

Homily for the 3rd Sunday of Easter
May 5, 2019
By Fr. Thomas Joseph

In the gospel reading (Jn. 21:1-19), we are presented with a post-resurrection incidence where Jesus revealed himself to his disciples at the Sea of Tiberias. In that scene, Peter had gone with some of the disciples to fish. Despite their expertise, they were unable to make a catch.

It is at this particular moment of failure, that Jesus stepped in and stood on the shore unrecognized. He ordered them to cast their net over the right side of the boat and immediately they made a very large catch which was so full of fish that it required extra efforts to pull the net out of the water.

It is EASY for me to RECOGNIZE God, and to “experience” the PRESENCE of the Risen Lord Jesus, in the BEAUTY and JOY of life! It’s EASY for me to celebrate “God among us” at a baptism, or a wedding, or First Communion. It’s EASY for me to see the hand of God in the midst of comforts and Joy. It’s EASY for me to hear God’s voice in a stunning piece of music..... But, it is a real STRUGGLE, sometimes, to find God – (to see the face of the Risen Lord) – in SUFFERING and PAIN; in difficult times.

Today's gospel reading is a message of hope for you and me. It promises us of success no matter how much effort you have wasted and no matter how many times you have failed. This type of success is guaranteed if only you are humble enough to listen to Jesus and follow his directives. You may have failed either because you did not invite Jesus to your situation or because you did not listen to or trust him.

The disciples failed in their fishing efforts despite their expertise perhaps because Christ wanted to teach them that He is the only person that can grant success to the works of their hands. The miracle was also a great manifestation of his resurrection because they had known him before his death as a wonder worker who intervenes in the hopeless situations of his people and so his miraculous intervention continues after his resurrection.

How often have you trusted Jesus in your hopeless situation? How much do you rely on him for your success? Do you think you have all the potentials to be successful in life? Do you pray for success when you are going for an interview or embarking on a project? Success is a gift for efforts made, more than it is a reward and only God can grant this gift. That is why we need God to show us the right path to our desired success as He showed the disciples by telling them to cast their net over the right side of the boat.

In the final part of the story, our attention is focused on the private encounter between Jesus and Peter. Jesus has called Peter aside and asks him three times if he loves him. "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these others do?" "Yes, Lord", says Peter, "You know that I do." Jesus asks him a second time and Peter gives the same answer. And then, for the third time, Jesus asks him again. Peter is upset and bursts out, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." After each response Jesus confirms that he believes Peter by giving him a task: feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep. And then, to sum it all up, Jesus simply says, "Follow me".

As we read or listen to this story, and hear Jesus repeat this very personal and very direct question three times, we can't help but remember that, just a few days previously, this same Peter had three times loudly denied that he even knew who Jesus was and firmly insisted that he was not a follower or disciple, of Jesus. At the time of Jesus' greatest need, when he was totally abandoned by everyone and left to his terrible fate, Peter could not find the courage to stand by him.

Such a betrayal is hard to forgive - and yet this is exactly what Jesus does in today's Gospel. In spite of Peter's terrible failure, Jesus still wished to trust him with the leadership of the new community of disciples. But Jesus knew that Peter would not have the courage to lead others if he remained burdened by the guilt of his betrayal. And so, three

times, Jesus asks Peter about the depth of his love, and in doing so gives Peter three precious opportunities to put his three betrayals, his three acts of cowardice, behind him.

Not only is the forgiveness of Jesus generous and total - it is also full of compassion, determined to help Peter move forward with hope and courage. And that is exactly what Peter does. He accepts the leadership of the community, he becomes a bold and fearless preacher of the message of Jesus, and in the end, he gives his life for his Lord, whom he really has learnt to love with all his heart.

This is the kind of forgiveness which Jesus offers each one of us - and because we are trying to be his disciples it is the kind of forgiveness, he can help us to offer each other, if we let him.