October 22nd: Memorial of Saint John Paul II, pope

Gospel text (*Jn* 21:15-17): After Jesus had revealed himself to his disciples and eaten breakfast with them, he said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” Simon Peter answered him, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.” He then said to Simon Peter a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Simon Peter answered him, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was distressed that he had said to him a third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.”

“Feed my sheep”

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Today, on the Feast day of Saint John Paul II, we contemplate how gentle Jesus was with His Apostles: once again He helps them fish and has breakfast with them. How appealing! But we also notice that the Lord bestows special treatment – a manifestation of a unique request - on Simon Peter.

For in fact, Jesus Christ takes him aside, keeping with him a very private conversation. Three times the Lord asks him if he loves Him. Three times reminding us of his three denials! Peter feels overwhelmed and this is why he responds: "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you"(Jn 21:17), as if saying, “despite everything – as you well know - despite my weaknesses, I love you.” Three times, also, the Master has the tenderness to confirm him in his mission: "Feed my lambs."

On such a day as today the Polish bishop Karol Wojtyla was elected Bishop of Rome. What a difficult answer for him who was fully aware of the difficulties! But it was not a matter of his forces or of the circumstances of the moment; it was the call of God. Soon afterwards, the Holy Father evoked: “‘Be not afraid'. What are we to be afraid of? We should not fear the truth about ourselves. One day when Simon Peter became aware of this, he fell at Jesus’ knees and said: “Go away from me Lord, I am a sinful man.” I think that it was not only Peter who became aware of this truth. Every man realizes it. Each one of Peter’s successors realized it. And in a particularly clear way the one who is answering now.”

These were difficult times for the Church, as they can also be for us now. Times that can make us tremble… but should never make us deny or doubt God. On the 25th anniversary of his election, Saint John Paul II came back to the theme: “Humanly speaking, how could I not have been apprehensive? How could so great a responsibility not burden me? I had to turn to divine mercy in order to answer the

question ‘Do you accept?’ with confidence: "In the obedience of the faith, before Christ my Lord, entrusting myself to the Mother of Christ and of the Church, aware of the great difficulties, I accept". You do the same!