

## **Homily for Easter III - 2022 It is the Lord!**

Every believer in the risen Lord has their favourite resurrection story. I think today's gospel, the story of Our Lord calling to the disciples from the shore of the lake and the amazing catch of 153 fishes is mine, although as a priest, the road to Emmaus culminating in the revelation of Jesus risen in the breaking of the bread comes a hot second!

My reason for loving today's gospel so much is not particularly religious. It reminds me of being in the Wimmera in my late teens and being on the shores of one or other of the lakes that form the Wimmera Mallee Irrigation Catchment. There's ten or a dozen of them.

Some of my happiest memories are of fishing, yabbing, swimming and camping with friends from Agricultural College at one or other of those lakes. We visited most of them. A great sense of the freedom, simplicity and joy in being at one with other young men on the shores of those beautiful lakes remains with me to this very day. Foremost in those memories is being at the edge of a lake enjoying the sun rise on a clear morning, as darkness surrendered to dawn and as dawn became day and the preparation of a superb breakfast of fried fish, yabbies, eggs, bacon and thick slabs of buttered toast all washed down with hot milk coffee well laced with whisky or rum.

St John in this beautiful 'addition' to his gospel (for that is what chapter 21 of St John's gospel indeed is) certainly paints a beautifully vivid picture of the lake in the early morning. The apparent stranger calling out to the men from the shore. The excited realisation by John who the stranger was and impetuous Peter grabbing his cloak and leaping over the side in his eagerness to be first to greet Jesus. And then the charcoal fire with that sumptuous breakfast cooking for them.

Its worth pointing out that the story is entirely in accord with what fishermen did on Galilee in our Lord's time and right up to the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. Night time was the best time to fish the lake. Often worn out fishermen would return empty handed after a fruitless night of toil. Also, at dawn the men in the boat would sometimes be guided as to where to cast the net by someone strategically placed on land, who was better able to see in the clear shallow water where a shoal of fish might be.

The encounter the fishermen had with the Risen Lord on the shore of Galilee is of a similar order to other resurrection encounters recorded in the gospels. At first Jesus was not recognised... then He was. It was thus for Mary Magdalene at the tomb, She mistook the Lord for the Gardener until He called her name.. Mary! In the upper room, the Apostles

mistook the Lord for a ghost until He ate some fish and showed them His wounded hands and side. The two disciples on the road to Emmaus didn't recognise Jesus, even as their hearts burned while He explained to them the meaning of the scriptures. It was not until He broke the bread that their eyes were opened.

St John's vivid story of the risen Christ revealing himself on the shore of the Sea of Galilee reminds us again, very powerfully indeed, of the physical reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Very early in the second century (around 110AD) St Ignatius of Antioch, who was a disciple of St John himself, wrote 7 epistles to various churches while making the journey from Antioch to Rome in chains, to face martyrdom. He was fed to the wild beasts. In his Epistle to the Church at Smyrna, Ignatius also gives powerful testimony to the reality of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ saying: ... *"I know that after His resurrection also He was still possessed of flesh, and I believe that He is so now. When, for instance, He came to those who were with Peter, He said to them: 'Lay hold, handle Me, and see that I am not a bloodless demon.' And immediately they touched Him, and they believed, being convinced both by His flesh and Spirit. For this cause also they despised death and were found its conquerors. And after His resurrection He ate and drank with them as one in the flesh."*

Always, there have been those deny outright the possibility of resurrection at all. Remember the Greeks at Athens who mocked St Paul when he spoke of the resurrection of Jesus Christ (see Acts 17:32). A well, there have always been those who attempt to explain away the appearances of the risen Lord to the disciples as visions or hallucinations. Real, but only in an internal or visionary sense. The gospels themselves are at pains to insist that the Risen Christ was not a vision, not a hallucination, not even a spirit but a real person.

A good deal of modern biblical commentary downplays the physical reality of Christ's resurrection and attempts to rationalise the resurrection stories into into a more palatable form for so-called 'modern' minds. It suggests that members of the early church had all sorts of warm inner experiences of Jesus being alive in their hearts and minds after His crucifixion. Accordingly they came to understand those experiences in terms of the myth of Jesus having risen from the dead. Such liberal commentators sometimes speak of a "Resurrection of Easter Faith." The notion that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a myth that somehow gripped the consciousness of the Apostles and very first Christians fails spectacularly, quite simply because it is faith in something did not even happen, rather than

faith in something that did. The disciples could never have experienced such a ‘resurrection of Easter Faith’ without a literal resurrection. If it was not the Risen Lord Jesus, then who or what was it that so completely transformed the disciples and converted the world?

The fact of the matter is that each of the four gospels is at pains to insist that the Risen Christ was no a vision, neither an hallucination, certainly no spirit or phantom, and we could add most certainly no warm inner glow or feeling that might be termed a ‘resurrection experience of Easter faith’ giving rise to mythical stories about miracles and resurrection. The gospels clearly and forcefully affirm that the risen Christ had a real body which still bore the marks of the nails and of the spear that was thrust into his side.

To return to our Gospel for today, no vision or hallucination or spirit or warm inner glow would be likely to direct a party of fishermen to a shoal of fish. No vision or hallucination or spirit or warm inner glow would be likely to kindle a charcoal fire, prepare a meal and share it out. Yet, the Risen Christ did all these things. This then is the simplest and yet most profound aim of today’s gospel, to affirm simply but emphatically the physical and objective reality of the resurrection. It was indeed the Risen Lord Jesus and no other who called out from the shore and who prepared a breakfast for the fishermen.

St Peter so powerfully states in his second Epistle when he says: *“We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.”* 2 Peter 1:16

And to quote St John again from last weeks gospel.. *“These things are written that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Christ and that through this belief you may have life in His name.”*

On this Third Sunday of the joyful season of Easter, with all honesty and truthfulness we can affirm our sincere belief in the objective reality of the Lord’s glorious Resurrection by saying *“My Lord and my God”* as urged last week, at the elevation of the Host and the Chalice, during the prayer of consecration. As well, when we actually receive Holy Communion we can join with the young Apostle John, the one whom Jesus Loved, and say with heartfelt faith... *“It’s the Lord!”*

Dear Faithful people, may grace and peace be yours from God who is, who was and who is to come and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn son, who was raised from death.... to Him be glory and power for ever and ever. Amen! Alleluia!