

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

R¹. Alleluia, alleluia.
 Christ is risen, creator of all;
 he has shown pity on all people.
 R². Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel John 21:1-19; L48C

At that time, Jesus revealed himself again to his disciples at the Sea of Tiberias.

He revealed himself in this way.

Together were Simon Peter, Thomas called Didymus, Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, Zebedee's sons, and two others of his disciples.

Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing."

They said to him, "We also will come with you."

So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

When it was already dawn, Jesus was standing on the shore; but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.

Jesus said to them, "Children, have you caught anything to eat?"

They answered him, "No."

So he said to them, "Cast the net over the right side of the boat and you will find something."

So they cast it, and were not able to pull it in because of the number of fish.

So the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord."

When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord,

he tucked in his garment, for he was lightly clad, and jumped into the sea.

The other disciples came in the boat, for they were not far from shore, only about a hundred yards, dragging the net with the fish.

Reflecting on the Gospel

Last week we read from the conclusion of John's gospel. Today we read from the epilogue, the chapter that follows the conclusion. Scholars refer to John 21 as the epilogue in part because it is markedly different from the preceding chapters in some vocabulary and in style. In fact, it is so different that it was likely written by a different author to address, in part, realities that had emerged in the decades following the initial composition of the gospel.

Today's reading incorporates two stories: one of the appearance on the seashore, followed by another of the rehabilitation of Peter. The Beloved Disciple, who remains nameless, is the first to recognize Jesus with the proclamation, "It is the Lord" (John 21:7). This is an echo of the discovery of the empty tomb when, even though Peter was the first to go into the empty tomb, the Beloved Disciple "saw and believed" (John 20:8; NABRE). The Beloved Disciple is portrayed as the true model of discipleship. And he does not appear in any other gospel!



Another nod to earlier stories in the Gospel of John includes the mention of a "charcoal fire," as that is the place where Peter denied Jesus three times (John 18:18; NABRE). The presence of a charcoal fire here sets the stage, narratively speaking,

for his threefold rehabilitation. Three times Jesus asks Peter, "Do you love me?" and three times Peter responds affirmatively. This three-time inquisition is quite obviously a retort to Peter's threefold denial during the passion. After the Beloved Disciple died, the Johannine community—for whom the Beloved Disciple was a model of discipleship—was coming to recognize their role in the greater Christian world, which was led (at least figuratively) by Peter. But the last story we heard about Peter was his denial of Christ. Thus, the epilogue, the additional chapter following the conclusion, tells the story of Peter's rehabilitation. Peter represents the larger Christian community. Though he denied Jesus, unlike the Beloved Disciple who was the ideal, Peter was effectively forgiven and placed in a leadership role. Thus in the Christian imagination, Peter represents the ideals and realities of discipleship. No Christian community is an island unto itself. Even leaders can stumble; when they do they can be forgiven by Jesus himself. Such is the power of the risen Christ.

Living the Paschal Mystery

Sometimes it's easy to imagine the saints and disciples as those who had it all figured out. But today's gospel reminds us otherwise. Even now, a time after the resurrection, the disciples are fishing. They do not seem to be about the business of preaching or teaching. Instead, they have gone back to what they were doing before they met Jesus. One nameless disciple recognizes Jesus and his proclamation causes Peter to jump into the water and swim to the seashore to meet Jesus. Jesus does not harangue or scold Peter for the weakness he showed during the passion. Instead, Jesus asks him three times whether he loves him. And three times Peter says yes, though clearly becoming a bit agitated. But in so doing, Jesus rehabilitates Peter and gives each subsequent Christian the hope

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or John 21:1-14

and promise of rehabilitation when we fall short too. The saints and disciples were real human beings with faults and shortcomings. Jesus did not choose perfect human beings. Rather, he chose disciples, those who would follow him. And he chose us too. Our task is to follow. When we fall short Jesus will be there for us too.

Focusing the Gospel

Key words and phrases: Do you love me?; Feed my lambs

To the point: Jesus asks Peter three times, “Do you love me?” Each time Peter answers him in the affirmative, Jesus gives him an action in which to show his love: feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep. Next Sunday (commonly known as Good Shepherd Sunday) we will read from chapter 10 of John’s Gospel where Jesus proclaims, “I am the good shepherd.” Now Jesus calls on Peter to continue his work. He might have denied Jesus three times during the passion but now, in his proclamations of love, Peter is called to serve Jesus by serving those Jesus loved, by feeding and tending the lambs of the Good Shepherd.

Connecting the Gospel

to the first reading: Peter is true to his word. In the first reading from Acts of the Apostles we hear yet another instance of his care and ministry to the early church. Peter feeds Jesus’ “sheep” by witnessing to them about the good news of Jesus of Nazareth who has been exalted at the right hand of God “as leader and savior / to grant Israel repentance and forgiveness of sins. Peter might have denied Jesus three times during the passion, but he gladly undergoes persecution, even flogging. He and his companions accept treatment by “rejoicing that they had been found worthy / to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name.”

to experience: Jesus asks us, “Do you love me?” He invites us to continue work of caring for and tending the flock of the Lord. How do you tend Jesus’ lambs? How do you feed his sheep?

Connecting the Responsorial Psalm

to the readings: There is a temptation in the spiritual life to believe that if we do everything right we will escape hardship and suffering. And yet, we know from experience that this is simply not true. Through no fault of our own, calamity strikes. Today the psalmist reminds us to cling to God when we are through these moments of despair and darkness: “O LORD, you brought me up from the netherworld; / you preserved me from among those going down to the pit.” In the gospel we witness the journey from one state to another. The disciples go from catching nothing all night to filling their nets with such abundance of fish they fear they might burst. And then, confronted by the loss of life, Peter’s threefold expression of love redeems him from his earlier threefold denial and liberates him from the fear of following in the footsteps of the risen Lord.

to psalmist preparation: We believe in a God who journeys with us through darkness and despair and who will not abandon us in times of trial and suffering. How do you hold onto this hope in your own life?

PROMPTS FOR FAITH-SHARING

In the first reading the apostles, led by Peter, tell the authorities, “We must obey God rather than men.” Has there been a time in your life where you needed to take a stand for God’s law? How did you find the strength to do so?

Third Sunday of Easter, May 5, 2019

Gospel (cont.)

John 21:1-19; L48C

When they climbed out on shore,
they saw a charcoal fire with fish on it and bread.
Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish you just caught.”
So Simon Peter went over and dragged the net ashore
full of one hundred fifty-three large fish.
Even though there were so many, the net was not torn.
Jesus said to them, “Come, have breakfast.”
And none of the disciples dared to ask him, “Who are you?”
because they realized it was the Lord.
Jesus came over and took the bread and gave it to them,
and in like manner the fish.
This was now the third time Jesus was revealed to his disciples
after being 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?”
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.”
Jesus said to him, “Tend my sheep.”
Jesus said to him the third time,
“Simon, son of John, do you love me?”
Peter was distressed that Jesus 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.
Amen, amen, I say to you, when you were younger,
you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted;
but 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.”
He said this signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God.
And when he had said this, he said to him, “Follow me.”