

Among the four Gospels, John's stands out as particularly compelling, rich in powerful images and layers of meaning. One of these is the charcoal fire.

We are familiar with charcoal and incense in our liturgies. At funerals, solemn Masses like Christmas and Easter, and other sacred moments, charcoal burns as incense rises — carrying our prayers like fragrant offerings ascending to God.

But in today's Gospel, the charcoal fire conveys a different message. It is used simply — for cooking. Jesus had lit a fire and prepared breakfast for His disciples. This is not the first charcoal fire mentioned in John's Gospel. The first was on the night of Jesus' Passion, when Peter, warming himself by a fire, denied knowing Jesus three times. That fire became the scene of Peter's failure and weakness — where sin broke him and fear overtook him.

Yet now, after the Resurrection, Peter stands before another charcoal fire. This time, it is Jesus who has prepared it. Not someone ready to judge, as at the other charcoal fire, but One who comes to restore what was lost — a relationship that had been broken, trust that was fractured, and the heavy shame of having hurt and abandoned the One who loves you so deeply. And this restoration begins not with harsh words, but through the simple gesture of a meal. The Risen Lord welcomes them tenderly, saying, "Come and have breakfast."

Moreover, by this second charcoal fire, Peter experiences healing and commissioning. Jesus does not dwell on the past. Instead, He gently draws Peter into love. Three times — mirroring Peter's three denials — Jesus asks, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" and then Jesus entrusts him with a mission: "Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep." The one who once denied Jesus is now restored and entrusted with shepherding His flock.

Before we continue, let us look more closely at what Peter did during the Passion. Scripture tells us that he denied knowing Jesus. But what does it mean to know in this context?

The Hebrew word **"yadah"** (to know/knowledge/יָדָה) is used in various contexts, including the covenant between God and man, and the intimate union between husband and wife. The first time this word appears is in Genesis, when Adam "knew" Eve, and they became one flesh, conceiving their first child. This is no mere intellectual knowledge — it speaks of deep, intimate communion.

In the context of the Eucharist, Jesus the Bridegroom now invites Peter (symbol of the Church as He will soon be inaugurated as the first Pope) into this same depth of intimacy — a love that unites the human and the divine, and restores the communion broken by sin.

So too with us. At every Eucharist, this invitation is renewed. The altar becomes our charcoal fire of love, where Jesus prepares the feast of His Body and Blood for us. When we receive Him, we know Him. The altar becomes the place where the Bridegroom, Jesus, and His Bride, the Church, become one flesh. They are in communion.

Just as Adam and Eve's knowing bore fruit in a child, so too, through this sacred union, we are made new — becoming more and more the children of God.

When you approach the altar and the minister says, **"The Body of Christ,"** Jesus is asking you personally: **"Do you love Me? Do you want to know Me?"**

Your **"Amen"** is more than a response — it is the renewal of your covenant of love made at Baptism. In that moment, Communion becomes the sacramental restoration of two lovers: the Bridegroom and His Bride, Jesus and the Church. Through the power of the Resurrection, what was fractured by sin is now restored.

Jesus asks us this question most clearly in the Eucharist — where His self-giving love is made present again. There, He looks into our hearts and asks: "Do you love me?" Like Peter, we are invited to answer sincerely: "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." But love must

overflow. Jesus did not stop at Peter's confession — He gave him a mission: "Feed my sheep."

Love for Jesus naturally overflows into love for others. We are each entrusted with a part of His flock: our families, parish, neighbors, the poor, and those we meet at work or in the mall. The Eucharist sends us forth — not only to be fed but to feed. Each Mass strengthens us to serve, forgive, and live charitable lives and witness to others of the love of God in Jesus Christ.

So today, the Risen Jesus turns to you by name — yes, you — and asks again:

"Do you love me?"

Let your answer be seen not only in words but in your life. Let your love become visible in how you serve, forgive, and care.

Let your love for Him feed His sheep. And in doing so, your heart — like Peter's — will be restored. Your life will proclaim with joy and truth:

"Yes, Lord. You know everything. You know that I love you."