

Sunday, April 10, 2016      3rd Sunday of Easter (C )

Conventual Mass      Do You Love Me? Follow Me

Simon Peter got up and said “I am going fishing” and the others went with him. Here they were back home in Galilee by the shore of Lake Galilee. They had come back home as they had been instructed to do by the angel that had appeared to the women when these had gone to the tomb early on the first day of the week. And yes, they had seen the risen Master themselves. That was just the problem. A happy problem, of course, but one they could not take in.

John was at the site of the crucifixion and had seen Jesus hang there until he surrendered his last breath to the Father. He had seen the lance pierce his side and the blood and water gushing out. He was there when they carried him to the tomb. The rest, afraid for their own skins, had hovered in the distance to watch and wait. And all as they traveled along the way had seen crucified criminals. They stayed dead.

Yes, they were with him when he raised Lazarus from the tomb, but that was different. Lazarus had returned to a normal way of life. He had to use doors to get into a room and you certainly recognized

his features immediately, even from a distance. The risen Master seemed beyond the reach of space and time, the same Master they knew before yet somehow very different and often enough not recognizable at first glance.

To see him in the flesh and blood again, to know he was alive, to have him whom they loved and who loved them back again was wonderful beyond words. And that was the problem. Their eyes saw, their ears heard, and their hearts beat with joy but their minds could not absorb it. It was, when you came right down to it, beyond belief! It tore at every experience they had. Good news? Joyful news? Of course! Beyond all measure, but it was difficult to digest it, to file it in some known category.

Some people when they are confused, anxious or worried, find their relief in hard work. Simon Peter and his fellow disciples were of that sort. They had come to Galilee as commanded by the Master and now they were awaiting him and the wait was a trying one. So when Peter decided to go fishing, they all decided to go with him hopefully to calm their nerves.

They struggled all night in that dark sea and caught nothing. At the first light of day some stranger on the shore had the nerve to ask

them whether they had caught anything. When they yelled back their “no,” he gave them a suggestion. Because they had nothing to lose, they followed his instruction and instantly the net began to sink to the bottom as if all the fish in the sea were heading for it. Later they would remember how this catch was sign and foreshadowing of their future vocation and how the world would rush to hear the Good News. Peoples from the ends of the earth would be called and enter the Master’s net,

The voice that called to them was familiar, very familiar after all and someone in the boat shouted “It is the Lord!” That’s all Simon Peter needed to hear. Impetuous as always, he threw on some clothes and swam to the figure of his beloved Master. The sea, that symbol of evil and chaos for the ancient Jews held no terror for him for it was love that drew him on.

And yet, and yet, there was that matter of his betrayal that still haunted Peter. Even as he swam towards the One he loved, he was filled with embarrassment, with shame. At their final supper together, he had staunchly maintained his willingness to die for Jesus even as Jesus prophesied Peter’s betrayal. And fear overtook him and he did what he believed he never could do –betrayed the Master while

sitting at a fire in the high priest's courtyard. And that glance that fell from Jesus' eyes on to his own! How could he ever forget?

Now at another fire on the shore, Jesus had prepared breakfast: bread and fish. The disciples were reminded of the bread and fish Jesus had multiplied for the crowd that followed him, foretelling that special bread, his own body, that he had distributed among them at that last, farewell supper. They were reminded of the bread that was broken at Emmaus and identified him to the two travelers. The bread and fish spoke to them of the Eucharist they had received at his hands. A few hundred years later, images of bread and fish would be painted on catacomb walls representing that great gift of the Eucharist to his disciples and to us.

Breakfast passed without incident. It was a happy affair being together with their old Master again. They joked and laughed as before and stole sideway glances at him who was somehow different, yet the same. How good it was to have him among them, how almost crazed with joy they all were!

And after breakfast, Jesus invited Simon Peter for a little walk! A little fearful and yet delighted to be with him for a private conversation, Peter followed Jesus. Three times Jesus asked Peter

whether he, Peter, loved him. Of course, it was to heal the wounds of Pete's betrayal but it was torture as he remembered. "Of course, I love you. You know all things; you know that I love you, you know that in spite of my fall." Jesus then gave Peter a special commission: to shepherd, to feed and take care of his flock.

After that, in a passage not in our gospel today, Jesus would give Peter another command, the same command he gave Peter three years previously by the shores of the same lake, "Follow me!" And Peter would, even to the same death that the Master suffered.

Jesus, the Master, comes to each of us as well and asks each of us "Do you love me?" He asks it again and again because like Peter at the Last Supper, the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. Jesus was human as well as divine and I think he needed to hear Peter's declaration of love especially in light of both Peter's and Judas' betrayal. To each of us he also gives a commission. It is not necessarily a commission to journey to foreign countries to bring others to Jesus. It is in every case a commission to live out our lives according to the Gospel in such a way that others will come to Christ, as the net of the Gospel foretold. And to each of us, the risen Christ

calls out as he called out to Peter “Follow me!” “Do you love me?”

“Follow me!”