

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

3rd Sunday of Easter | For Sunday, May 5th, 2019

Freed from Fear ... Filled with Love

Written by Angie Windnagle

Acts 5:27-32, 40b-41

Revelations 5:11-14

John 21:1-19 or 21:1-14



There was a moment in my life a couple years ago when I struggled with excessive worry and anxieties, creating an attitude where fear ruled most of my decisions rather than trust in God. After reflecting on this, I went to Confession, ready to be freed from worry and the lack of trust. While there, the priest asked me an utterly simple question: what is the opposite of fear? Convinced it was a trick question, I stumbled on my words a bit and finally responded, "Trust." Clearly, the opposite of fear was trust, I reasoned. After all, it's what I don't have when I worry, right?

I'll never forget the impact on my soul when the priest said, "No, the opposite of fear is *love*." How many times have I prayed with 1 John, reading nearly those exact words, "*There is no fear in love.*" (1 Jn 4:18). Apparently not enough! To be freed from fear means to be filled with love.

The readings this weekend echo this same truth as we journey through the Easter season. Love trumps all fear, giving the disciples of Christ holy boldness to proclaim his word to the ends of the earth. And that love is personal, inviting, and empowering.

In Acts, what strikes me most is that the Apostles went away rejoicing that they could suffer for the name of Christ. So often when I consider what it takes to be a true follower of Jesus, I think of a certain kind of courage where you do the right thing even if you're deathly afraid. Now don't get me wrong, certainly the saints and followers of Christ exhibit heroic courage. Perpetua, Felicity, Isaac Jogues, Miguel Pro ... the list goes on. We have libraries filled with stories of lived virtue and courage, proving it is a necessity for sainthood. But before we can act in courage, it seems we need to be in love. To act boldly, we have to know intimately the Person we are willing to die for, just as He knows us and died for us. Love is a prerequisite for the Christian life lived well.

This week, as I read the headlines about the [shooting at a California synagogue](#), my thoughts lingered on the same theme. Without love, there's no power to be brave. The woman who was able to take bullets to protect the rabbi — and the rabbi who

was able to finish his sermon after being shot — all speaks of the power of love. To rejoice in suffering, and even to accept and indirectly choose suffering when it is inevitable, is the example we see in the readings this weekend. And it's a kind of holy boldness we are all called to.

In the Gospel, we also see the divine mercy in action and the depth of love God has for His children, reminding us that we love because He first loved us. When Jesus calls to the disciples, they respond. Jesus still calls to us today, and we are invited to respond. We see how merciful and tender the heart of Jesus is during the exchange with Peter. Just days ago, we read of Peter's denial of Christ. Three times he denied Christ, and three times he's prompted to proclaim his love to our Lord. Our God doesn't just love us generally, as a whole. He loves us individually and personally, as we see with Peter. Can we even begin to imagine the level of healing from being able to claim Christ three times after denying him three times? It's an incredibly personal encounter and calling, giving Peter the healing and grace to accept his new role of leading the early Church.

Finally, what is most striking about the readings this weekend is that the final aim is not to spur us on to live just an optimistic lifestyle now that the sorrow of the passion has passed. We don't sing our alleluias and declare victory because the suffering is gone, but because the fear no longer has power over us. Like the heroic woman at the synagogue, we are spurred on by love to march onward through this perilous journey, knowing our inheritance as children of God and victors in the risen Lord.

Jesus appeared to the disciples and called on them to cast their nets. He is still calling each of us today to do the same. He calls us to respond not in fear, but in love, ready and willing to catch souls through our work and prayer. Let us respond as the disciples did, not naive to any suffering that may be ahead, but rather embracing all God sends us that is filled with the fire of His love.

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PRAYER

God our Father,
may we look forward with hope to our resurrection,
for you have made us your sons and daughters,
and restored the joy of our youth.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son,
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

— *from Liturgy of the Hours, Evening Prayer*