

3 Easter C 2019 SML JN 21:1-19

It was a week after the Resurrection, and the Apostles were by the Sea of Tiberias, also known as the Sea of Galilee. Simon Peter, the understood leader, said to Thomas, Nathanael, James, John and two other disciples, "I am going fishing."

The word Peter used implied a habitually repeated action. In not so many words, Peter told them that he was going back to his former way of life as a fisherman. Pretty hard to imagine, and yet that is what is implied in the tense. In addition, Peter's character, for all its good points, was vacillating and impetuous. It was Peter who told Our Blessed Lord he would not deny Him, only to insist three times that he knew Him not.

Leave your boats behind you, Our Blessed Lord told Peter and the others; henceforth you will be fishers of men (LK 5:10). And here they are back at their old job as fishers of fish. Just imagine how forlorn they felt. For three years, they experienced all the signs, wonders and miracles, and heard the teaching of Our Blessed Lord that set their hearts on fire, and now, it must have seemed like:

- ✓ one big fat disappointment,
- ✓ back in their boats,

- ✓ holding tangled nets,
- ✓ looking off into the distance,
- ✓ shaking their heads in disbelief,
- ✓ fishing for fish, rather than fishing for men.

On the Sea of Tiberias, night was the best time to fish. Despite that, like many previous nights in years past, they caught nothing. Work performed of our own will is so futile. When day broke, the morning light revealed Our Risen Lord standing by the sea. No, they answered His question, they had caught nothing. Casting the net to the right side, there followed the catch of a multitude of fish, and both Peter and John reacted characteristically:

- ✓ As John was first to reach the empty tomb on Easter Sunday, Peter was first to enter it;
- ✓ as John was first to believe that Christ was risen, Peter was first to greet Our Risen Lord;
- ✓ as John was first to see the Lord from the boat, Peter was first to rush to the Lord and dive into the sea.

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- ✓ It was John who leaned on Our Blessed Lord's chest the night of the Last Supper;
 - ✓ It was John who was nearest the Cross,
 - ✓ and it was John to whose care Our Crucified Lord committed His Mother;

so now John was the first to recognize Our Risen Lord on the beach. John had the greater spiritual discernment, but impetuous Peter had the quicker action.

- ✓ Naked as he was in the boat,
- ✓ Peter threw on a shirt,
- ✓ forgot personal comfort,
- ✓ abandoned his companions
- ✓ and eagerly swam the hundred yards to the Master.

Once before, when Christ had walked on the waves toward the boat, Peter could not wait for Our Blessed Lord to come to him, but asked, "If it is you Lord, bid me to enter the water." Now again, Peter entered the water and made his way to Our Risen Lord.

Once on the shore, they saw a fire, a fish laid on it, and some bread, which Our Risen Lord had prepared for them. That had to be a throwback for the Apostles to the bread and fish Jesus had multiplied when He proclaimed Himself the Bread of Life, when they were fishers of men, and not just fishers of fish. With the large catch of fish, Our Lord anticipated the size of the catch that would ultimately be drawn into the bark of Peter, namely the Church. This great catch would foreshadow the Apostles once again becoming fishers of men, and not just

fishers of fish.

At the beginning of His public life, John the Baptist pointed out Jesus, on the banks of the Jordan when he said, “Behold the “Lamb of God.” (JN 1:29); now that Our Risen Lord was about to leave this earth, He applied the same title to those who would carry out His work. He who had called Himself the Good Shepherd appointed others to be shepherds. They had just ended the meal He had prepared for them on the beach.

On Holy Thursday, Jesus had given the Eucharist after the Last Supper, and the power to forgive sins through the washing of feet. Now, after partaking of bread and fish on the beach, He turned to Peter who had denied Him three times, and three times asked Peter for the affirmation of his love. “Simon, Son of John, do you love me?” Peter needed to confess His love before Our Lord would bestow any more authority on him. Once again, the threefold questions, “Do you love me?” in front of the morning fire had to be a second throwback for Peter to the night fire just ten days prior, when he denied Our Blessed Lord three times. Such is the scene of the conversation in which Our Risen Lord commissions Peter to feed the lambs and the sheep. I will return to these questions in just a minute.

During the public life of Our Blessed Lord at Caesarea

Philippi, He told Peter he was the rock upon which He would build His Church. Jesus also prophesied that He would be crucified and would rise again. Peter then tempted Him away from the Cross. In response to that temptation, which Our Lord called satanic, He now told Peter that He was not only commissioning Him with full authority to care for His lambs and sheep as He did; He was arranging for him yet another parallel, that Peter too would die on a cross. When Jesus said to Peter, “When you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go,” Jesus told Peter, in effect, “You will be nailed to a cross like Mine, a cross you wanted to deny me.

Because I loved you, they killed Me; and because you love Me, they are going to kill you.” I once said that the Good Shepherd gives His life for His sheep; now you are My shepherd taking My place; you will receive the same reward for your labors as I have received: crossbeams, nails, but eventually, eternal life.”

Back to the threefold question. While Peter had come a long way since that day in Caesarea Philippi when he tempted Jesus, like Satan, from the cross, Peter had not come all the way. There is evidence of this in his “What’s in it for me, Lord,

what's in it for us" question when he asked, "(Lord), we have left everything to follow You. What then will there be for us?"

MT 19:27

There were two different words for love going back and forth between Jesus and Peter. What Jesus asked Peter was, "Do you love me for my sake? And Peter's answer was, "I love you for mine." Jesus asked a second time, "No, Peter, do you love me for MY sake?" and Peter said, "I love you for MINE." Our Blessed Lord's third question was, "So you love me for YOUR sake?" And Peter said, "Yes, Lord, you know everything. I love you for my sake."

It's the difference between, Lord bring it on. Give me blessings and graces and all good things for my sake, as opposed to, "Lord bring it on. Give me blessings and graces and all good things, not for my sake, but for yours, not for my benefit, but for Yours, so I can give You more, Lord."

So yes, the Lord asked Peter for a love of devotion, and all he got was a love of emotion. But even that Jesus did not reject. It's not enough, but it's certainly a place to start.