus in today's Gospel. After asking Peter three (3) times, "Do you love me?" Jesus responds with some pretty stout words: "when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone will dress you and lead you where you don't want to go." This of course was an allusion to the type of death that Peter would suffer for his faith. However, Jesus is also speaking to us and that should come as no surprise.

The early Christians understood this in a most profound way. They clearly understood that every Christian could potentially be led to a place they may not have wanted to go, namely, a martyr's death, even death on their own cross. Yet, they accepted this ultimate form of disrespect, martyrdom, as a sign of their faith. They were prepared to take their place in the Paschal Mystery where there was to be no joy without sorrow, there would be no accomplishment without hard work, no love without sacrifice and there would be no growth without letting go of the old and familiar. You will also remember that even Jesus pleaded for the "cup" to pass him by, but it didn't.

Now, none of us wants to suffer and we certainly don't go out of our way searching for it, because we know that somehow suffering will eventually find us. It just seems to be part of our human nature and absolutely part of the Christian experience. We also know that as witnesses to our Catholic faith, there will be elements of our religious practices that will bring us scorn from others around us, even members of our own faith tradition. There are also many elements of our Tradition that other will find as unimportant, such as the real presence of Christ in our sacrament of Communion. Then there are aspects of our lives that we live as Catholics that is just plain confusing to some people. But, that's okay! It's truly okay, because every time we suffer, we will be given an opportunity. We can let the occasion at hand hold us back, perhaps shatter our spirits or bring us down. Or, we can recognize it as an opportunity to rise to the occasion and be the person that God created us to be. For us, suffering is never the end of the story there is always more.

So, when we find ourselves, like Peter, being led to places we don't want to go, we can see them as mere stops along our journey of faith. It is a journey that will go much further than our momentary suffering. So just remember, hold onto that "ticket" of faith that you've spent a lifetime of securing, because it's going to get you a seat on the "glory train" that is headed to the "promised land." Can you say, Amen? Amen.