

3rd Sunday of Eastertide (C)

5th May 2019

'The many lessons at Tabgha'

Acts 5: *the God of our ancestors raised up Jesus*

Ps 29: *I will praise You, Lord, You have rescued me*

Apoc 5: *The Lamb that was sacrificed is worthy of riches and power ...*

Jn 21: 1–19: *Who are You? They knew it was the Lord*

After the famous passages in John's Gospel the past two Sundays — first, the finding of the empty tomb on Easter morning; then the appearance of the risen Jesus to the apostles, twice, a week apart — we have a third such passage this Sunday, an epic, which recounts the Lord appearing to them once more after His Resurrection, but this time in Galilee, back by the lakeside where it all began.

I've been to the traditional spot where this happened. It's called Tabgha, between Capernaum and Magdala, and it's a tranquil spot where one can go right down to the water's edge, and peacefully contemplate Our Lord's many times on and by the Sea of Galilee. I said Mass there, at one of the outdoor altars provided, when I was there in October — it was the feast of Pope St John Paul II, and I was given by chance the JP II altar! — and at that place I remember praying for the many priests I know, friends and Deanery priests, in their mission for Christ's Church. There's a

statue there, too, commemorating the moving encounter of Jesus with Peter, that we heard at the end of the passage today: Our Lord challenges Peter, He forgives him, and He entrusts him once again with the leadership of the Church and its Mission.

This occasion, recounted in the very last chapter, ch. 21, of St John's Gospel, provides a fitting culmination to that Gospel, and there's so much for us to take in at this point of Eastertide. First, it provides us again with the reassuring appearance of the risen Lord. He keeps wishing to strengthen the apostles — and us — with evidence for His being risen, truly alive, and undying. His appearance is, as we have often noted, rather different from before His crucifixion and death — the apostles know Him, but sometimes are unsure. It's not always his appearance that they immediately recognise, but His words, His attitude, His kindness to them. I suppose, He is moving in to a new relationship to them, and quite soon He will not be seen by them at all, once He ascends to the Father again. So, it's not His physical recognition that will be important, but His

undying love for them, His immortal Spirit that will be given to them, and the Sacraments too.

Speaking of the Sacraments ... It's quite clear that in a number of the Resurrection appearances Our Lord alludes to, or even re-enacts, the liturgical ritual that He instituted at the Last Supper, namely the Eucharist. Here, too, by the shores of Lake Galilee, He does the same: "take and eat!" Jesus is showing the apostles that they cannot live a life apart from Him, and that they are dependent, too, for spiritual nourishment from Him. There is no way that they will live now except in special relationship with Him. There is no going back to everything as it was before His ministry with them. Had He died and not risen, maybe so ... But not now that He has risen and shown them the life beyond the grave, and proved to them His divinity.

With Peter in a most particular way — as leader of the apostles — He makes this clear. Peter is forgiven for his denials, and He is given charge of leading the flock of Christ, "Feed my sheep." The mission Jesus is sending them out on is a difficult one — and they will give their

lives in martyrdom, most of them; but it is the most blessed and greatest vocation possible, to take the Gospel of Jesus to the ends of the earth.

So, this wonderful moment at Lake Galilee gives the apostles much to take to heart — and us too:

1. another proof of the absolute truth of Jesus's rising from the dead;
2. a reminder that we are nothing without Him, doomed to a superficial life if we do not embrace the spiritual life that He is offering us;
3. reinforcing the centrality of the Eucharist in our relationship with Jesus, His very personal gift of Himself in the actions of the Holy Mass;
4. encouragement that when we fail we have the tenderness of His forgiveness, and His confidence in us to be His witnesses, despite our weakness;
5. the command to be missionaries, to do His will, to spread His Gospel, to speak and act as Christians at all times, to the end of our lives ... and for some, that means to be His martyrs, the ultimate sacrifice of love.