

3rd Sunday of Easter – C

After Jesus' Resurrection but before the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Peter and the other disciples were completely shaken to the core: there was nothing in their lives - or in the lives of anyone else for that matter - that could have prepared them for what they had been witnesses to. After three years living and travelling about with Jesus, he had died and then risen from the dead, and then was manifesting himself to them on different occasions, appearing to them without warning, entering locked rooms and so on. But in between these appearances, no doubt Peter and the other disciples felt somewhat at a loss as to what to do with themselves. So they returned to what they knew best, what they did before Jesus had come into their lives and changed everything: they decided to go fishing.

And yet, despite all their efforts throughout that night, despite all their skill, they didn't succeed in catching anything.

Until they saw Jesus, and listened to his command to cast their nets one more time. When they listened to him, they succeeded in hauling in an incredible catch, so big that their nets were full to bursting. Where had all those fish been hiding all night?

At the seminary I was one of the older guys in my class. Along with a few others, we were what was known as “late vocations.” Some people are called by the Lord to serve him at a young age and respond while still young. The average age of seminarians here in the U.S., after having gone up for years, is now dropping. And good for those who are called by the Lord and respond while still young.

While I might have been called at a young age, however, I certainly did not respond right away. Instead, I went my own way, looking for happiness wherever I thought I might be able to find it, even literally wandering around the world in my search for it. I was sailing around my own Sea of Galilee, dropping my nets again and again, hoping that eventually I would haul in a good catch –

that I would find happiness and peace in the world, but on my terms. And like Peter and the disciples in our Gospel today, I pulled up empty nets again and again. Certainly, I had some good times and great memories, lots of fun at times, and I give thanks to God for many of the wonderful experiences that I had, but on my own I was not able to find the peace and happiness that I was seeking. Those things kept eluding me.

I could say the same for my brother seminarians who, like me, were of a “certain age”, who had “experienced life” and had looked for happiness all over – in jobs, in possessions, in relationships, wherever – and, who, like me, reached a point in their lives when they realized they were not finding what they had been seeking. One of my classmates who is now a priest has said very candidly that, if he had continued to live the way he had been living, he thinks that now he would either be dead or in prison. Seeking happiness but not finding it.

And all the while, Jesus was patiently waiting for us on the shore. No doubt he was watching us sailing around and dropping our nets and pulling them up empty. And while he waited, he was preparing a meal for us. Until finally one day we caught sight of him. "Children, have you caught anything?", he said. "Have you found what you have been looking for? Have you found peace and happiness out there? If not, listen to me. Listen to my words, and you will find the peace and the happiness that you have been searching for."

Jesus says these words to each one of us. How many of us have wandered around in life, away from God, looking for peace and happiness where they could not be found? No, maybe you didn't wander around geographically like me but you may have wandered nonetheless. Maybe you still feel like you are out to sea trying to haul in some fish. If you are, Jesus is waiting patiently on the shore. And he is preparing a meal for you. And the meal is going to be delicious (even if it includes fish).

After breakfast, alone by the fire next to the Sea of Galilee, Jesus and Peter have a conversation, in which Jesus asks him three times, “Peter, do you love me?” He gives Peter three opportunities to atone for each of the three times that he had denied Jesus by the fire in the courtyard of the palace of the high priest in Jerusalem. Both that scene when Peter denied Jesus in the temple courtyard, and the scene by the Sea of Galilee when Jesus gave Peter the opportunity to atone for his denial, took place around a “charcoal fire” – clearly the evangelist intends there to be a link between these two events. Jesus likewise gives each one of us the opportunity to atone for the times when we have denied him, whether through our words, our actions, or our thoughts. No matter how many times we have denied him, he gives us that opportunity to repent and be forgiven.

And then Jesus says to Peter, “Follow me.” He says those same words to us. It is not enough just to tell Jesus that we love him. It is not enough to eat the food that he gives us. We must

also then follow him. Where might he be leading us? It is true, like Peter, sometimes it is to places that we might not want to go. Or rather, it might be to places that, in our previous life of wandering, we would not have wanted to go. But once we have said yes to Jesus, following him to those places becomes possible. Jesus called Peter to follow him all the way to the cross – Peter himself, according to the tradition that has been passed down to us – was crucified in Rome in 67 A.D. Jesus calls us too to follow him to places that before we probably would never have wanted to go. But when Peter was crucified, he was willing to die for Christ – the tradition even tells us that Peter asked to be crucified upside down because he did not consider himself worthy to die in the same way as Jesus.

We may not know yet where Jesus is calling us to follow him. We do not know what crosses we have to carry. But wherever Jesus calls us to, we can have the confidence that he will give us the strength we need to follow him anywhere. Even to the places that

before we could never have imagined. And that He will be with us every step of the way.

Jesus is waiting for us on the shore. Let's stop sailing around aimlessly and go to him so that he can feed us. And then let us follow him wherever he leads.

- **May 4, 2025 at St. Mary's, Spring Lake**