

## Homily 3rd Sunday in Easter - Year C (5.5.19)

I know we all have our social setting, and particular upbringing, which affects us so deeply in adult life. And I know in the time of the Apostles it was a very different situation, but I find myself very much linked to them today, both in the Gospel and in the Acts of the Apostles, because what was omitted in the Acts of the Apostles was when there were commanded not to preach in the Name, the Sanhedrin had them flogged, and then dismissed them. That's why it says,

**"And they left the presence of the Sanhedrin glad to have had the honour of suffering humiliation for the sake of the Name."**

That was the humiliation.

So, why I have an affiliation? It is because of my secondary school, which I won't name in Bradford. And it was a thug school and 50% of the thugs were the teachers. And they thought it was good to strap boys on a regular basis. I can remember, I was a goody goody two-shoes and never did anything wrong, but I used to get strapped at least five times a year. And I remember us all being kept behind after to the art class one lunch time to tidy it up from the mess of the previous classes, which made us late for the first sitting that we were on for lunch. And the teacher on lunch said,

**"Why are you late?"**

And when we told him, he said,

**"That's not a good enough excuse,"** and got his strap out and strapped all 28 of us once each as we went in to lunch to teach us a lesson not to be late.

So I was glad to suffer the humiliation for the faith. Because one of the things that struck me about the similarities is, I was brought up in what was predominantly a Christian-Catholic ethos and school, in those days, was virtually 100% Catholic attendance. And I don't remember planning this, but all my close friends, and there was at least eight at the time and some I'm still in touch with, all went to church. And most of us, by the time we got to

fourth and fifth form, had joined the school SVP, because we wanted to promote the Catholic faith. We were inspired by Frederic Ozanam, the founder of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, and his mission to the poor.

And I felt very strongly about defending the faith in school, probably an experience not common to many teenagers. And it was in that context that I felt like the Apostles, because the Apostles lived in a faith community and they themselves, even though there are very different characters like my friends were, they had the faith, they were very strongly connected through faith. But it's interesting, in this gospel, I think there's very powerful little vignettes that I've interpreted for myself. First of all, it said they were struggling with what had happened post-resurrection. And they'd just gone back to work, fishing with the nets, when Jesus appears to them. And that's very like us, isn't it? That we go about our everyday business, ploughing on, but occasionally we have a tremendous insight when Jesus comes to us in a special way and we feel maybe moved that I saw a sign or a pointer in my life. And then the fact that they were fishing all night and caught nothing, and Jesus says to them,

**"Drop the nets to starboard."**

And they get this big haul, which I think is a very powerful symbol of what he wanted them to do, to become fishers of 'men'.

And there was 153 fish apparently, and some theories say that that was the known number of nations and tribes in the world at the time. And so the symbol would be, very much that the mission of the church is to the world, is to the exclusion of no one. And that the net didn't break - In other words, there's a room to catch everyone without causing strain on the church [on the net]. And then there's this other little vignette, isn't there? They pull the fish to shore, but Jesus has already got a breakfast ready. It's very strange, isn't it? When he says,

**"Bring some of the fish here",**

but it says he already had some bread and fish cooking. And I think there's a double symbol for me here, that they can't catch their fish, which is a symbol of their mission, without his help. It is Jesus who invigorates life into people; they're just the workers, they can't do it of their own accord. But then this

little breakfast, Jesus does not need them to give him anything, as such. He has prepared food for them. They need him to feed them.

And of course there's an allusion to the Eucharist, that in other words, the profound gift that Jesus gives is his very self. And I think this little Gospel today challenges us to all these insights to look to our own lives. Am I just ploughing on in life and do I not see, occasionally, glimpses of Jesus appearing to me in the events of life? Do I accept that I need the grace of God to fulfil my mission as a Catholic Christian in the world? And when I approach the Eucharist do I really dispose myself, saying,

**"Yes, I need you to feed me to live and to survive"?**