

Christ is risen!

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

The story of the Apostles is a story about what the resurrection of Jesus means for the Christian.
It's a story about the restoration of humanity,
of redemption and forgiveness,
the undoing of death,
and a totally different world and way of life.

And for the Apostles, it begins in much the same way that it ends.
St. Matthew tells us,

*“While walking by the Sea of Galilee, [Jesus] saw two brothers,
Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother,
casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen.
And He said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.’
Immediately they left their nets and followed Him.
And going on from there He saw two other brothers,
James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their
father, mending their nets,
and He called them.
Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed Him.” (Mt 4:18-22)*

Then in our Gospel today we hear,

*“After this Jesus revealed Himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias,
and He revealed Himself in this way.
Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of
Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together.
Simon Peter said to them, ‘I am going fishing.’
They said to him, ‘We will go with you.’
They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.” (Jn 21:1-3)*

So what's the point?

Why does St. John feel the need to record an utterly unsuccessful fishing expedition?
And why does St. Peter decide to go fishing in the first place?

Is it because there's nothing else to do?

Were they bored?

Or did they just need to get away?

No. That's not it.

It's not as harmless as that.

What seems so insignificant is actually a denial of the life and work of Christ.
Even after two resurrection appearances, they still didn't get it.

Peter went back to what he knew.
 He knew fishing; so did his brother, Andrew; and so did James and John, the sons of Zebedee.
 Before Christ they were fishermen.

But when Jesus called them to follow Him, He promised:
“I will make you fishers of men.”

And here they are, in a boat, casting their nets, trying to haul in some fish.
 It might as well say,
“They really liked Jesus while He was still with them, but that was then, this is now.”
“Time to make a living.”

St. John includes this story in order to restore these fearful, doubtful, and unbelieving Apostles.

Jesus’ death and resurrection wasn’t the end of their work at all—
 it was, in fact, the training ground, the seminary, the very beginning!

Now, to understand this passage, we’ve got get a bit more into the minds of John’s audience.
 There are a number of really strange things going on,
 and it would be easy to pass them over.

First of all, when Jesus asks if they’ve caught any fish, they humbly admit they haven’t.
 And of course they haven’t,
 that’s not what the Lord has called them to do—not anymore.

But then, at His word, they cast their nets on the other side of the boat.
 Now, for those who know anything about fish,
 you know they’re certainly just as free to swim on one side of the boat as the other.
 They’ll swim under the boat and around the boat and wherever they please.

So this word of Christ isn’t some tactical advice.
 It wasn’t that they were out of practice, having spent the last 3 years with Jesus.

The other side of the boat is a way of saying, you’re looking in the wrong place.

And when they listen to His voice, they catch a load so large that they can’t haul it aboard.
 It’s at this point that St. John, who’s writing this Gospel, gets it.
 He tells St. Peter, *“It is the Lord!”* (Jn 21:7)

As soon as Peter hears that it’s Jesus, he jumps into the water.
 He joins the fish.

This is important.
 I’m sure you’ve heard that one of the early symbols for the Christians was the fish.
 These “Jesus Fish,” covering car bumpers, were once found in the catacombs,
 where the early Christians gathered.
 Christians were simply fish, caught by our Lord’s net of salvation.

Now, by the time everyone gets to shore—

Jesus already has a fire going, with bread and fish on the grill.
The meal is set, but something's missing.

He says to them,

“Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.” (Jn 21:10)

*“So Peter went and hauled the net ashore,
full of large fish, 153 of them.*

And although there were so many, the net was not torn.” (Jn 21:11)

This seems, at first glance, to be a simple detail.

But this is where it gets pretty crazy—stay with me now.

You see, 153 is a very particular number.

He could've easily said, there were about 150 fish, which would've been a good catch anyhow.

But numbers mean something.

153 is important mathematically, especially for the Greek.

You can try this at home, but if you add 1+2+3+...all the way up to 17, then you get 153.

17, a prime number, was also important to the Greeks mainly because when you put 153 dots on paper, with 17 on the bottom, it forms an equilateral triangle—like a pyramid.

I mention this so you can understand that when John says 153 fish,
his hearers' understood more than we do.

Another important fact is that the ancient Greeks believed that there were exactly 153 different varieties of fish.

So, when John mentions 153 fish, there's a lot going on—

and that, connected with the nets that didn't break,
gives us two pieces of Scripture fulfilled in this story.

The first comes from Ezekiel,

“Fishermen will stand beside the sea.

From Engedi to Eneglaim it will be a place for the spreading of nets.

Its fish will be of very many kinds, like the fish of the Great Sea.” (Ezek 47:10)

The second comes from Matthew's Gospel,

*“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea
and gathered fish of every kind.”* (Mt 13:47)

So, what seems a very simple, and at first unsuccessful fishing expedition,
turns out to be an account of the Scriptures' fulfillment!

It's an ingathering of all those to be saved—
 every type: tribe, nation, people, language—
 all are hauled ashore to a feast with Jesus.

This is, as Matthew says, what the Kingdom of Heaven is like:
 a net that doesn't break, holding within it all those being saved.

This is what the Apostles are to be about—
 they've been called not to fish for fish, but to fish for men.

They're to preach, baptize, forgive,
 and draw into communion with the risen Christ all whom our Lord calls to Himself.

That's also why our Lord repeats Himself, asking Peter,
"Do you love me?" (Jn 21:15-17)

Peter, whose name comes from Christ's promise,
"On this rock I will build My church" (Mt 16:17),
 and who denied Christ three times, even though he said,
"Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away..."
"Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!" (Mt 26:33, 35)—
 this Peter is restored three times to do what he's been called to do.

Three times Jesus commands him,
"Feed My sheep" (Jn 21:17).

That's what is to be a fisher of men.
 It's a shepherd, a pastor.

You are His sheep—
 those whom our Lord has called to Himself,
 into His resurrected body and life, to His miraculous meal of forgiveness.

And I am His Peter, His shepherd, His fisher of men.
 I am to feed and nourish with the Word of sins forgiven.
 You are to delight and rejoice in the Easter joy of His resurrection for you.

With Christ all things are new.
 His Word spoken at the beginning is just as sure and certain as if spoken at the end.
 His promises are true and they're for you.

You are the 153 fish.
 You are those caught in His net of forgiveness,
 which never breaks—
 no one can snatch you out of His hand.

You are those brought in by the Apostles,
the preaching and teaching the baptizing and communing.

You've been brought to the feast, where Christ is host and meal, gift and Lord.

We're all little fish, swimming with Peter in Baptismal waters that promise and deliver joy.

The story of the Apostles is a story about what the resurrection of Jesus means for the Christian.
It's a story about restoration, redemption, and forgiveness.
It's about the undoing of death, your death,
and a totally different world and way of life.

And all that He does, and all that He is, is for you.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit