

Easter 3 John 21:1-19

Our gospel today is like hearing an echo. It is a passage we often hear separated and yet read together the repeated nature of the dialogue is so much clearer. It is after Jesus' resurrection, after Jesus has appeared to the disciples on at least 2 occasions according to St John not counting his initial appearance to Mary in the garden on Easter Sunday. So, the shock of Jesus' death and resurrection although not resolved was past its initial disbelief and the disciples seem to find themselves if not in grief, then still in deep confusion over the whole thing, which is hardly surprising.

Their response to not knowing what to do with this new information is to go back to doing what they know best, fishing. We can picture the scene if we've ever been to a funeral of a large number of people together at a time of grief, some people make themselves busy and others go out of their minds feeling cooped up in the house, and soon drift to outside the front door everyone looking where they can to express their grief in the most comfortable way for them. Equally it seems these disciples of Jesus needed to go somewhere, do something, be useful in order to keep from thinking too deeply about what had gone on and so they got in a boat and fished.

This is where the echo begins as this scene is not unlike that 1st meeting with Jesus, fishermen in their boats, toiling in vain having caught nothing and Jesus borrows their boat to preach to the crowd. After speaking he tells them how to fish, "cast your nets on the right side". A carpenter tries to tell a fisherman how to fish, it's a little surprising that they didn't refuse, yet Jesus had been preaching and they had been impressed by him, so they perhaps thought they had nothing to lose by giving it a try. They were rewarded in their obedience by a large number of fish that first time, and this time also the scene unfolds in a remarkably similar way.

Jesus calls to the boat, have you caught anything, nothing come the reply, "cast your net on the right side of the boat" and they are rewarded by 153 large fish, fish they couldn't have missed all night, fish that were part of Jesus' miraculous encounter.

Why so similar, what is the purpose of repeating an encounter? Why do we repeat anything? To learn. We practice when we want to improve or memorise something, learning an instrument, memorising our times tables, whenever we want to establish something in memory to perfection, repetition is often the key. Jesus used what worked before to get their attention. In so doing he reminded them what his ministry had been all about and why they had followed him in the first place. And by performing the same miracle again he taught the disciples that saying I'm a follower of Christ, is not a one-time statement, but rather it is a continual state of being, that requires us all to be looking for Jesus, listening to his call for us, waiting on opportunities to be obedient to him. We are not called once to become a Christian, we are continually called and re-called to Christ's service, sometimes in the same ways as before, sometimes in new ways, but our call is a conversation that is ongoing and alive. Jesus reminded the disciples that he had promised

to make them fishers of people and that their lives were committed to that, so that even when they tried to go back to how things were before, they could do nothing without him.

Then comes our second echo, Jesus stays to eat with the disciples and he and Peter have an uncomfortable encounter. Peter was keen to be the first to get to Jesus, as even his impetuosity sees him jump in feet first, quite literally this time, and swim to Jesus leaving the others to struggle with the boat and the fish. When he gets to shore he dares not ask Jesus who he is, and it is Christ who initiates the conversation to put to rest the unfinished business between them.

You will remember that Peter was the most dedicated, the most obedient, the most enthusiastic, the most over the top disciple amongst the twelve throughout Jesus' ministry, yet he was the one to deny he even knew Jesus after his arrest, not once but 3 times. Jesus warned him he would, Peter wouldn't believe him, but he did it. Whenever Peter's mouth began working before his brain was engaged, Jesus rebuked him or explained things to him, and always forgave him his impetuosity, but this time, when Peter denied him, Jesus could not rush to his aid.

So here, on the beach, in a perfect echo of the denials Jesus asks Peter if he loves him. He asks three times and he accepts his answer each time. It is like Peter had to say he loved Jesus 3 times to erase the 3 denials. Not for Jesus' sake, Jesus had already forgiven him, why else would he be there, but for Peter's sake, so that he knew it was forgiven.

How difficult is it for us to trust people when they have wronged us? Even when we think we understand why the event or argument occurred and can move forward beyond it, we are often a little more wary in the future. Say you have someone over for a meal and they manage to smash one of your best crystal glasses accidentally, you might accept that it was an accident but the next time they visit, you might put out the everyday glasses just in case.

Jesus, however, sets us an example of true forgiveness, where not only do we accept the remorse of the wrong-doer but we also entrust them with the most precious of things to us even though that makes us vulnerable to them again. It's not easy, but that is what Christ does. Peter, for all his mistakes, his betrayal and his risk, was entrusted with the mission of the Church. Not single handed, with the support of the disciples and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, but nevertheless, he became a leader for the church and when next he was faced with danger because of his faith, he faced it without a hint of fear, even to his martyrdom. Proving to Christ that his faith in Peter was well placed, but also proving to us that we can truly be forgiven and found worthy no matter what we have done before and how many mistakes we have made.

The echoes in John's gospel serve as lessons to us all of the awesome love of God through Jesus to call, to re-call, to forgive and to entrust to each of us God's mission and the future of his Church. May we learn to hear his call, respond to his re-call, accept gratefully his forgiveness and deserve his trust in all that we do in his name.