

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

Gospel: John 21:1-19

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.

Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." He said to them, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off. When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn.

Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the 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. Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go." (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me."

REFLECTION 1:

YOU KNOW THAT I DO

Scripture scholars have long wondered about the possible meaning of the count of 153 fish in the catch described in today's Gospel. One speculation is that it refers to 153 fish found in the Sea of Galilee; another that the number symbolises all generations of people. And yet, the most important number in today's Gospel is the number three. This was the third time that the risen Christ appeared to the disciples. Jesus asked Peter if he loved him three times. We are also thinking of our threefold God; three persons in one, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The story that is featured in today's Gospel has a great sense of theatre about it. There are two main characters in this drama: Jesus and Simon Peter. The easiest one to describe is Jesus. He is always the central figure as all four Gospels revolve around him and what he meant to those who experienced his healing of the blind and the lame. It's all about what he meant to those who heard him talk to them of a God called Abba, Father, who was passionately in love with his people, including 'the least of these.' The Gospel tells us what Jesus meant to those who witnessed his horrific death on a cross, who gave himself over totally to his Father in the greatest act of love ever. The drama now intensifies in the

Gospel story, because Jesus has already died on a cross and was buried in a tomb – and yet here he is calling to Peter and the others, sharing a breakfast meal with them, talking to them!

This is where Simon Peter enters into the drama. He's the one who at first doesn't recognise Jesus, but once he does, he immediately jumps into the water without fully dressing himself, and leads the rest of the group out of the water and straight to the Lord. That is the same Peter who three times swore that he did know Jesus and who was absent at the foot of the cross. Now we are ready to appreciate a very gentle intimate scene that happens after breakfast, the scene where Jesus turns to Peter, who had denied him three times and now three times asks the same question: 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' Each time Peter firmly responds: 'You know that I love you.'

This personal scene is first of all about reconciliation and forgiveness, but then it becomes a commissioning. Peter is told that he has to 'Feed my sheep.' Peter is now to be shepherd of this new faith community that believes in a resurrected Lord, a community that has been sent out to make known his Easter Gospel of love and mercy and new life. And as he did with Peter, Jesus is right now asking each and every one of us, the same personal and intimate question: 'Do you love me?' We pray in this Eucharist that we will be able to answer with a passion equal to that of Peter: 'Lord, you know that I do.' And then demonstrate that love.

REFLECTION 2: GONE FISHING

Pope Francis in his 2015 environmental encyclical 'Laudatio si' speaks of praising God for the natural world and warns about plundering natural resources – such as fish stocks – to depletion. He warns about the implications of failing to value the life and refreshment we derive from clean water, which is getting scarce globally.

The Sea of Galilee is beautiful site where so much the mission of Jesus was located. The lake has been known for its plentiful stocks of fish. Yet, in recent years, the Sea has seen a dangerous decline in fish stocks due to overfishing and falling water levels. By 2010 a two-year ban on fishing was imposed to help fish stocks recover and today fishing there has been tightly regulated.

I travelled to the Sea of Galilee as a pilgrim in 1974 and again in 1990 and our little group visited Tabgha where a Benedictine monastery now commemorates the multiplication of the loaves and fishes. Next door to the monastery there's a striking statue on the edge of the water that recalls the wonderful resurrection breakfast where Peter was fully reinstated and marks the location where the episode in today's Gospel took place (Jn. 21:1-19).

The story of Jesus' appearance by the Sea of Galilee after the resurrection is one of the great dramatic stories of the New Testament. By now most of the disciples had returned to Galilee and were just sitting around bored until Peter perked them up by suggesting that they go fishing. It seemed to them that resuming fishing would be their livelihood. However, they suffered an initial set back, like many a fisherman over the years, the fish were not in catchable mood. Suddenly a man calls out to them from the shore and directs them to where they should cast their nets. Immediately their nets are heavy with the catch of fish and when the disciples reach the shore, they realise it is Jesus and so he feeds them. In fact he has fish already on the fire, yet he invites them to bring some of their abundant catch in a mutual gesture of sharing.

Once breakfast is over, Peter is asked especially to reaffirm his love for Jesus three times. Jesus gives life and hope in abundance and over that intimate meal of bread and fish by the Sea they are invited into their new reality as lifelong missionaries of Jesus Christ. Galilee is where it all began.

Jesus would challenge us today with words similar to what he said to Peter, 'Recast your nets Peter, and try again'. Peter failed the first time because he had been working alone without the help of Jesus. Many of us may well feel like Peter, we have been working all day and night and have caught nothing. We have been working hard on ideas with little or no success. We feel down and perhaps it is because we have been working alone without Jesus in our lives. We have tried to do it all by ourselves and forgotten what Jesus said to his followers a few chapters earlier in St. John's Gospel, 'I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in that person will bear much fruit, for without me you can do nothing' (Jn. 15:5).