

No Ordinary Picnic

Third Sunday of Easter – April 10, 2016 – John 21: 1-10

On this third Sunday of Easter Jesus sits down to a meal with his disciples. This picnic on the beach is anything but ordinary. In fact, this meal is the beginning of the Church and her missionary activity to spread the gospel.

This story is another of the appearance stories where the Risen Christ appears and is made known to his disciples. The interesting point is that this very extraordinary experience happens in the midst of a very ordinary day when the disciples are doing a very ordinary task. In the midst of their grief and loss, **“Simon Peter said to them, ‘I am going fishing.’** Peter has gone back to work. He is all about moving on with his life without the Lord. **“They (the other disciples) said to him, ‘We also will come with you.’ So they went out and got into the boat but that night they caught nothing.”**

Here we have the disciples in the act of making a living. They are working in the context of loss and grief. Their yield is nothing. **“When it was already dawn, Jesus was standing on the shore; Jesus said to them, Children, have you caught anything to eat? They answered him, “No.”**

Jesus instructs them to try again. This time the net is full to the point of breaking. In this moment, their recognition of Jesus is complete. Peter jumps over board in an attempt to reach Jesus before the boat is back to shore. Jesus already has a fire going with bread and fish on the barbeque. He asked that they too bring some of their fish for the feast. This Eucharistic motif provides a small banquet of spiritual nourishment for these weary disciples. They eat of their work and the Divine hand that provides the catch setting up the next point to this story.

Jesus challenges Peter towards redemption. Having denied the Lord three times prior to the crucifixion, Peter is asked three times if he loves Jesus. Each time the question is the same. Each time Peter says yes to the question, **“Simon, son of John, do you love me?”** The question is a challenge toward the missionary activity of the Church, a responsibility being entrusted to Peter. Peter is redeemed from his failures with the charge to **“feed my lambs, tend my sheep, and feed my sheep.”** The new missionary activity can only take place in the overall love of Christ, not in the desire for personal gain or recognition. Without Christ there is no catch.

This challenge lies at the very heart of the pastoral care of the Church. Jesus has moved this extraordinary picnic from the simple meal of bread and fish into the universal nature of care and concern for the least and the lost.

However, the missionary activity of the Church will take us to the outer limits of our very self. Jesus says to Peter, **“Amen, Amen, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted; but then 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.” He said this signifying by what kind of death he (Peter) would glorify God.”**

Our lives as Christians call us to realize that if we follow Christ into the missionary activity of the Church, we will suffer and one day we will die. The question for each of us is the same as the question posed to Peter, **“Do you love me?”** If we answer yes, then we are also accepting that our life is no longer our own. We live and die for Christ. This is the challenge and the charge this week. On his part, Jesus says something very simple, **“Follow me.”**

Happy Easter!
Sue Schettler