

Reflection for the 3rd Sunday of Easter, Cycle C

The lectionary translation of the readings for this Sunday can be found at <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/050425.cfm>

1st Reading: *Acts 5:27–32, 40b–41*

Acts of the Apostles reports that, after the giving of the Holy Spirit, at Pentecost, the Church begins to preach and to heal in the name of the Lord and to grow. The Jewish authorities try to put a stop to this. In today's selection, Peter and the apostles have been arrested. This selection leaves out a wonderful speech by Gamaliel warning the Sanhedrin to be careful about mistreating the followers of "the Way". In John's Gospel, differently from Luke/Acts, the Spirit was given and the Church commissioned on the day of Resurrection. We had that reading last week.

2nd Reading: *Revelation 5:11–14*

Last week we were introduced to reading from the Book of Revelation with its fantastic imagery and story of the triumph of good over evil. We jump ahead, a bit, in John's vision to the section about the Lamb who was slain. The person on the throne, of course, is God the Father and the lamb is Jesus.

Gospel: *John 21:1–19*

"...when you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." ...And when he had said this, he said to him, "Follow me." Jn 21:18–19

Gospel Reflection

There was a song in the early sixties entitled, "I Will Follow Him". I think it was a one-hit wonder, written by a couple of people, adapted by another and made popular by the singer Little Peggy March. You don't remember her, do you? But, I bet you remember the song; I will follow him...

The Gospel selection today is all about following him, following the Lord, following the teacher of "the Way." It ends with those words to Peter, "Follow me." Jn 21:19 But this isn't just about Peter and his being commissioned to lead the Church. There is so much more in the story and it was so important that it was evidently added to the Gospel of John, after the original conclusion but before being passed around.

It tells us of the disciples going back from Jerusalem to Galilee, which was normal since the Passover observance was finished. And, they seemed to be going back to making their living the way they did before they met Jesus. This seems to me to be normal, too, since without Jesus, they were no longer the little band of disciples following their Rabbi. Their going back to their old way of living occurs in spite of the fact that the reading we had last week, which immediately precedes this, is where Jesus told them, "As the Father sent me, so I send you..."

Maybe they hadn't figured out what that meant yet, but they soon discovered that without Jesus, their lives were fruitless. That's what the fishing at night, catching nothing, then following Jesus' instructions at dawn and catching a catch they could hardly haul in signified. Remember, John use the darkness and

light motif in a deeper way than just talking about night and morning. The physical darkness and light were just emblematic to the spiritual darkness we face in our lives.

And then we have the breakfast of fish and bread portion of the story. We don't exactly know what the hundred and fifty-three fish signify but John's point about Jesus work and our work being combined is unmistakable. Remember, I've mentioned before that the Mass consist of our asking the Holy Spirit to make our Lord's sacrifice-of-self present to our day-and-time, then we combine the gift or our labors to his to send up to God as one offering. There it is, unmistakably; in the words where Jesus tells them "Bring some of the fish you just caught." Lk 21:10

Then we have that whole interchange with Peter, whom you'll remember denied Jesus three times just a week or so earlier and now that Jesus is gone, is going back to what he knows about how to negotiate life. Jesus will have none of that. He makes Peter state his love three times, each time telling him he has work to do. Then he ends it with the words "Follow me." Jn 21:19

Follow me means "be my disciple", live according to "the way" that I taught. It means, "Do this in memory of me..." And be a mature disciple! Jesus didn't actually say it that way, but being a mature disciple is implied in the concept of discipleship, especially after the gift of the Spirit is given.

So here are the three elements of discipleship. First, a disciple is a student of "the Way". Being a student of the Way requires being in relationship with the master, or teacher, or rabbi, whatever you want to call him. It's not good enough to just read about it.

Secondly, a disciple is a practitioner of "the Way", still in relationship with the Lord. That's how we really learn it. We put it into practice and develop first hand experience of how fruitful it is and how much richer our lives become. So let's fish out of the side of the boat that Jesus tells us to fish from.

Thirdly, a mature disciple is a proponent, or teacher, of "the Way". That's the whole meaning of the words from last week's selection, "As the father has sent me, so I send you." Jn 20:21 The primary way we teach "the Way" is by witness of life. As St. Francis is purported to have said, "Preach the Gospel in all places and at all times. And, if necessary, use your voices".

So let's double down and follow him! Let's let our fishing, in life, be fruitful. Let's join the fruits of our labors, our fish, to his, at Mass, as one combined gift to the Father. And, let's be at peace.

God bless...

Personal Reflection:

"...when you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." ...And when he had said this, he said to him, "Follow me." Jn 21:18-19

Question:

What words or phrases attracted your attention during the Liturgy of the Word on Sunday? What connection do those words or phrases have to your day-to-day life? (Why do you think they attracted your attention?) What might God be trying to say to you through these words or phrases? What response should you make? What action should you take?

Alternative:

Share about/Reflect upon what makes you feel like you are really a disciple of the Lord. Does your discipleship contain all three elements of discipleship? What do you need to change in your life to be a more mature disciple?

Verse by Verse:

Jn 21:1 "...at the sea of Tiberius." | The Sea of Tiberius was also known as the Sea of Galilee. Both names are used in the Gospels. It does indicate that they were no longer in Jerusalem but had returned to Galilee.

Jn 21:3 "... 'I am going fishing...'" | In Greek, this is literally "I am going to fish". Some believe this means that Peter was going back to making his living as a fisherman which does not necessarily imply that he was leaving The Way (Christianity) behind. Even if they went back to fishing for a living, we might assume that he would have continued living The Way (Christianity) which Jesus taught. But, Jesus telling Peter "Follow me." in Jn 21:19 might support the assumption that Peter was leaving Christianity behind.

The non-canonical Gospel of Peter 14:60, as pointed out in AYBC, may shed some light:

Now it was the last day of the unleavened bread, and many were going forth, returning to their homes, as the feast was ended. But we, the twelve disciples of the Lord, wept and were grieved: and each one, being grieved for that which was come to pass, departed to his home. But I Simon Peter and Andrew my brother took our nets and went to the sea; and there was with us Levi the son of Alphæus, whom the Lord ...

It does seem, since they were using their nets, that they were fishing for more than their immediate personal needs.

Jn 21:4a "When it was already dawn, Jesus was standing on the shore" | They were fishing at night but Jesus was there when the sun comes up. Is this a contrast by John of the dark being the absence of Jesus and Jesus being the light?

Jn 21:4b "but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus." | Scholars are not in agreement as to why they didn't recognize him or what, if any, significance it may have. Some say this may have originally been a story of the first appearance which John placed as the second account.

Jn 21:5 "... 'Children, have you caught anything to eat?...'" | The word "children" is probably a too literal translation of the Greek. The meaning may be better rendered by using the word "Lads". It was probably a colloquialism.

AYBC points out that the Greek is more directly translated "You haven't caught... have you?" with the implied answer being "no". Is John telling us that without Jesus we can't be fruitful?

Jn 21:6 "...Cast the net over the right side of the boat..." | AYBC points out "John implies a more than natural knowledge on Jesus' part and the corresponding moral duty to obey him exactly if one is his disciple."

Jn 21:6 "...and you will find something." | This is an accurate translation. The Greek does not imply they will find fish.

Jn 21:7 “...the disciple whom Jesus loved...” | Most take this to mean John. It is also used in Jn 21:20, Jn 13:23, Jn 19:26 and, Jn 20:2 although in this last instance a different Greek word for love is used.

Jn 21:10 “...Bring some of the fish you just caught.” | Jesus already had fish on the fire (see Jn 21:9). Their adding some of their catch to it means the breakfast was a combination of Jesus input and theirs. It reminds me of our combining the gift of our lives to Jesus’ sacrifice-of-self made present at every Mass.

Jn 21:11 “...one hundred fifty-three large fish...” | The UBS translation handbook states that the number is only meant literally even though there have been many attempts to put forward a symbolic meaning. At least as far back as St. Jerome, 342-347 to 420 CE, there have been theories on its meaning but none can be proven. Jerome said that Greek zoologists recorded 153 kinds of fish and proposed that the number meant disciples being made in all the world’s cultures. Some say the untorn net references Jesus’ undivided tunic.

21:13 “Jesus came over and took some of the bread and gave it to them...” | The words “took” and “gave” give this episode Eucharistic overtones. AYB points out that the risen Lord does not give thanks. If there are Eucharistic overtones, why bread and fish but no wine? St Augustine saw in the cooked fish, Christ who suffered, and in the bread, the bread come down from heaven. In this way, the Eucharistic symbolism reminds the reader of the presence of the risen Lord in the Christian community.

Jn 21:15 “...do you love me more than these...” | These could refer to people (all the others) or objects (all the this-worldly things). It is translated differently in different versions.

Jn 21:15-17 “...do you love me...” | In this sequence two different Greek words are used for love. Scripture scholars seem to agree that, in this instance, they are being used interchangeably. Likewise, Peter uses two different words meaning “to know”. Again, Scripture scholars agree that they are being used interchangeably.

This interchange parallels, as opposites, Peter’s threefold denial of Jesus in the courtyard of the high priest’s house (Jn 18:17, Jn 18:25 and Jn 18:27).

Jn 21:15-17 “...Feed my lambs...Tend my sheep... Feed my sheep...” | The two verbs translated here as “feed” and “tend” both mean “take care of”, not just feeding. The word translated “tend” originally meant “be a shepherd”. Hence the sentence would mean, “Be a shepherd to my sheep”. Most see in this interchange, the commissioning of Peter to lead the Church.

Jn 21:19 “...signifying by what kind of death...” | Some versions include these words in parentheses indicating that they are a comment by the Gospel writer. UBSH notes that these comments are common in the Gospel of John.

Jn 21:19 “...Follow me.” | UBSH states that this signifies following Jesus as a disciple and must also include following him in death. This last point is strengthened by the discussion of the beloved disciple not dying until Jesus returned in Jn 21:23.

Jn 21:1-19 | These verses constitute the majority of what is considered an epilogue. AYB indicates that there is no evidence that the Gospel was ever circulated without the epilogue. It possibly was written by someone other than the author of that which precedes it.