

SERMONS FROM ST. FRANCIS

Third Sunday of Easter

April 22, 2007 –

Text: John 21:1-19

Pr. Robert Goldstein

“ Going Fishing ”

Why did Peter go fishing? He has already met the resurrected Christ twice and yet he goes fishing. Some commentators have interpreted this as a sign of confusion on the part of the disciples, falling back to their former ways. But I'm not so sure.

We live out our faith in all kinds of ways –according to the personality God has given each one of us. Look at Paul. We heard about him in the first reading this morning. Paul doesn't strike me as one who would go fishing. Paul is a perfectionist, even obsessively so. When he is opposed to this new Jewish sect he is not half-hearted! He is extreme, even fanatical, breathing threats and murder against Jews who now call themselves followers of the Messiah Jesus and misrepresenting his Jewish heritage. There are no half measures with Paul. It is all or nothing.

And what happens? God will lay claim to those qualities in Paul by converting him to the Jesus movement. And so Paul becomes a Christian –with no half measures, no mediocrity. Paul can't become just another disciple. Oh no, Paul has to go all the way. He has to become another apostle! And not just another apostle. Paul is driven to push the envelope –he has to become the first apostle to the Gentiles. And what an extraordinary leader he becomes –translating a Jewish Christianity into a Christianity for all nations. If you don't believe me, ask him. He'll tell you! But not everyone is like Paul. With Peter it's, “Aw, let's go fishing.” Peter is not Paul. Peter is Peter. Let us understand him as a different kind of child of God.

Peter strikes me as someone impulsive at one level but very thoughtful at another. He runs to the empty tomb. He jumps out of that boat swimming to Jesus. But he is more than that. After his dramatic denial of Jesus, his witnessing the resurrected Christ twice already, Peter goes fishing. I can just see Paul shaking his head and concluding that Peter lacks commitment, lacks enthusiasm. He isn't Paul even though I suspect Paul thinks Peter ought to be! So Peter goes fishing.

But Peter may just be more in touch with the rhythms of life than Paul. Paul wants to break the rhythms, change the old ways into new and better ones. Peter has the sense to go fishing to mull over this newly found faith. For Peter, Christ means that the ordinary things of life are part of God's redemption too. Perhaps Paul ought to go fishing, if he could sit still long enough. A break just might do him good.

It is precisely in the ordinary situations in life, in the ordinary rhythms of going to work each day, of meeting frustration at work, even despair at one's daily toil, that Peter once again meets Jesus. The resurrected Christ is not some abstract term, not some otherworldly phantom or spirit, to be worshipped in some sort of sexless purified European abstraction, but a gloriously down-to-earth friend who makes breakfast for Peter and his fellow fishers –meeting another ordinary human need.

The associations with communion are everywhere here. Our Christ, really present, invites Peter to this meal Christ has himself prepared. He also invites Peter to contribute some of their fish to the meal, giving back a few of the fish that God has so bountifully and miraculously supplied. Christ invites you, without any admission requirements to this communion here this morning. Christ invites you to offer a few fish of your own even though Christ is the miraculous source of all you have received. It really is a miracle!

The past week has been one of those weeks from hell as the sensibilities of all us were punctuated by the popping shots of that crazed soul in Blacksburg, Virginia. A pointless disaster of immense proportions raping the sacredness of college youth in their sacred college world. This is nothing like Peter going fishing. And yet it is, in the sense that, even in the worst days of our lives, Christ appears and invites us to the table.

Many a parent, brother or sister, college or high school friend is weeping this morning, mourning the loss of their 33 loved ones at the hands of a truly disturbed human being. But Christ is present with them and with us in our knowledge that no matter how many times evil seems to win out, good shall always overcome evil, love shall always overcome hate, hope shall always overcome despair, courage shall always overcome fear. This is the promise of God and why even the worst Friday of the year is called Good Friday. This was the message of the Lutheran campus pastor of Virginia Tech at the very first memorial service. And we light 33 candles on the high altar his morning remembering those who died at Virginia Tech.

Peter and Paul, as very different as can be, would both go on to write words of such comfort, blessing and hope, words that have fed people the bread and the fishes of Christ in the darkest days of human existence. God's Word in the words of Peter and Paul, and in other words of the Bible, shall never return void or empty. Shall not the horror that now envelops Virginia Tech turn into the ordinary daily routine of students going back to classes, their professors opening their minds and hearts to new worlds? This is our hope in the goodness of time.

Peter and Paul are so different and yet both have met Jesus, both have followed Jesus: One on an ambitious mission hurtling towards the center of the world, Rome itself; the other going fishing somewhere, going back to ordinary rhythms of life.

Where are you and I? Perhaps we are like Paul or like Peter. Perhaps we are like neither of them. Yet, through baptism, we have all been clothed with the garment of Christ. In the Eucharist we all are freely and equally fed that meal of faith.

Perhaps we need to be reminded that we are all uniquely loved in God's eyes. And as walk our pilgrimages with Christ's unseen presence, who, in our shadows, just may be revealed to us with the same resurrected glory –the extraordinary in the ordinary. Thank you God for Peter and for Paul. Thank you for everyone here this morning. Christ is Risen! Alleluia! Amen

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