

Archbishop Lori's Homily: 3rd Sunday of Easter; Maryland Knights of Columbus Convention

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St. Luke Church, Ocean City, Maryland

May 4, 2019

Introduction

It is great pleasure to offer Holy Mass here at St. Luke Church on the occasion of the Knights of Columbus Maryland State Convention. I want to recognize, greet, and thank our Worthy State Deputy, Mr. Dale Trott, together with all the officers of the Maryland State Council. We are blessed by the presence of two former State Chaplains, Msgr. Marty Fields and Fr. Don Grzymiski and our current State Chaplain, Fr. Joe Jenkins. I extend a special welcome to Paul and Julie Lambert from North Dakota; Paul is my colleague on the Board of the Knights and we are most grateful for your representing the leadership of the Order. My warmest greetings to all of you, my brother knights, as well as to your wives and families, gathered in such great numbers.

What I would like to do this evening, in the midst of this beautiful season of Easter, is to offer a reflection on how today's Scripture readings apply to all of us - to you, my brother Knights and families, striving to live the ideals of the Order, and to all of you, my brothers and sisters, striving to live your vocations amid the many challenges and pressures of everyday life.

In the Midst of Daily Work

So, as this evening's Gospel opens, where do we find the Apostles? We find them doing the very thing they were engaged in when the Lord first called them to follow him - they are fishing. To be specific, they are fishing in a boat on the Sea of

Tiberias. It seems that, in the midst of the Risen Lord's comings and goings – the Apostles are grappling with the mystery of the Resurrection. As they wrestle with a reality that exceeds everything they ever imagined, a number of them return to their old livelihood, commercial fishing, if you will. Let us ask why they decided to do this. Are the Apostles trying, amid their confusion, to go back to “normal” – to forget what they had seen and heard – as if the Risen Lord were a mirage that will vanish or a dream from which they will awake? Or do they find themselves on a boat fishing for a divine reason a providential reason that only gradually will become clear to them?

Let's linger over this point for just a moment. As we go about our daily routine, whether it's work or family responsibilities, are we merely earning a livelihood and merely keeping things under control at home? Do we keep busy with our chores or with our chosen profession, not solely out of necessity but also at some level to escape the confusion, misunderstanding, and futility that are so often a part of life? Or do we put the Risen Lord in the background, perhaps forgetting him altogether? The Gospel suggests that, like the apostles, we are called in the midst of daily routine to engage in a mission that is larger than ourselves and our immediate concerns. Let us, therefore, press onward in reflecting on this Gospel.

We read in the Gospel that the disciples labored all night long and caught nothing. As they were heading toward the shore, they see a stranger who suggests that, in spite of their futile efforts, they should lower their nets again, and this time they catch 153 large fish. It was the beloved disciple John who, with the eyes of love, first recognized the Lord; but it was Peter, the leader of the Apostles, who jumped into the water, swam ashore, and encountered Jesus. Let us see how the Risen Lord opened the eyes of his first followers. He did so by making their old occupation, namely, fishing, a sign and symbol of the Church's mission of evangelization. The boat on the sea is the Church travelling on the waters of history, headed toward the shore of eternity where the Risen Lord awaits. Along the way, the Risen Lord instructs Apostles – and all those on the boat – to lower their nets, not for a catch of fish, but for a catch of souls – people from every race, culture, and language. The 153 fish represent all the then-known cultures of the earth. Thus does John's Gospel portray the Church's mission of evangelization!

Now let us return to the question of the meaning of our daily life and work. Does not

the Lord call us to follow him in and through our daily routine? Does he not call us in the midst of our daily lives to spread his Gospel? Just as the Risen Lord opened the eyes of those Galilean fisherman to the true mission with which he was entrusting them, so too the Risen Lord wants to open our eyes to the opportunities that are all around us to spread the Gospel. In other words, every occupation and every vocation is integral to the Church's ongoing mission of lowering its nets for a catch of souls – and this is true whether the times are peaceful or filled with controversy. Just when we think it is futile to encourage a son or daughter to return to church, or when we think a friend or co-worker has closed themselves off to the faith, the Risen Lord says to us, “lower your nets for a catch!” Or when we think our efforts to teach the faith or to engage in works of charity have no impact on our lives of faith and that of others – we hear the Lord say to us, “lower your nets for a catch.” In the midst of daily routine there are countless opportunities to spread the Gospel but often we are either afraid to seize them or we are convinced they will be futile.

Two Conditions sine qua non

What enabled the Apostles to break through the futility of fishing and not catching? How did they shed their confusion and timidity so as to become the bold witnesses to the Gospel that we see in today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles? There are two conditions for this that applied to them and that apply to us also.

First, we must be convinced in faith that the Risen Lord is truly with us, not as a ghost or a mirage or a mere idea – but present in truth, reality, and power. We must recognize his Presence, not only with the eyes of faith but also love. And once we recognize his Presence we must seek in the Holy Spirit to encounter him. In that encounter, we, like Peter, must repent of our betrayals and profess our love. As we do so, the Risen Lord moves from the periphery of our hearts to the center, thus transforming how we think, how we make decisions, how we love. In this way we make become, no longer casual Catholics, but missionary disciples!

Second, if we wish our labors on behalf of the Gospel to bear fruit, we must worship the Risen Lord “in spirit and in truth”. Today's reading from the Book of Revelation gives us a glimpse of the joy and rapture of the great liturgy of heaven, where countless angels and members of the redeemed cry out with one voice: “Worthy is

the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches, wisdom and strength, honor, and glory, and blessing!" In the Church's earthly liturgy, Holy Mass and the Sacraments, you and I are privileged to participate even now in that heavenly liturgy where Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father. As we join saints and angels in worshipping the Risen Lord, something of the Lord's power over sin and death, something of his goodness and glory begins to dawn on us, just as was the case with the Apostles on the seashore. Then it is that our souls are flooded with grace and strength such that our discipleship and our labors - even when they seem futile - will bring forth astonishing results both in time and eternity. May God bless us and keep us always in his love!