

### Third Sunday of Easter

***Peter was distressed that Jesus had said to him a third time, "Do you love me?" and said to Jesus: "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you."***

John 21, 1-19

A good way of getting an insight into today's gospel is to take the words of Jesus: "*Cast your net on the other side*" metaphorically. Jesus is inviting his disciples, and us with them, to embrace change, to turn our lives around, to do an about-face, if necessary, in order to live with integrity and authenticity.

Let's look at that invitation of Jesus in context. The lives of the disciples had been thrown into utter confusion by the events of the previous few days. Though Jesus had predicted his arrest, trial, death and resurrection, they had failed to grasp his message. Still trying to cope with their grief, they are now trying to cope with the confusion and bewilderment that have come from the incredible news of his being raised from the grave and the couple of strange encounters they have subsequently had with him. Unable to properly cope, they did what many people do in the face of shock and sudden loss - they took refuge in the familiar and the comfortable, they did what they knew best, they went fishing! So practiced at it were they that they didn't even vary their method, despite the fact that they had had no success.

That famous Aussie Rules player and coach, Ron Barassi once said: Practice makes perfect is balderdash! Only perfect practice makes perfect!" But this was a lesson the disciples had still not mastered. They were in a rut, and, to make matters worse, were paralysed by fear, hesitancy and self-recrimination. That's when the risen Jesus appears to them a third time and shakes them out of their paralysis. He points out that life and abundance are to be found elsewhere, indeed, in the very opposite direction to the one in which they were looking and moving. "*Cast your nets to the other side*", he urges.

By this time, the disciples were fairly well practiced in self-recrimination. Peter, in particular, was dealing with the fact that he had disowned Jesus three times. And all except John were coming to terms with the fact that they had run away in Jesus' hour of greatest need. While Jesus does not pretend that the relationship between him and them has not been fractured, he does not resort to being vindictive. He does not confront them with an interrogation: "How could you have possibly done that to me? Why did you deny me?" He was not caught up with the past. By ignoring the past, he sent a clear message to the disciples, and to us, that living in the past, constantly blaming oneself for past mistakes, is unhealthy and destructive. He put the focus on the here and now and directly challenged Peter: "Do you love me? And if you do, put your energy into loving service of others." Let go of the past, give up repeating things that get you nowhere, stop blaming yourself. Turn your attention to living productively, try fishing on the *other* side!

We don't have to look far to find people who found the courage and commitment to put the past behind them and cast their nets on the other side. Following a distinguished career in the Royal Air Force during World War II, Leonard Cheshire, after declaring that God was an invention of people's minds, found his way into Catholicism and spent the remainder of his life working tirelessly in support of disabled and terminally ill people. Helen Keller was born profoundly deaf and blind yet overcame these severe disabilities to live a full and active life as a public speaker and writer advocating for peace and the rights of women and people with disabilities.

The key to turning one's life around so dramatically is to be found in the question that Jesus put to Peter and, of course, in Peter's response. When one finds and develops a capacity to love, to reach out in selfless service to others, one begins to work little miracles, one sows the seeds of new life in others. That's how resurrection is made real in our own time and place.

It is not by mere coincidence that, as Peter protests his love of Jesus, he is invited to invest himself and his energies in the service of others. He is missioned to feed and shepherd those whose care and well-being Jesus had championed during his life. Jesus does not taunt Peter, but calls him to move beyond the past by taking on the challenge of servant leadership. In similar fashion, he overlooks our failures and disappointments and invites us to be big enough to forgive and seek forgiveness, thereby enabling resurrection to happen in our families, our communities, our places of work and our neighbourhoods.