

While in the seminary, we had a chance to go to the Holy Land and visit the spot that traditionally marks the place where the Risen Christ ate with His apostles in today's gospel. There is a quaint little Church called the Primacy of St. Peter that is run by the Franciscans. Inside there is a flat rock where they believe Jesus ate with his disciples. For some reason, I remember praying in that little church and there was a cat wandering around. It's odd the things I remember.

Let's take a closer look at our gospel. Peter says, "*I am going fishing.*" We are not quite sure if Peter is returning to his former way of life – going back to what he knows – or if he and the apostles just need to eat.

Regardless, this makes me think if you've ever had a rich religious experience – a beautiful retreat or a moment in prayer – a real encounter with Christ – and then you return home and your fervor goes back down. It's important to maintain a consistent prayer life – to stay connected to Jesus, the vine who gives you life.

Additionally, we are told six others apostles join Peter. There are seven in all. Seven is a number of perfection. For example, there are seven days of creation. Here, we have a symbol of the whole church – all those in Peter's boat – fishing for souls – or at least trying to do so.

The apostles fish at night. In John's gospel, night is symbolic of weak faith, or trying to accomplish things without Christ. Without Christ, the Church cannot fulfill its vocation of catching fish for Jesus.

John then tells us, "*When it was already dawn, Jesus was standing on the shore.*" It's no accident that Jesus is associated with the dawn, given that He is the light of the world. Unlike the apostles, He knows where the fish are.

And in contrast to the apostles, He stands on the shore. St. Augustine remarked that the shore is the limit of the sea. Jesus, then, stands at the limit of time – or the end of the world. He stands firmly on solid ground, whereas the apostles struggle to fish in the waters of time.

Certainly, the Church has and always will have her struggles as she makes her way through time. Sometimes they will come from without – storms that press upon the boat. Other times they will come from within - dissension, worldliness, and immorality.

Unfortunately, sometimes struggle comes from the inside *and* the outside. The good news, however, is that Christ always sees His boat, and guides it accordingly.

John then gives us a strange detail. Peter was fishing without clothes, or in our translation, he is lightly clad. He then puts on clothing before jumping into the water. John, as always, has something deeper in mind.

Symbolically, Bishop Barron points out that Peter's nakedness reminds us of Adam, who was innocent before the Lord. After sinning, he puts on clothes because of shame. The idea may be that Peter puts on clothes because he had previously denied Christ three times. The good news is that whatever shame Peter had, Christ will soon restore and re-commission him to feed His sheep.

The disciples follow dragging a net full of fish, 153 to be exact. Lots of ink has been spilt over the meaning of this number. Jerome, of course, pointed out that it was believed there were 153 species of fish in the Mediterranean Sea. The Church, symbolized by the net, is not broken as it works to bring in every person into God's kingdom.

On other hand, 153 could just be John's testimony that he was there. Fishermen tend to know exactly how many fish they catch and how much each weighs. Moreover, given that John was the youngest, it may have been his job to count the fish. John, then, may be saying, "There was 153 fish. I know because I was there. I had to count every single one of them. It was a lot of work."

Next, we are told that Jesus invites them to have breakfast. There is fish and bread. In John's gospel, the last time there was fish and bread by the Sea of Tiberias was when Jesus fed five thousand people. This prefigured the Eucharist. Here, John may be giving us a picture of the heavenly banquet, where the Risen Christ shares a meal with His apostles. At every Mass, we celebrate the Eucharist, a foreshadowing and participation in the banquet of heaven.

Finally, we have the famous dialogue between Jesus and Peter. Jesus invites Peter to reaffirm his love for him three times in front of a charcoal fire, which reminds us of Peter's threefold denial before a charcoal fire before Jesus' crucifixion.

For us, this is good news. Like Peter, we often deny Jesus in words and actions. However, Jesus in His mercy gives us opportunities to ask for forgiveness and to express our love for Him again. Jesus doesn't just ask Peter, but each of us, "Do you love me?"

And as with Peter, Jesus does not just expect words, but also action by following Him. Oftentimes, He will lead you to places that you do not want to go – or at least uncomfortable in doing so.

He may lead to places internally where you need healing and forgiveness. And He may lead you externally where you can share Jesus to others. Peter, for his part, experienced both. Jesus healed Peter internally by forgiving Him. Healed by Christ, Peter now knows that He depends completely on the Lord.

This, in turn, allowed Jesus to bring Peter to places where he would never have gone alone. Eventually, Peter was lead to Rome where tradition says that he was crucified upside down.

In short, this Resurrection narrative gives us great encouragement. Christ stands on the shore, firmly planted. He knows where the fish are. He's prepared the fire and ready to dine with us. By encountering Him again and again, we will not only be nourished, but experience healing and brought to places we could never have dreamed of going by ourselves. As always, stay close to Jesus, rely on His mercy, and He will take care of the rest.