

### **Easter III**

Cycle C, 5.5.19

Acts 5:12-16/Revelation 1:9-13,17-19/

John 20:19-31

#### **A BOLD CONFRONTATION – A COURAGEOUS REPONSE**

Father Greg Boyle is a Jesuit whose vocational call has taken him in some unusual directions. As a young Jesuit in 1986 he was appointed pastor of Dolores Mission Church in the Boyle Heights neighborhood of Los Angeles. It's one of the worst gang areas in the country. Seeing the escalating problems and unmet needs of gang-involved youth, Fr. Greg and the community developed positive alternatives. They established an elementary school, a day care program, a community organizing project and finding legitimate employment for young people. *Homeboy Industries* was born.



In the midst of the civil unrest in Los Angeles in the beginning of the 90's, Fr. Greg launched the first business: Homeboy Bakery, whose mission was to create an environment that provided training, work experience, and above all, the opportunity for rival gang members to work side by side. Today Homeboy Industries' nonprofit enterprises has expanded to include all kinds of creative businesses to employ former gang members: Homeboy Bakery, Homeboy Silkscreen, a Diner, a Farmers Markets, Homeboy Plumbing and Homegirl Café. Homeboy Industries, is now the largest gang intervention, rehabilitation and re-entry program in the U.S.

In an interview, Fr. Boyle was asked about his vocation as a priest and Jesuit – how he came to do what he's doing. He said: *Well, I was educated by Jesuits, so for me, they were always sort of this combo burger of absolute hilarity and joy and the most fun people to be around, and they were prophetic. This was during the time of the Vietnam War, and we'd laugh a lot and I'd go with them to protesting the war. The combination of the prophetic and the hilarious, I loved that. So I thought, boy, I'll have what they're having, you know. So that's what I did. It's not very deep, but that's kind of it – the reasons you join an organization like the Society of Jesus aren't the reasons you stay, but that kind of was my initial hook.* Greg's motivations have changed. He said: *I've learned everything of value really in the last 25 years from precisely the people who you think are on the receiving end of my gifts and talent and wisdom, but quite the opposite. It's mutual.* He gains from his homies as much as he gives to them.

I thought that Greg Boyle's insight about his own Jesuit vocation can shed some light on the gospel, on the importance of Peter's role among the apostles and in the early Church, and on our own vocations as followers of Jesus and members of the Church. *The reasons you join an organization aren't the reasons you stay.* I think of my own vocation as an Oblate of St. Francis de Sales. When I entered the novitiate back in 1968, at the tender age of nineteen, I had lots of youthful idealistic notions about what it meant to be a priest and join a religious order. I even liked the black cassock I wore back then (but haven't worn in fifty years). Underlying all of those reasons and unknown to me consciously at the time was a desire to get out of Toledo, Ohio, to be free of a dominating household

matriarchy and to experience life beyond the narrow confines of a Polish Catholic ghetto. Obviously, many years later, those motivations have changed; my desires have been tempered and purified by time and experience... by the people I've served and by the grace of God.

What about you and your vocation? What reasons motivated you to get married or to become a teacher, or a physician or a corporate executive or to work in a particular industry or company? And how have your initial reasons for joining your organization (whatever it might be) changed over the years? Last summer I dropped in at a friend's thirtieth birthday party. Boy, did I feel out of place being more than twice the age of most of the attendees. I just couldn't get into the beer pong game which was well under way by the time I arrived. There were a lot of thirty-something couples, with little babies and toddlers in tow. A few parents were in one corner or another changing a diaper, chasing a run-away two year-old or comforting a crying baby. I thought to myself: *"Did you know what you were getting into when you said 'I do' on the day you were looking story-book perfect in your bridal gown or black and white tuxedo?"*



Those young couples will have many more seismic shifts in their vocations as time and fate unfold for them. Like Father

Boyle said: *The reasons you join an organization aren't the reasons you stay.*

In today's gospel Peter's faith is put to the test and his motivations purified by the risen Lord as he's confronted with the implications of following Christ. He had to answer for himself: Why did I follow Jesus in the first place? Was it for some kind of power? (Recall the disciples asking Jesus if they should call down fire to destroy an unbelieving town?) Was it for approval or advancement? (Recall when Peter said: *'Lord, we've left everything to follow you!'* In other words, 'What's in it for me?') When Jesus is finished grilling the fish and bread for the seaside breakfast, it's time for him to grill Peter.



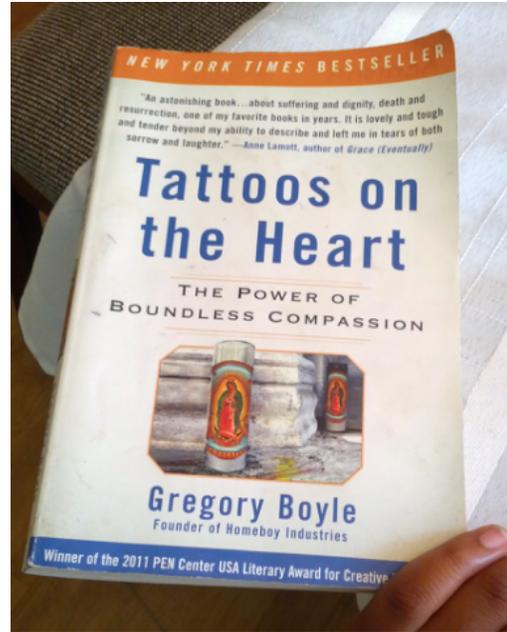
When Jesus questions Peter three times about his loyalty, the gospel writer gives us a rare detail about Peter's emotions. *"Peter felt hurt because Jesus said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?'"* I suppose he felt two times were justified, but not three. Of course, he didn't limit himself to denying Jesus twice. One writer calls this conversation "Peter's rehabilitation and commissioning." "Do you love me?" and, if so, "Feed my sheep."

Peter's reckoning doesn't end with being grilled by Jesus. He also is subjected to a grim vision of his own future, of a time when he, like Jesus, will be led where he doesn't want to go and will die a martyr's death. This is the way of anyone who is willing to follow Christ and be his disciple in the world. To love at all is to be vulnerable, to open yourself to an unknown and

unpredictable future. To give yourself to another means that your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly broken. The alternative is to live in a safe zone, to wrap up your heart with hobbies and little luxuries, avoiding all entanglements and locking it up in a casket of selfishness.

After the death of Jesus the disciples went back to what they knew best – their daily work of fishing. They may have even been trying to hide, lest something terrible happen to them as well. But going home to hide from Jesus isn't an option for us any more than it was for Peter. For one thing, Jesus has forgiven us for whatever we have done or not done in the past. So there's no need to hide. For another, we can run, but we can't hide. He knows where we live. He stands on the shores of our lives. He stands at our front doors. And when we answer his knock, he has just two questions for us: "Do you love me?" and, if so, "What are you going to do about it?"

Out of his love for Christ and his response to Jesus' call, Father Greg Boyle has helped to transform the hopeless lives of many lost teens into productive communities of service and mutual support. One of the programs he began is a tattoo-removal program, a painful process that can take anywhere from three to forty treatments. Yet, having the wrong tattoo can make a gang member a target and cost him his life.



There is an invisible tattoo on the heart of everyone who follows Our Lord.

It too can cost us our life.

It's the mark of the Holy Spirit given to us in baptism that allows us to answer Jesus' bold question:

*Do you love me?*

God's grace allows us to say with Peter:  
*Yes, Lord, you know that I love you!*

The only thing left for us now is to go out...

tend his lambs...

feed his sheep.

*John Kasper, OSFS*