

Alleluia He is Risen!

Have you ever had a really powerful experience of God, one which changed your life, at least in that given moment. Perhaps you had this type of experience on a retreat that you attended, where you experienced God in a new and powerful way. And you thought “everything is different now.” And then what happens? You come off that high. You have to go back to school, to work, to the routine of daily life, and that experience becomes more remote.

I think this is what we see happening with the disciples at the beginning of the Gospel. They have seen the risen Lord. Thomas touched the wounds of Jesus, and made that great proclamation of faith, “My Lord and my God.” And then time passes. And it almost seems that the apostles are unsure what to do with themselves. So they go back to what they know, they go back to their daily routine, to their work as fishermen.

Peter says, “I’m going back to work,” and 6 others join him. Now here, we need to start paying close attention, because often times the details in John’s Gospel are quite significant. We have 7 Apostles gathered together. This evokes two images. First the number 7 brings us back to the creation story from the Book of Genesis, which takes place over 7 days. So we are being brought back to the moment of creation. This will be a moment of re-creation. Also, in the Roman Law, a person’s will required 7 witnesses. So the 7 apostles will be the executors of Jesus’ will.

Okay, so what happens to these 7? They go out at night and catch nothing. Again, the symbolism of the Gospel. At night, in the darkness, you will catch nothing. That’s because Jesus is the light. And apart from the light, we can do nothing. This is a fundamental principle of Christianity, we cannot bring people to Jesus unless we ourselves are with Him. We cannot be fishers of men, if we ourselves are not with Jesus. We cannot be effective witnesses to the message of forgiveness if we ourselves have not been forgiven. Often people ask me if priests go to confession. The answer is “of course we do. How could we possibly preach about forgiveness if we ourselves didn’t first seek out and receive forgiveness for our own sins?” If priests remain in the dark, they won’t be able to bring people to the light. If we as Christians remain in the dark, we can’t preach the Gospel to the world.

What happens next in our Gospel? Dawn comes, and so does Jesus. Notice, Jesus comes in the light. He does so because he IS the light. And he gives an instruction to his witnesses, “now that you are in the light, try casting your nets again, and see what happens this time.” Notice how this changes everything. When the disciples are in the light, they are able to make a great catch. When Jesus is in our daily lives, even when we’re going about our routine jobs, we can make a great catch.

Friends, a very important spiritual insight is being given here. If we want to work for Jesus, if we want to be his disciples, we first have to remember that no matter how skilled we are, we cannot serve God if we don’t stand in his light. By all accounts, the Apostles were skilled fishermen, but they couldn’t do it on their own. They couldn’t even do it as a group gathered together. They needed Jesus. The same is true for us today. This is why we come to Mass every week. We need Jesus. We need Him present in the assembly. We need Him present in the Word. And most importantly, we need Him present in the sacraments. If we don’t come into His

presence, if we don't encounter Jesus, then our work is in the dark. When we walk away from the Church, even only for a week, we are fishing in the dark, and our nets remain empty.

But when we're in the light, we make a great catch, God can bring the work of creation to its completion. He can recreate and redeem the whole world. We see this when the beloved disciple tells Simon Peter, "It is the Lord." Notice what John tells us ensues. Peter puts on his clothes and rushes to Jesus. Other translations are even more clear, they say he put on his clothes for he was naked. Now, I don't pretend to know the customs of fishermen in Jesus day. Perhaps fishing in the nude was quite common. But I think John is making a deeper point here. Who else did we see working in the nude? Adam and Eve. Before the Fall in the book of Genesis, Adam and Eve are working in the Garden with God. And it is not until they sin that they put on clothes.

So here we have Simon Peter working in the nude, he sees Jesus and what does he do, he puts on clothes, just like Adam and Eve did. Peter, too, was a sinner. But here we are going to see how God is able to redeem the world. There's a difference between Peter and Adam. Adam, upon hearing God rummaging through the garden, hides from God. Peter, on the other hand rushes to meet God. Has he sinned, yes, he denied Christ three times. But unlike Adam, he knows that he needs to be redeemed, he needs to be reconciled to God, and that can only be done by bringing his sin to Jesus. He knows that he can't hide from God, that he can't go to some corner in the darkness and fix the sin on His own.

Too often I think we try to do that, we try to hide our sin, and try to fix it on our own. But let's be honest folks, how's that working out. It doesn't. Despite what all the self-help books tell you, despite what Dr. Phil and Oprah may say, you can't do it on your own. You need Jesus to fix it for you. That's the only way.

And He does just that. Peter who denied Christ three times, now comes face to face with His sin, as Jesus asks him three times "Do you love me?"

This question is of course the essence of Christianity. Christianity is not a philosophy, or a teaching, it is a relationship – a relationship with God. Notice Jesus does not ask Peter, "Do you believe my teachings?" No, He says, "Do you love me?" Our actions as Christians are not based on a philosophical system, they're based on our love of Christ. That is to say, if we love Christ, we follow him, we do what he asks. We tend His sheep, we feed the flock. But we do this, not because someone prescribed it as a rule, but because we are motivated by our love.

Let me suggest this to you, if you are living your faith based on laws, you're missing something. If you come to Mass only because you're afraid of committing a mortal sin, you're missing something. Don't come to Mass out of fear, come to Mass because you love Jesus, and you want to receive Him in the sacrament. If you go to confession because you are afraid of dying and going to hell, you're missing something. Don't go to confession out of fear, go because you love Christ, and want to be reconciled to Him. What we learn today is that Jesus left us His will, to this we have 7 witnesses. His will is that we love Him, and that our love for Him will motivate us to feed the flock, to care for each other, and to stop fishing at night, but to fish in the light of Christ, so that others too may come to know Him, to love Him and to serve Him.