

Day 41. Discernment

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Let us now turn our attention to them, to the apostles. Jesus chose them and at his call, they left their boats, their nets and their homes and so on... The anointing of the Word changed their lives. With great enthusiasm, they followed the Master and began to preach, convinced that they would go on to accomplish even greater things. Then came the Passover. Everything seemed to come to a halt: they even denied and abandoned their Master.

We should not be afraid. We are courageous when reading about our life and our failures, even denying and abandoning the Master, as Peter did. They came to grips with their own failure; they realised that they had not understood him. The words uttered by Peter in the courtyard of the high priest following the Last Supper – “I do not know this man” (Mk 14:71) – were not only an impulsive attempt at self-defence, but an admission of spiritual ignorance. He and the others perhaps expected a life of triumph behind the Messiah who drew crowds and worked wonders, but they failed to understand the scandal of the cross, which caused their certainties to collapse. Jesus knew that, on their own, they would not have succeeded, and so he promised to send them the Paraclete.

It was precisely that “second anointing”, at Pentecost, that changed the disciples and led them to shepherd no longer themselves but the Lord’s flock.

Here is the conflict to resolve: Am I a pastor of the Lord’s flock or of myself? The Spirit is there to show us the way. It was that anointing with fire that extinguished a “piety” focused on themselves and their own abilities. After receiving the Spirit, Peter’s fear and wavering dissipated; James and John, with a burning desire to give their lives, no longer sought places of honour (cf. Mk 10:35-45) which is careerism; the others who had huddled fearfully in the Upper Room, went forth into the world as apostles.

The Spirit changes our heart and points it in a different direction.

Homily, Holy Thursday Chrism Mass