

Year for Priests

A Call with a Catch

3rd Sunday of Easter – Year C

Catholic San Francisco – April 16, 2010

Acts of the Apostles 5:27-32, 40b-41

Psalms 30:2, 4, 5-6, 11-12, 13

Revelation 5:11-14

John 21:1-19

The final Gospel encounter with the Risen Jesus is told at the end of the Gospel of John, when the Beloved Disciple recognizes Jesus standing on the shore following the great catch of fish. In this final encounter with Jesus, several events follow one right after another: Jesus feeds the fishermen when they come ashore - "Come, have breakfast;" He confronts Peter with both his commitment - "do you love me?" - and his mission - "feed my sheep;" and the entire episode ends with a call that is all too familiar to those who are His disciples - "Come, follow me."

This call to Peter concludes a story that began with the catch of fish. It is nonetheless a call that, for Peter, comes with a catch. In the verses immediately preceding, Jesus describes to Peter just what exactly it will mean to follow Him - "'When you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.' He said this signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when he had said this, he said to him, 'Follow me'" (John 21:18-19). Prior to meeting Jesus, Peter had a very different life. Now that he had declared his love for Jesus and received the command to "feed my sheep", new things would be asked and expected of him. All this is encompassed in Christ's basic call to "Come, follow me"; a call that was the catalyst to everything that followed.

Upon review of the many times Jesus issued this call throughout the four Gospels, it is a rare occasion when the call did not come with a catch. When Jesus approached the men who would be among his Apostles, his call to "Come, follow me" meant abandoning their livelihood as fishermen (Mt 4:19-22; Mk 1:17-20). The same is true for the tax collectors Matthew (Mt 9:9) and Levi (Mk 2:2). For others, "come, follow me" meant having no place to lay one's head (Mt 8:19-20), to "let the dead bury the dead" (Mt 8:22) or to abandon what had previously been



The Appearance At The Sea Of Tiberias by William Hole

familiar (Lk 9:61-62). To the rich young man, Jesus said, "Sell all you have and give to the poor...Then come and follow me" (Mk 10:21; Lk 18:22).

Clearly, Peter and the Apostles, are not the only ones for whom the call "follow me" comes with a catch. However, we know from the tradition of our Church that, not only Peter, but all of the Apostles, would eventually give their lives for the glory of God and the spread of the Gospel, after enduring persecution, arrest and torture. "Come, follow me" had a catch, and it was a catch accepted and lived courageously.

In this Year for Priests, called by our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, I am reminded of the many ways my own life has progressed, the many roads I have taken in living, not only as a Catholic, but one called to serve as a priest. Some of these roads were quite unexpected and surprising, some challenging, but all leading to my being the kind of Catholic, and the kind of priest I am today -- and the journey has not yet ended.

What have been the unexpected consequences and new roads taken by each one of us as part of our answer to Christ's basic call to "Come, follow Me"? Where and how will that journey eventually end for each one of us?

Rev. William Nicholas