

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This weekend's Gospel speaks of another resurrection account of Jesus. After Jesus rose from the dead and appeared at least twice to His disciples, Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James and John, and two other disciples decide to go fishing. Now, you have to remember, this is not a bunch of guys want to take a fishing vacation;" this is their livelihood. They have been following Jesus for three years, they have witnessed the signs and wonders that Jesus has done, they have witnessed the resurrection ... but they now go back to their old way of life. Have they been thinking, "Well, Jesus did great things, but now we don't see Him much anymore. We might as well go back to the way we were."

I think that this is an incredibly common temptation today. God does so much for us! He died for us, because He loves us and wants us to be with Him forever. He rose from the dead to destroy the power of sin and death. He pours out His Holy Spirit into the world through the Church, so that we can still have a living relationship with Almighty God. God gives us His life in Baptism, so that we become the Body of Christ, the Church. He pours out His Spirit in each of our lives in powerful ways through Confirmation. He feeds us not just with "bread from heaven" (which would be incredible enough), but with His very Body and Blood – with the very essence of *who He is!* When we are open to Him, God often gives us profound experiences of His mercy and love through the sacrament of Reconciliation, a powerful retreat, or religious experience. And yet ... and yet ... we too often go back to our old ways of life. It's as if we say to Jesus, "Okay, I know You did all of this for me, but what have You done for me lately?"

This temptation – after the excitement of a high-powered retreat has died down, after the scent of the Chrism from the sacraments has faded – is to think our encounter with God was only a "passing phase." The temptation is to "go back to real life," instead of truly living *life in Christ*.

Jesus appears to the disciples, and shows them that He is still part of their lives. Despite going back to "normal life," they find that they are empty: they work all night and catch nothing. At the word of Jesus, they have a miraculous catch.

Do you see this? Without Christ, all our efforts leave us empty. With Christ, we have superabundance. In Christ we find meaning for our lives. In Christ, we find purpose. In Christ, the toil is worth it.

In the end of this Gospel passage, Peter comes face to face with his sin – there is a charcoal fire on the beach, the same type of fire described in the courtyard of the High Priest when Peter denied Jesus three times. As scary as it is to face our sin, we have to do it. But notice that when we do it with Christ (as opposed to facing our sin and weakness on our own in the darkness), it is in the light of love. Jesus doesn't ask Peter, "Are you sorry for your sin?" Nor does He ask him if he will die for Him. No, Jesus asks Peter, "Do you love me more than these?" (John 21:15). More than *what?* More than fishing. More than the disciples around them. Does Peter love Jesus more than he loves other things?

And here is where Jesus comes to us. He has given us everything, and, more often than not, we go on with our lives as if nothing has happened, but Jesus keeps reaching out to us. He doesn't shame us. He wants us to love Him. Sometimes it means we have to come face to face with our sin. Sometimes it means that we see our cowardliness, our inability to keep our resolves, the times when we have abandoned, denied, or betrayed our friends, family or God. Yet in the midst of this, Jesus asks us one question: "Do you love me more than these?"

In this question, we are given the whole perspective of our lives. The moral law is not about toughing our way through difficult or impossible tasks assigned by God. No, it is about living in a living relationship with the God of the universe. It is about trusting His love enough to know that when He asks us to do something, He will give us the grace, the strength, the courage to do it. It is about trusting that God's commandments are commands coming not from a vindictive heart, but from the Heart of the Father, who loves us more than we love ourselves, who longs for our good, our flourishing, our fulfillment more than we long for it ourselves. It means that we're called to respond to God, not as slave or servant, but as lover. While fear is enough to keep us from Hell, it is *love* that God desires from us.

I encourage you to take time this week to examine your life. Look back at the many ways that God has touched your life, how He has called you to His Heart. Then, taking His hand of love (I get the image of a five-year-old grabbing her father's hand), do not be afraid to face your sin. In facing your sin with God, you will hear these most incredible words from the Heart of God: "Do you love me more than these?" If you struggle to say yes, be honest with yourself and with God. Ask Him to expand your love so that you will be able to say, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you" (John 21:15). When we do this honestly with God, we find that, instead of leading us back to the "old way of life," He will give us something new: "Feed my lambs... Tend my sheep... Feed my sheep.... Follow me" (John 21: 15, 16, 17, 19).