

Easter 3C 2013

Gone Fishing

When I want to forget everything, I go fishing. Although I rarely catch anything, it doesn't matter. For me, the purpose of fishing is not so much to catch fish as it is to fish, to get away from my problems.

Although I don't know why Peter went fishing, I suspect that he needed to get away. After those terrible days in Jerusalem, Peter needed to forget that he had denied Jesus three times. Peter needed to go fishing. And so, when he returned to Galilee, he returned to his old way of life. Peter went fishing.

It was while he was fishing that Peter met Jesus the first time. It was when Peter was fishing that Jesus had called Peter to follow him in the way of discipleship. But now, although he had seen the risen Lord, Peter was returning to his old way of life. Having denied Jesus three times, Peter did not know what to do. How could he continue to follow the one whom he had denied? Peter was hurting, and he needed to forget; he needed to return to his old familiar routine. Peter needed to go fishing.

But everything was going badly for Peter. Although he had fished the whole night, he caught nothing. And then it happened. There was Jesus on the shore telling Peter and his companions to lower their nets once more. As the nets burst with fish, Peter recognized the risen Lord. Overwhelmed both with joy and fear, he jumped into the water to greet the one whom he had denied.

Three times Jesus asks, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" And three times, Peter—who had denied Jesus three times—reaffirms his deep love for the Lord. And three times, Jesus commissions Peter to feed his lambs and feed his sheep. Having reconciled Peter to himself, the

risen Lord calls Peter to follow him once more. Peter will no longer fish in the old way. Having been forgiven and called by the risen Lord, Peter will fish for human beings. Peter will proclaim the gospel of the risen Christ.

Like Peter, at one time or another all of us fail as disciples of Jesus Christ. At one time or another, all of us deny the risen Lord by what we do, or more likely these days by what we fail to do—by failing to bear witness to the gospel. And like Peter, we return to our old way of life, the life we knew before Christ.

This is why today's gospel is important. For, it reminds us of the healing power of Christ's resurrection. It reminds us that the purpose of the church—our purpose—is to proclaim the good news of the resurrection.

First, this gospel reminds us of the healing power of the resurrection that reconciles us to God and grants us new life. No matter what we have done, the power of Christ's resurrection can restore us to new life. No matter how far we have fallen, the power of Christ's resurrection can raise us up again. No matter how lukewarm we have become, the power of Christ's resurrection can fill us with the fire of God's Spirit.

Second, this gospel reminds us that our purpose is to proclaim the resurrection, to bear witness to the new life we enjoy in Christ. It is not enough to celebrate the resurrection. It is not enough to reflect on the resurrection. We must proclaim the resurrection to the world.

We have come through the most powerful period of the church's liturgical year. We have celebrated beautiful liturgies. But if we do not proclaim what we have celebrated, our Easter

celebration will be of no avail. For, the purpose of our worship, the purpose of the church, is to proclaim the gospel.

Two weeks ago, this church was bursting with people who are no longer here. Rather than discourage us, their absence should incite us to proclaim what we celebrate: that Christ is risen and alive. Rather than discourage us, their absence should remind us of the work we must do. Rather than discourage us, their absence should inspire us to live and preach the gospel more fervently.

Every Mass ends with these or similar word: “God forth, the Mass is ended,” or, “Go and announce the Gospel.” Let us go forth with renewed faith today and proclaim the life that is ours in Christ—the only life that can change and transform the world.