

### 3rd Sunday of Easter “Time to Fish!” With Confirmation

Bishop Frank Schuster

My friends, do you want to hear some good news? The great thing about being a bishop is I get to see what is going on throughout the archdiocese. I am hearing from every pastor that our numbers are going up. The baptismal fonts were busy on Easter. We brought in about a thousand new adult Catholics on Easter Vigil in our archdiocese alone. What do you think about that? And our Archdiocese isn't alone. There is a revival going on, and not just in our own country. I am one of three bishops on the confirmation circuit this year in our archdiocese, and between the three of us, I estimate we are confirming about three thousand Catholics this month alone. What do you think about that? Did you know there was about 1.5 million young people for World Youth Day in Portugal a couple years back, and I am told that they expect that number to double when World Youth Day is held in Seoul, South Korea in 2027? My friends, mark your calendars, because you won't see the “revival” we are seeing in our country and world reported a lot in the news. Why? I think it is because the world wants you to believe that the Church is dying and irrelevant. I am here to tell you that the opposite is the case. I am here to tell you the Church is young, the Church is faithful, the Church is beautiful, and the Church is alive, like we see here today. Amen?

I love our Gospel reading this weekend, there is something very human and down to earth about Peter these last few weeks, wouldn't you say? Peter witnessed Jesus' arrest and condemnation. Peter also witnessed the empty tomb. Indeed, Peter had already encountered the Risen Lord before his very eyes. At this point in the Gospel, it seems that he and the disciples are not sure what to do next. And so, what does Peter suggest? He says, “I am going fishing.” Peter, as always, speaks for the other disciples. After everything they had been through, they don't know what to do next. And so, the disciples seem tempted to return to their former lives as fishermen. Thankfully, there is something about Jesus that refused to let his disciples go back to their former lives.

An encounter with Jesus is life changing, pointing us forward in life not backwards. Jesus asks Peter, “Do you love me”. Peter responds, “Yes, I do love you.” Jesus answers, “Feed my sheep.”

Scripture Scholar Fr. Raymond Brown suggested that, although the two stories in today’s Gospel reading seem to follow one after the other haphazardly, they are, nevertheless, related and held together by the common theme of discipleship. There is Peter in the boat out in the water. The boat reminds us of the Church, Peter’s boat, sailing over the waters of time. Jesus is at the shore, calling to mind the end of time, our heavenly destination. Jesus, looking from heaven, sees the Church not being very successful in its evangelization, not catching many fish. Notice that it is dark when this happens. The darkness calls to mind the sinfulness of its evangelizers.

I think this is a helpful commentary. When the light appears at dawn, the light of life is standing at the shore. Jesus teaches his disciples how to evangelize and where to put their nets. They catch so many fish that they have trouble pulling the nets to the heavenly shore. Many scholars have argued that the 153 fish mentioned in the Gospel represent the number of known species of fish at the time of its writing. This is an interesting thought. That the nets do not tear suggests that the saving nets of the Church can hold every soul in the world without tearing. This is quite the challenge the Lord offers the Apostles in the Gospel reading this weekend, to fish for souls and then feed his sheep. I believe this challenge is relevant for us today.

My friends, Christ died for our sins, he died for us all, Christ rose from the dead, and now, what is Jesus’ expectation of his disciples? It is time to go fishing. It is time to fish! We must evangelize. And we must evangelize by the light of his teaching, not our own. The Gospel reading this weekend suggests strongly that everything we have liturgically celebrated through the season Lent, Holy Week, and Easter should now orient ourselves to the most important symbol the Lord shows us at the end of mass. What is the most important sign the Lord points us to at the end of mass? I hope you guessed it, the exit sign! The love God has given us must be shared outside these doors.

My dear confirmandi, this mission given to us as Church begins with your own personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The sacrament of confirmation you are receiving today should remind you every day that with all the worries life can throw at you, God is with you. Even with everything the world expects of you, so often unrealistically weighing down on you, God understands you. Even when you fail, even when you fail, God will always offer to forgive you. Why? Because God loves you. Know that in your heart. God loves you, and he loves you more than you love yourself. Believe it! The world will never love you like God does. The secret is to just let him into your heart every day. Indeed, being sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit is like having God's signature written on your heart in permanent ink. You can't rub it off. Real love is like that. It is permanent and once we let God's love fill our hearts in that way, every day, we will not be able to sit still. Like Peter in our Gospel reading for this third Sunday of Easter, it is time to move, it is time to go fishing!