

05/14/17 5 Easter A

-- Many times, when we read a scripture passage at Mass, what comes just before the beginning of that passage is crucial to understand it. That seems to be true about today's gospel.

-- It begins at the beginning of Chapter 14. Jesus is speaking to the apostles on the night before his death. At the end of Chapter 13, he had told them that they could not go where he was going.

-- Peter had told Jesus he would lay down his life for him. As was typical of him, he spoke before he thought. Jesus then told Peter that he would deny him three times before the cock crowed the next morning. And we know what happened soon after that.

-- Peter let Jesus down. And so do we, many times. I have promised God things I could not deliver. And, if we're honest, we all have at times.

-- Last year, on the Holy Land tour, our small group combined with a larger group from west of St. Louis. Their pastor Fr. Phil had an interesting story.

-- He was originally from Western PA around Erie. He'd been ordained in 1981, but after several years he left the ministry to get married. He had a son, but after a number of years, the marriage broke up.

-- Sometime later, he felt a call to come back to priesthood. But it was difficult. He could not go back into the same diocese. And he had to wait until his son was of age. But he persevered, and eventually was accepted by St. Louis.

-- He has now been a pastor for about eight years and, by all accounts, is loved by his people. He had let the Lord down, just as Peter had. But God restored Peter, so he became the head of God's people. And God restored Fr. Phil as well.

-- Jesus begins today's gospel by telling us *Do not let your hearts be troubled*. He calls us to put our faith in him, because he wants to restore us to new life. He knows our brokenness, but he looks beyond it.

-- In our second reading, we hear Peter some years later speaking to newly baptized Christians. The one who was broken himself assures them that God has called them to be a chosen nation, a royal priesthood.

-- Peter knows the darkness they have been called out of. He had been there himself. He had let down the Lord. But the Lord picked him up, and allowed him to be his instrument to do God's work.

-- God did that with great saints like Augustine, who had good intentions, trying out many ways of life... and attempting to experience all the pleasures of life as well. In the end, they did not satisfy him. Only the Lord did.

-- He's done the same with people like Fr. Phil Krill in his complicated journey of priesthood. God restored him to his life and ministry.

-- Jesus can do the same for you and me today, broken as we often are. Yes, he grieves over our failures, but he still restores us to new life.

-- The specific ways that happens are as varied as are the people of God. After all, Jesus says *In my Father's house there are many dwelling places... if I go to prepare a place for you I will come back again and take you to myself.*

-- We often hear this passage at funerals, and it is comforting, knowing that none of us is perfect. God loves us anyway, and wants to restore us to the fullness of life.

-- The first question that remains is: Are we willing to admit our brokenness and allow God to restore us? The second question is: Are we willing to allow God to use us, imperfect as we are, for the advancement of his kingdom?