

Bishop Bradley's Reflections on the Scripture Readings for

April 10, 2016 Third Sunday of Easter

As we come together today, still celebrating Easter joy, and enjoying the warmth of the Easter candle with the Light of Christ shining forth for all to see, it feels much more like Christmas with the frigid temps, freezing rain, and occasional snow showers. Perhaps one day soon the weather will catch up with the fact that it's time for Spring!

At least the Scripture Readings we have just heard proclaimed help us to continue rejoicing in the Easter event with the joy that is appropriate for this Easter Season.

The Apostles at this point are pretty disheartened and discouraged. They had seen their Master and Lord killed and buried. Two days later, they had begun to hear stories that the tomb was empty and that Jesus was alive, but, how could that be? They were still trying to process all this, and did not know what to make of it. So as we heard at the beginning of the Gospel, Peter says: "I'm going fishing." Several of the others say: "We'll go too!" Remember, most of them used to be professional fishermen---that's what they did for a living, until Jesus called them to follow Him. So, when Peter says "I'm going fishing," what he was really saying was: Well, what we tried to do----following Jesus----didn't work out----it ended in a disaster----Jesus was arrested, tortured, killed in the most gruesome way possible, and buried----It's all over. I might as well go back to what I knew and what I was good at before!

But we heard what happened. These experienced fishermen fish all night----and catch nothing! When morning light comes, they see a "Stranger" on the shore calling to them: "*Children, have you caught anything?*" And if that's not odd enough, this "Stranger" starts giving them suggestions on how to do what they were supposedly experts at! They take His advice, and catch so many fish that their boat starts to sink. And then, the "lightbulb" turns on, and John says to Peter: "*It is the Lord!*" Peter doesn't want to wait for the boat to slowly get them into shore, so he jumps in and swims as fast as he can to get to Jesus.

When they get to shore, Jesus has a campfire going and He tells them to bring some of the fish they just caught. So, it would seem to me that Jesus, and all those Apostles, would have made some pretty good scouts if scouting had been around in those days.

Of course, there's something much more important going on here than that. The "Stranger" was the Risen Jesus. The Apostles still weren't able to "recognize" Him because of their lack of

faith. But eventually they did---and this campfire scene is one of the ways that they were able to do so.

Does that “scene” remind you of anything? Jesus had the fire going.....He asked them to bring some of the fish they had caught....Then we are told: “Jesus...took the bread and gave it to them, and in like manner, the fish.” Does that sound familiar? It sounds like what Jesus had done just a few days before that at the Last Supper. This scene is Eucharistic. It’s in the Eucharist that the Apostles are once more able to recognize the Risen Lord.

It’s the same for us, here and now. It’s here---at the Celebration of the Eucharist---that we come to recognize the Risen Lord at every Mass! We come to Mass---we bring ourselves---“the Fish”; and Jesus provides the “fire”---His Real Presence. And in the process, when we receive the Body and Blood of Christ, we are transformed into the Risen Christ---we become what we eat. We enter into the new life of Christ in the Eucharist.

The Gospel story continues on for another very important moment. The Risen Jesus needed to take care of some unfinished “business” that He had with Peter. So Jesus asked Peter a very direct question: “*Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?*” Jesus had to know because Jesus was counting on Peter to be His representative ---His Vicar---the one who would be the Leader of the Church when Jesus Ascended back to Heaven. Peter answered: “*Yes, Lord, you know that I love You.*” Jesus asked Peter that very same questions two more times. It seems clear that because just a few days earlier, Peter had three times denied even knowing who Jesus was because Peter was afraid of getting into trouble, Jesus was trying to make sure that Peter really loved Him, and so He asked him three times to kind of “make up for” the three times he denied Him. Each time that Peter said, Yes, Lord, you know that I love You”, Jesus gave him a “job” to do: “*Feed my Lambs*”, “*Tend my Sheep*”, and “*Feed my Sheep*”.

At the end of that conversation, Jesus said: “*Follow Me!*”

What Jesus was telling Peter was that there was no going back to his former way of life----of being a fisherman was no longer what he was called to do---he was no longer successful at catching fish. What Jesus was calling him to do was to be “the fisher of men”---to “catch people”---to “bring people to Christ”.

That question is an extremely important question for all of us. So let me ask you: “My sisters and brothers, DO YOU LOVE JESUS?” “Do you love Jesus “more than these”?” “These” what? “These” anything!

Do you love Jesus, and intend to follow Jesus and live according to God’s ways more than any other “ways”?

Do you intend to love Jesus, and follow Him, even if or when people make fun of you for doing that?

In today’s First Reading, we see these same Apostles after the Holy Spirit had come upon them on the first Pentecost. They had lost all their fears; they were absolutely committed to following the Risen Jesus no matter what the personal cost; they clearly recognized Jesus and knew that He was Alive and living within them. And so, even when they were arrested, even when they were directly commanded to stop preaching about the Risen Jesus, we heard them say: “*We must obey God rather than men.*”

None of us wants to have to make that kind of choice. But when we have to make that choice---if there’s a conflict between “God’s ways” and the “ways of the world”, then we must choose God’s ways.

That takes a lot of courage----the courage and strength that we get from this celebration of the Eucharist---the courage and support that we get from our faith. That courage also comes from being very clear in our answer to Jesus’ most important question: “Do you love Me more than these?” We hope and pray that our answer will always be very clear: “Yes, Lord, you know that I love You.” And when we do, we will very clearly hear Jesus say in response: “Well, then, just follow Me---follow Me wherever I lead you---follow Me all the days of your lives.

God bless you, now and always!