

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson

1st May 2022 - 3rd Sunday of Easter

Readings (Year C): 1st: Acts 5:27-32. 40-41. Psalm: 29. 2nd: Apocalypse 5:11-14. Gospel: John 21:1-19.

Work and food form a large part of all daily living. We often used to speak of going to earn a crust, our daily bread to feed the family. They come together in this gospel scene which has changed from the claustrophobia of the locked room in Jerusalem to the open air of the Sea of Galilee. St John uses the Roman name Sea of Tiberias, as it establishes a link between the sign of the loaves and fishes in Chapter 6 of John, where he uses both names for the lake.

The use of the Roman name also opens up a connection with Rome, scene of the mission and death of Peter, just as the charcoal fire would remind Peter of the night when he was warming his hands at the charcoal fire when he betrayed Jesus.

Seven of the disciples, a full number, had gone back to the old occupation as if they still did not appreciate their new mission and the Spirit they had received. Among the seven fishing was Nathanael, the one to whom Jesus spoke about the great linking up of heaven and earth in chapter 1 and this connection rounding off the unity of John's gospel.

The setting in the light of morning is an indication that this is the new age of resurrection time. That there were still dark areas in the faith of the apostles is suggested by their going back to the fishing nets and the fact that they laboured all night and caught nothing. They did not recognise the Lord by sight nor by the sound of his voice. The moment of recognition came at the size of the catch of fish, probably triggering off the memory of another miraculous catch. Once again it is the beloved disciple who makes the recognition; 'It is the Lord.'

The moment of recognition is the key to understanding these post resurrection encounters. In this instance the catch of fish is a symbol of the mission of the disciples; recalling their first call by Jesus. In this episode we can pick out four important features of our the church's and our mission

1. As long as the apostles laboured through the night they caught nothing. But once they heard the word of the Lord giving them direction, the catch was huge. The mission of the church is a combination of divine direction and human effort.
2. The nets were not torn, just as the cloak of Jesus was not torn on Calvary. Being untorn expresses the unity of the flock for which Jesus prayed.
3. The prominence of Peter further indicates his special authority in the church. He is clearly acting as the captain of the whole operation. We have Peter, Pope Francis.
4. The number of fish is very significant; a haul of 153 fish. Down the centuries commentators have offered various interpretations of the number. St Cyril of Alexandria thought 100 represents the Gentile nations: fifty the Jewish remnant and three in honour of the blessed Trinity. Some the 153 fish may have something to do with all those sheep Jesus asked Peter to look after. St Jerome thought 153 represents the different types of fish found in the sea of Tiberias, which would run parallel to Matthew (13:47) where Jesus likens the kingdom of God to a dragnet in which fish 'of all kinds' are caught. Another commentator mentioned the Psalter and the Trinity, or the traditional rosary, the total number of 'Hail Mary's' being 153.

These all point to the mission texts at the end of the other gospels and the beginning of Acts, in which Jesus ask us to go to the ends of the earth to gather in the scattered children of God.

At the core of this mission is Jesus' universal love; when we love him, we will be interested in all those he loves. At the heart of the universal mission of the church is the sustenance of Jesus as the Bread of life.

The sacraments, esp. the Eucharist, vital for growth of the church as our food is, and visible evidence of 'It is the Lord, feeding, nourishing, strengthening and healing his people.