

“The Miracle Business”

One of the most beautiful, calming places on the face of this earth is the Sea of Galilee. When I read anything in the Bible that has to do with the Sea of Galilee, I am instantly transported there. It is amazingly beautiful and I need to tell you how magnificent it is; there are flora and fauna from all over the world or – there are flora and fauna that went out to all over the world. Just being able to wake up in the morning and look out over the Sea of Tiberias, Lake Gennesaret or the Sea of Galilee (it has many names), to see the mist on the water and look at the Golan Heights - I can most certainly understand why Jesus created such a place – and the beauty He enjoyed during His time near here. One place that, for me, stands out is Tabgha, which on the north western shore of the Sea, not very far from Capernaum, is best known for Christ's miraculous multiplication of loaves and fish to feed a multitude. But it is also remembered for Jesus' third appearance to His disciples after His Resurrection. Tabgha is a mispronunciation of a Greek word meaning (meaning “seven springs”). Several warm sulfur springs entering the lake here, attracting fish especially in winter. It was an amazingly popular fishing place in the time of Jesus.

Tabgha is only slightly different since Jesus' day, and the water level is significantly lower, since the Sea of Galilee (or Lake Tiberias) is THE source of drinking water for all of Israel, and part of Jordan. Another change is the building of the grounds for the Church of Peter's Primacy, since this is the place where Jesus reinstated Peter by asking him three times “Peter, do you love me?” I am not kidding when I tell you that I could literally spend hours there – just thinking on John 21 – or just thanking God for such a magnificent place. Should you ever go to the Holy Land – this place is not to be missed – just down the hill from the mountain where Jesus preached the Beatitudes! It is amazing how many of the important places of the Gospels are so close together – after all – they had to walk there.

The beauty and peacefulness of this place makes you only wonder how magnificent it must be to enjoy a sunrise, seeing the sun coming up over the Golan Heights, reflecting on the lake. That is the scene for today's Holy Gospel. John 21:4 tells us it is “*Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.*”

You might be wondering, why did the Apostles go fishing in the first place? I think that since this was long before the Day of Pentecost but before Jesus' Ascension, they wanted to get back home from Jerusalem to the place that they knew best, doing the thing that most of them knew best – trying to get on with their lives – not knowing what was coming next. They are on the Sea just when the dawn was breaking and the beautiful colors of daylight were filling their view – and they must have been so tired – having tried all night with their light shining to attract the fish – but they caught nothing. Like the two disciples on the Road to Emmaus, and Mary in the garden by the Tomb, they still did not recognize that it was Jesus right away, so He called out to them, “*Friends, haven't you any fish?*” “*No,*” they answered. He said, “*Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.*” When they did, they were unable to haul the

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net in because of the large number of fish.” (John 21:5-6) This must have triggered a memory for them of what had happened three years earlier – recorded in Luke 5:4. Jesus got into Peter’s boat after Peter and his men had been out all night – and He told Simon Peter "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break.” God is still in the miracle business. The memory of this caused John, the Apostle Jesus love to tell Peter that he recognized the Risen Jesus saying "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water.” (John 21:7)

Before we go any further, I believe that there are two important messages to be learned from what we have seen so far. If you remember last week’s Holy Gospel from John 20, Jesus met with all of the disciples, including Thomas and gave them the power to forgive sins, then breathed the Holy Spirit upon them, preparing them for the rest of their ministry journey. This week’s Gospel reminds them and us that if we try to do it our own way – we will fail. These Apostles worked all night and got nothing, but when they listened to Jesus’ voice – doing what He says – the results are remarkable. There is absolutely no telling what can be done through the Power of His love, and just a smidge of obedience.

The second message is that up to this point the disciples had caught nothing, *UNTIL* Jesus gave them direction. It is important for you to understand the way Jewish fishermen thought in Jesus’ day; they would take off from the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, heading toward the middle – out to the deepest water. The western shore was considered the “Jewish side of the lake” and so as they pointed their boat to the north, they would throw their nets of the left side of the boat – toward the Jewish side, and they would be catching “Jewish fish!” After fishing all night and coming up empty Jesus spoke specific instructions to them: He said, *"Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some."* When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.” (John 21:6) The right side of the boat – was something that they usually didn’t do – but they did what they were told. The right side of the boat faced the eastern shore – the Gentile side of the lake, where the Decapolis was, ten pagan cities, and where the Gadarenes were, where Jesus cast the demons into the swine. Keeping pigs was not something that was done anywhere near Jews. Jesus’ instructions were in essence telling the Apostles that they were no longer only trying to reach the Jews – but also they should be looking toward the Gentiles as well! They did what He told them and they caught such a large number of fish that they were unable to haul the net in!

Ironically, not long after on a hill in the Galilee region, before Jesus ascended to the Father, from the Mount of Olives, near Jerusalem – Jesus met the disciples and told them *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”* (Matthew 28:18-20) The important “key” word here is “nations”

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which in Jesus' day referred to the Gentiles. There were new rules to their mission – they were to preach His Gospel to the WHOLE WORLD, not just Israel. Very soon – they would be given an incredible boldness, a new desire, and the spiritual gifts to do just that when the Holy Spirit filled them on the Day of Pentecost – fifty days after the feast of First Fruits – which is Easter Sunday.

But wait! There is so much more to what took place that morning at Tabgha. Peter recognized Jesus and he jumped into the water to go and greet Him. Impetuous Peter was first out of the boat again – just like when He went to meet Jesus when Jesus was walking on the water. The other disciples stayed in the boat and brought it to shore, towing the net that was full of fish.

There was the charcoal fire – just like in the courtyard when Peter denied Jesus. 153 fish – a number that is just to signify that there were more fish than the net could hold; more fish than could feed the entire nearby village of Capernaum. This must have certainly jogged his memory.

Jesus is cooking bread and fish already – He doesn't really need their catch, but He welcomes it just the same. The Apostle John is telling us something – about working under the leadership of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Jesus does not need us to change the world, but He invites us to be a part of it. How often do we hear that Jesus needs us to be His hands and feet? There is a famous song by Audio Adrenaline that says "I want to be your hands, I want to be your feet, I'll go where you send me." It doesn't say "you need me to be your hands, to be your feet" it says "I want to be" - and "I'll go where you send me" obediently. God spoke creation of the world with what? A word! He doesn't need our help to accomplish the tasks, but He invites us to be with Him on the journey; He welcomes what we do – He welcomes our catch, and He wants our efforts to be our best efforts – not halfhearted. A church has been built on this site and it called the Church of Peter's Primacy. The rock in the middle of the church floor is believed to be the place where Jesus prepared breakfast. It was known to medieval pilgrims as "Mensa Christ" (the table of Christ).

Shortly after today's Holy Gospel when their meal was done "*Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, (Simon Bar Jona) do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."* (John 21:15-17) Remember, Peter denied Jesus three times – well now Peter was asked three time by Jesus if he loved Jesus, and each time Jesus gave Peter an assignment. In doing so Jesus was negating or overturning Peter's denial – but more importantly He was transforming Peter from lead fisherman to chief shepherd, proving once again that Jesus is merciful and forgiving – even something as horrible as denying Him three times.

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This is a powerful lesson for each one of us – that God’s mercy knows no limits – and when we respond to His calling – He will enable us, He will give us a covering of His love and He will use us for His glory and His Kingdom.