

When I get up here on Sundays I always want to say something that will really help you. So today I will talk about sin and guilt and fear. It sounds like I'm barking up the wrong tree – right? Well give me a chance. I'm going to start with Peter, St. Peter.

Peter said some pretty remarkable things to Jesus. He promised Jesus that he would never desert Him. He cried out "You are the Christ the Son of the Living God," and "Lord save me."

But then when crunch time came on the night before Jesus died, he denied Jesus 3 times, "Woman I do not know Him", he declared. Later when confronted by a person in the mob following Jesus he declared, "My friend, I am not [a follower of Jesus]". And a third time he declared, "My friend, I do not know what you are talking about." At a most crucial moment Peter denied Jesus 3 times.

In today's Gospel Jesus takes Peter aside. Peter's triple denial of Jesus, his triple sin weighs heavily upon him. As he faced Jesus his guilt was overwhelming. The words of Jesus cut deeply into him. But then Peter was free, his sin was forgiven. He was free, free at last.

It's painful to face our own guilt, our own sin. We'd rather forget the sin we've committed, bury it deeply with ourselves. But we pay a price for the burial. It stays there deep within us. It can be the source not only of hidden guilt, but fear and anxiety and depression.

See how easily Jesus forgives Peter. See how deeply He wants to forgive Peter; how thoroughly, completely He forgives Peter. "Feed my lambs", He declares to Peter; "Feed my sheep"; "Tend my sheep."

How strongly, how full heartedly Jesus wants to free us from the darkness and guilt, to free us from our sin. Jesus loves to forgive us. And we don't have the power to forgive ourselves.

And He has given us a special path to forgiveness. On the evening of the day Jesus arose He came to His disciples in the upper room. He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them. Whose sins you retain they are retained."

Jesus gave this marvelous power to forgive sins to His Church, our Church. There is no need to bury our sins, to hide them. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is a beautiful, wonderful path to forgiveness, to joy, to peace. Jesus positively loves to forgive us and welcome us home.

I recommend the sacrament highly.