

**3 Easter – Year A – May 11, 2011 - Homily**  
**Acts 2:14a, 36-41; Psalm 116:1-3, 10-17; 1 Peter 1:17-23; Luke 24: 13-35**  
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Well, it's great to be home, and good to be back with you all tonight. For those who didn't know where I was, I've just returned from eight days at CREDO (all in capital letters), which is a clergy renewal and discernment conference and retreat. One major focus of the conference was to provide information, time and space to reflect on four aspects of our ordained ministry: identity, discernment, practice and transformation within the context of our spiritual and vocational health, as well as our physical and financial health. Overall, it was an excellent experience. I met a lot of truly delightful folks, and I did develop a CREDO plan.

For most of us, the word credo (small case) means the things we believe, like the doctrines of our faith. This extends into how we live out our faith in the rich contours of our own spiritual lives and vocation, within whatever limits we may or may not face from a physical or financial perspective. Tonight's reading from 1 Peter also invites us to consider our credo for living more deeply. We're already grounded in our identity as beloved children of God. We're members of Christ's Body. We put our faith into action, and experience the ongoing transformation of the Holy Spirit. Let's see how Peter develops these aspects of Christian life and mission in his letter.

One of Peter's overarching themes is about growing in holiness. In verses 15 and 16 of this chapter we read, "be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'" In other words, whatever and whoever belongs to God becomes holy by association. Without losing this call and gift towards holiness, we now hear a focus on Christian living and character. Peter effectively emphasizes that our character is shaped by our understanding of the world we assume to be real. He begins with an if-then type statement. "***If*** you invoke as Father the one who judges all people impartially... [***then***] live in reverent fear during the time of your exile". We are also grounded in a tradition of holiness by virtue of our identity as Christ's own, as children of God, whose name we invoke as Father. This indicates the kind of relationship we ought to expect with God. It's personal and intimate, involved, caring and loving. Since God is holy, and we're merely in the process of growing in holiness, we also live in great awe and reverence of God. I say awe and reverence because it captures the essence of the Biblical meaning of the word "fear" rather better than the modern understanding of fear as an emotional response of terror or dread. Other indicators that we are grounded in a broad tradition come from the words Peter uses. For example, exile invokes the history of God's redeeming acts in bringing the Israelites safely out of exile in Egypt and into the Promised Land. Being redeemed by Christ reminds the whole community of all the loving acts that God has done for us, and where our faith and inheritance truly reside.

Remember, if our character is shaped by the world we consider real, then Peter wants us to accept that the real world equates to life in the Body of Christ, our rebirth and salvation in Christ through the waters of Baptism, and our love for, and commitment to God. As for the world that does not yet know Christ, or our lives outside of Christ before we were born anew in Him, they are not as authentic as our new life in Christ. We are part of a new family in Christ, and a new world in which we can fulfill our part in God's plan by expanding the kingdom of God here and now. To stress the point, Peter talks about worldly inheritance as perishable things like silver or gold. In fact, our true inheritance is everlasting, imperishable, a gift of God in Christ Jesus through His

death and resurrection. The challenge that Peter lays before us is to live in the world now as distinctive and identifiable children of God. That takes a great deal of integrity and authenticity to pull off, and Peter has a definite take on what that looks like.

While I was away these last few days, one day the cafeteria served jambalaya. One of the other participants was having a hard time choosing whether to go with the jambalaya or with the other option of the day. As more and more people passed her by, easily making a choice, she kept looking into the pot and finally turned to me and said, “You know that’s not real jambalaya.” I was hungry and let it pass, but I really wish now that I’d asked her what she meant. Was it that the ingredients were not authentic to the jambalaya recipe she knew? Was it that it couldn’t be real jambalaya unless it was made in Louisiana? Was it missing one of the trinity of vegetables: onions, celery or green pepper? Perhaps it was the meat or shrimp content that was array. Or was it bothering her that it was Creole style rather than Cajun style? Given the fact that I personally opted for the other menu item, and didn’t pursue the conversation, I guess I’ll never know! But the point has stuck with me, along with other things that were shared during CREDO. From a spiritual perspective, when we don’t live out our faith with integrity and authenticity, people really do notice. That applies to all of us, not just clergy, but everyone who invokes as Father the one who judges all people impartially, and the one who loves the whole world so much that He gave His only Son so that we might not perish.

Back to Peter. In accepting and receiving Jesus Christ as our savior, our souls are purified in that turning, that obedience towards God. Obedience reflects the divine-human covenant, such that in trusting and giving ourselves to God in Christ Jesus, we belong to Him, and therefore we’re called to live into the character of God. The number one characteristic of God is love, and so Peter speaks of genuine mutual love for one another. He also speaks of growing in love. As Martin Luther says, true love is not a work that turns God to us, but a fruit of our turning to God in trust, in response to God’s love in Christ Jesus our Lord. It’s such a joy to love God, because God is so good, and has done so much for each of us. It’s much harder to love others as easily as we love God, because we are way less than perfect and good. We are frequently as changeable as the weather, opinionated, stubborn, and sometimes downright unlovable in all kinds of ways. So what missing ingredients can we discern, pray for, or develop in our own lives that make us more real in our own love? Where do we have to be in our spiritual lives to be more authentic in sharing God’s love with others? How hungry are we? How much do we desire to deepen our knowledge and love of God? There are always other choices on the menu of life. We just need to remember that within our credo some choices are more authentic than others are.

Amen.