

### 3RD SUNDAY OF EASTER - HOMILY



If you have ever been in the position where you have done something seriously wrong, perhaps hurt someone close to you, or just done something shameful that you know everyone else knows about you, it is very hard to handle. Even the support of your family and best friends can be a problem rather than the help they want it to be.

And what often happens is that you retreat into a place that feels physically and mentally safe. Perhaps go back to a place or a task where you feel OK and where people will not bother you. Basically, hide. Sometimes you are ready eventually to apologise but you do not know how or it is no longer possible.

This is where Peter finds himself in the gospel today. He has betrayed Jesus, and there is nothing worse that he could have done. Not only that, but he was the leader of the group, everyone was looking up to him, Jesus had great hopes for him, but now he probably feels that they all feel betrayed by him. That they have lost faith in him.

Clearly some of his friends have stuck by him, not all.

Peter is thoroughly depressed. He cannot apologise, seek forgiveness from Jesus because Jesus is dead. There is no way out of his depression.

So what does he do, but go back to his roots.

“I am going fishing.” It is not even “Let’s go fishing,” or “Do you want to come fishing,” he does not feel he can rely on their support, cannot ask for it. But they go nevertheless.

So this is very like the story of the call of the disciples in Luke 5, but the circumstances are very different.

Peter and the disciples are at rock bottom. They are on automatic pilot, ‘Let’s just do what we always have done.’ It is a bit of escapism if you like.

So it is in this state that they are in the boat, and what is more they catch nothing. So even the attempt to ignore what has happened has failed. At least a catch of fish would temporarily cheer them up.

It is no surprise that they do not recognise Jesus at first. Peter and the rest of them are in that self-absorbed state you can get into when everything is going wrong, and Peter most deeply of all. (If you have ever been in it you will know what I mean.)

And then Jesus appears. A man on the shore. Still no change in them. But just like in the past it is a miracle, this time of the 153 fish that opens the eyes, first of John, who as this gospel has always underlined, was the closest personally to Jesus. It is the miracle that reveals who Jesus is.

You can imagine first the difference in personality of Peter and John. Peter wears his heart on his sleeve, he has been the most outspoken follower of Jesus, John is quiet and more reflective. John recognises Jesus, but it is Peter that immediately plunges into the water.

Now there is on the beach a Eucharistic breakfast. A sharing in the gift of Jesus of fish and bread. With his presence, and through this sharing, the way to forgiveness is opened up.

So far the story has made it clear, in a very practical way that with Jesus there is no need for us to ever feel trapped in a life of shame or depression because of what we have done wrong. If we have known Jesus in our lives he will always give us a way through, an 'out' of the woods to forgiveness and a fresh start. Also that the Eucharist is, as we have mentioned before, a sacrament that opens the way to healing and forgiveness. We often need the door to be open for us.

But what is then revealed is Jesus complete faith in Peter. Whether the three questions on love match the three denials (which many say is so) or not, what they mark is the rebirth of Peter as an apostle in his own eyes. Just as the catch of fish was an image of the gathering in of all into the Church and a renewal of the scenes of their calling in Chapter 5, so Jesus becomes more explicit about Peter's role as the shepherd of this new community. As we have mentioned before, the hallmark of the community that was made clear at the Last Supper and the washing the feet is love and service, so Jesus makes it clear to Peter that the sort of leader he has to be is one who feeds his people, (nourishes spiritually and cares for them generally), takes care of them, and does this in complete surrender to Jesus and the Spirit right to the point of death. "Somebody else will put a belt around you and take you where you would rather not go."

Every reference to fish and sheep is of course about the mission of the Church. Today's gospel is about the sort of community we are to be, the sort of leadership Jesus calls for, but also for us all the unlimited forgiveness that Jesus has for all of us, and that his forgiveness can touch every area of our lives, regardless of what we need forgiveness for. Peter is the image and great example of someone who feels that they are beyond forgiveness, that there is no hope, but discovers that with Jesus, there is always hope and always a greater purpose than ourselves, which is to be ready to open the door of Jesus' community to anyone.

To forget ourselves and serve in which ever way we are drawn, if not at times hauled like the fish.