

# The Catholic Parish of Petworth & Midhurst West Sussex

## Fr Peter's Homily for The Third Sunday of Easter (Year C) 1<sup>st</sup> May 2022

The fifty days of Easter are, for the disciples, a time of formation, of being moulded and taught, of being helped to reflect on what those extraordinary events in Jerusalem mean. What was it all about, and what difference does it make? The risen Jesus appears to them – individually, in groups, all together, to help them reflect on this: what now?

To start with, they didn't understand. Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb and thinks the body has been stolen, not even recognising the Lord when he stands in front of her. With a sudden shock, when she hears him say her name, she sees who it is: it is the Lord. She will not make that mistake again, she has learned something that day. Clopas and his friend are walking to Emmaus, and they don't recognise the stranger who falls in step with them. Even when he opens the scriptures for them, they still don't understand. Then he breaks bread, disappears, and they turn to one another with a shock of understanding: It is the Lord. And today, there he is by the sea. The disciples do not recognise him, but there must have been something convincing about his words because they do as he says, they simply fish on the other side of the boat, and the nets are full to bursting. John turns to Peter: It is the Lord.

There is something of a theme, certainly among the early resurrection appearances, of failure to understand, failure to see, failure to recognise – until suddenly the truth breaks through and it all makes sense. In each of these three stories something happens that breaks it all open: Mary recognises the voice, but only as it speaks her name; the two on the road do not recognise the voice, or the teaching, but something about the breaking and the sharing is beyond mistake; the extraordinary catch of fish is also a trigger, because isn't this exactly what happened that day when Jesus called Peter: a fruitless night, one more try at the stranger's command, a catch beyond all expectations? It is the Lord.

Perhaps the most touching thing about today's story is that simple little phrase. Mary worked it out for herself; the two on the road to Emmaus worked it out at exactly the same time; Peter doesn't get it until he is told, and then he's over the side of the boat and he's off. It is John who says to him 'It is the Lord' and suddenly everything looks different: brighter, better, more full of hope.

In the curriculum of formation for the disciples throughout the fifty days of Easter, today's lesson is picked up first of all by John. His place as an apostle is to spot the risen Lord at work, and point the way towards him. It is clearly very easy to miss him, to be distracted, or confused, or lacking faith, or having expectations that are too low, or just being too caught up in everyday things that the spiritual cannot break through. We know this well ourselves, and we are being summoned by this story to be like the apostles, to be people who recognise the presence of the risen Lord and point it out – but also to be attentive when other people do the same.

So I think the lesson for us today at the school of the Risen Jesus is this: to be on the watch for the risen one at work in our lives, to be attentive and open to his presence. When we get caught

up in all of the cares and the worries and the problems of daily life we need to be on the watch for him, listening for his voice, and we may well need some wise friend to say: 'hush, stop worrying and fretting, you don't need to deal with all of this, look for the presence of the everlasting arms – it is the Lord'. When we are disappointed, or sad, or upset, again we need to stop and watch for his presence, because it will be there. When we are overwhelmed by problems, or busy-ness, or decisions to make and we just don't know which way to turn, he is there then, too. It is the Lord. When I think of times that I have looked at problems and felt overwhelmed, or struggling with difficult decisions, or felt disappointed by apparent failure, what I have needed, and often been lucky enough to have, is someone to say to me 'this is not all down to you, you know; you don't have to sort all this out on your own; this doesn't all depend on you; there is another, and he has a plan, even if you do not see it, and in the long run all is well: it is The Lord'.

So, I think this rather lovely, homely Gospel story is leading us deeper into the mystery of Easter. It is a story of fishing, and night time, and early morning, and breakfast shared, and a challenge to love more, but above all it is a challenge to be heralds of the resurrection. It is a challenge to us to be like St John, and when people around us seem overwhelmed, or confused, or lost; when they feel they have to manage on their own and have lost sight of the Saviour's presence; when they feel it is all just too much for them to bear, then we are to be like John, to reach out and gently lay our hand on their arm and say 'It is the Lord'. It is his world, his Church, all is well. We do not need to do it all, we do not need to understand it all. We all need heralds of the risen Lord around us, because even his closest friends, who had known him so long and so closely, sometimes missed his presence.