

We have a couple of readings today that could be seen initially as contradicting, but if you really look at it, I think it really brings a good message to us.

In the first story, we read in Acts about Peter and John speaking to a crowd in the thousands. They heal a cripple man and of course, the religious leaders challenge them as to whose authority they heal this man. Peter, as only Pete can do, does not hesitate to point out that, in a loud voice for everyone to hear, "In the name of Jesus of Nazareth.... you know, the one you Crucified .... the one that God raised from the dead ... that's the name that makes this man able to stand here!"

I'm sure the religious leaders were sorry they asked. I'm also certain that most of us, when we read this, want to stand up and high-five Pete with, "Oh yeah, Pete, you go man ... you dish it out to 'em ... yeah, baby" shake your bad head, spit and snort and think that Peter is just one cool dude.

We love it. We sometimes feel so smug in knowing the truth and love any opportunity to remind those who just don't get it.

But on the way to our cool smugness, we get a little spiritual smacking upside the head in today's gospel reading.

Jesus talks about being the shepherd and how he lays down his life for his sheep. He makes it very clear at the end that no man takes away his life - he GAVE it. He laid down his life so that he could take it up again. "I have the power to lay down my life ... and I have the power to lift it up again."

We are quickly reminded of the scene when Jesus was arrested and, once again Peter jumps to Jesus' aide by taking out his sword and cuts a soldier's ear off. Jesus tells Pete, "Knock it off, you fool - don't you know that they have no power over me... if it was not meant to be, I could have legions of Angels here to remove them.... put your swords away!"

The resurrection story is a story of great power ... a power so strong as to be able to conquer death. A power that is almost too big for us to comprehend.

Most of us are like Peter. We react to this power of the resurrection with brazen confidence as we stand up against our enemies. This is a very human way to react, of course. The more

confident we are, the more brazen we can be towards anyone who might challenge that confidence.

Peter was right to stand up to those religious leaders who were challenging him and John. He was right to stand strong and cut them down with a response that not only was truthful, but would clearly shut them up from any follow up questions, that's for sure.

But then again, Peter was wrong - as we are so often.

The message in today's reading is that Jesus wants us to understand what this power is. Jesus wants us to understand that a power so strong as to surpass even death can only come through the power of Gods love.

The crippled man was standing there next to Peter not because of any words said - it was Gods love that made him stand.

Jesus died on the cross not because the Jews killed him or the Romans killed him - he gave his life on the cross because of Gods love.

Jesus rose from the dead not because of anything else but because of Gods love.

We live in a world that has so many people seeking power. Countries, religions, neighbors... we all want more power than the next guy.

The message that Jesus gives us today is simple:

You want power? .... You want real power? .... You won't find it in a sword... you won't find it in a brazen attitude ... you won't find it in a bank ... you won't find it in a title ... if you want a power so strong that even death has no grip on it .... then you only have one place to turn ... Gods LOVE.

We all have a little of Peter in us, but let's remember that we must always learn from Jesus, the shepherd who gave his live for his sheep so that he could take it up again and show us the ultimate power of Gods love for us.

The power of love .... that's what makes a good shepherd.