



This Gospel really is a very moving scene when you realize that this takes place after the Resurrection, after the disciples abandoned Jesus on the cross, after Peter betrayed Jesus. The risen Jesus goes in search of the disciples who have returned to their home in Galilee from Jerusalem where Jesus was crucified. If I remember correctly, the trip from Jerusalem to Galilee takes 3-4 hours on a bus. They return even to what they know – fishing.

The Risen Lord comes to them to encourage them and tell them more about the great mission that He has for them. Do you wonder if the disciples feared that Jesus was angry with them for betraying Him?

Jesus calls to them in a very human way, a very disarming way. Shouting out to from the shore, “Children, have you caught any fish?” “No” they answer. Just like the scene when Peter, James, and John first meet Jesus, Jesus tells them to cast the net on the other side and they bring a huge catch of fish. Then St. John realizes “It is the Lord!” St. John personifies love and devotion. It is he who first recognized the Lord that he did not abandon. But Simon Peter is the one who jumps into the sea to rush to Jesus. Peter personifies faith. He was the one who was unfaithful, who denied Jesus and abandoned Him while He was on the cross. Yet, still full of faith, he jumps into the sea and rushes toward Jesus.

Jesus shows great human tenderness toward them. He makes a fire for them and already has breakfast cooking for them. In the midst of this scene, Jesus approaches Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord you know that I love you.” Once twice, three times. A triple affirmation of love to atone for his triple denial of Jesus – this is Peter’s confession and absolution. Jesus confirms Peter in His mission as head of the Church: “Feed my lambs.” “Tend my sheep.”

This affirmation of love for Jesus and his mission of building the Church are tied together. This is an important point about the Christian life: Love must be worked out in action. Peter says that he loves Jesus, and Jesus is saying to Peter: “The love that you have for me must be shown to my sheep by taking care of them.” So loving God and loving those that God loves are connected.

The same for us: How we love others is a reflection of our true love for God. It’s not enough for us to say that we love God, without loving each other. If we fail to love the ones that God loves, then we fail to love God.

The Church fathers have also seen much symbolic mystical meaning in this reading. The boat is the Church, whose unity is symbolized by the net which is not torn. The sea is the world. Peter

in the boat stands for the Supreme Authority of the Church, especially in his role as head of the Church. The fish signify all the members of the Church. It's interesting that St. John specifies the number of fish in the net: 153. In those times it was thought that there were 153 nations in the world. So this is a symbolic way of saying that all people are invited to be part of the Church – all races, all nations, all socio-economic groups, all people.

A few weeks ago, the priests of the diocese met with Bishop Rhoades. Bishop Rhoades was gracious enough to offer us an open question and answer time – He is a very brave man! One of the priests asked him, “What do you see as the role of the laity in the diocese?” And you might think that the answer would be something like maybe, get more involved in parish life, join a parish committee, become a lector, etc. But that is not how Bishop Rhoades responded. He said – and remember he is speaking to priests – “We need to equip our people to evangelize and catechize in their homes, workplace, and the marketplace.”

Don't get me wrong: we need people to be lectors and be on committees and such, but Bishop Rhoades was pointing out that this is not the main arena for the work of lay people. The main arena is bringing others into the net – by witness and evangelization. It occurred to me after his comments that our RCIA program should always be full because of your good witness and inviting others into the Church.

We all have a role to play in bringing in a great catch of fish for the Lord as we are shown in the Gospel scene which shows us the great work of the Church in the world. Ask Jesus how you might even better do your part to bring others into the net.

**Father Mark Gurtner at St. Anthony de Padua Church  
3rd Sunday of Easter 2010**