

## EASTER 3, May. 5, 2019, Year C

- Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury, said this a few years ago: *"I sometimes feel that... our theology has lost that extraordinarily vivid... sense of the world penetrated by divine energy..."*<sup>1</sup> (repeat main phrase) Why would those words capture our attention? *Why are they compelling?* It's because they speak to *something for which we hunger...* and something we seek in our lives, whether consciously or not.
- Here is an insight common to all four Gospels: **People were moved by the divine energy they encountered in Jesus. But why? Why were they so profoundly touched, rather than** left just mildly interested, or somewhat indifferent? St. Augustine would have told us the answer, *long ago* ~ that **we hunger for this experience of encountering divine energy.**<sup>2</sup> We do so **because it is something we already know.** Not usually *consciously*, but instead *deeply*, and *intuitively*. We have an ancient memory of it imprinted *upon* our being ~ a memory of *having been* in communion with this divine energy. Which is why so *often* we *lament* or unconsciously *grieve* our loss. And it is our loss that fuels our hunger. **We want to re-connect with what was, even when we cannot precisely remember it or name it.**
- Which is again *why people were so surprised and moved* by the divine energy present in Jesus, in his **words** and **actions**, and in his '**signs**.' They were **not** just encountering something **new** and **never** experienced before; instead, they were alerted to something deeper and **latent** in their subconscious memory. For **when we become aware of having this deep memory of God, we begin to become more fully human** ~ because we were **made in the image and likeness of God.** People were moved by what they encountered in Jesus *for the same reason that* we are moved when we encounter Jesus. **In him, we encounter divine energy.**
- And so, **the people who first encountered this divine energy in Jesus faced a challenge when he was suddenly arrested and taken from them.** It became

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more *acute* when they saw him falsely charged and condemned. And it became a *crisis* when he was executed as a common criminal in the most degrading way, and put away in a tomb. As a result, *his first followers*, both men and women, sensed a *loss* of that divine energy when they were physically separated from him.

- *Then... something remarkable and astonishing happened. First*, by one's and two's, and then by more of them, they experienced that longed-for divine energy in him *again!* To their amazement and delight, he appeared to them, allowing them to *see* him. He spoke to them and they *heard* his voice. He even let them *touch* him. But most surprising of all, *he then imparted a living sense of his divine energy, so that they now felt it within themselves.*
- *Jesus' resurrection appearances allowed the disciples and his other followers to rediscover that divine energy in him, as they encountered him. But they also sensed this new energy in themselves.* This happened after they *encountered* his Risen Body, *and as* they then *became* his Risen Body. He gave them his peace; he then gave them his Spirit. In the process, *he imparted divine energy to them, which then came to be present in them – and us– as well.* This was the point that we reflected upon last Sunday, regarding when {*according to John*} Jesus *first* appeared to them.
- *But then, "afterward, Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee,"* also known by the Roman name, Lake Tiberius. As we discern from hearing this story, *Jesus appears before a group of people who have forgotten, or who perhaps despair of, this experience of divine energy.* It will help us to seek greater *clarity* about this Gospel story, given what we have observed so far. *Why would anyone* who had known and remembered Jesus in his earthly ministry, and who had then seen him after his resurrection, *seem to forget all that?* Because we remember all kinds of

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things, and we tend to *remember things we have known longest*. And *what Peter, and at least three other disciples, had known longest was fishing*.

- The fruit of their decision to *return to their old life* is beautifully captured by James Tissot in his painting, *Christ Appears on the Shore of Lake Tiberias*. Let's remember how, at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, he had called them *from fishing in the lake at night, to fishing for people during the day*. But now, *they have gone back* to dropping nets for fish in the sea, *at night*. *This may be deeply symbolic*, especially in John's Gospel, where *the contrast between light and darkness* is so significant. The disciples are looking for some semblance of what they had before, out there on the lake, at night. *At the end of that night, Jesus appears to them on the shore. Along with the growing light, he reveals himself at the dawn of a new day*. Still unrecognized, he calls out to them, and puts them in the position of having to admit the fruitlessness of their own endeavor to go back *to what was before*. For *he is present now*. He beckons them to attend to *what through him they still have* ~ and to *what they will still have* as they live *forward*.
- Tissot's depiction of Jesus at this moment says it all. *The Lord's posture in the painting communicates an invitation to return*. *With his hands, he says, "Come ~ return to me!"* And just as he once before shared bread and fish with them near this same place, he invites them to partake of these things once again. Whereas *their own efforts* to fish have yielded nothing, *from him and through him they receive gifts of abundance*. And from this abundance, he invites them to make an offering.
- Many of these details in our Gospel, and as depicted by Tissot, should 'speak' to us. *For when we feel challenged by our own experience of the apparent absence of our Risen Lord, we so often do what the disciples did ~ we go back*. We go back to what was for us the ever-compelling '*known and familiar...*' precisely because we are always more comfortable with what

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what we *know*, and with what is *familiar*. That is why we are so often in storm-tossed boats, on uncertain seas, with no idea of where we are going.

- Some presenters of the Christian Faith commend the idea that *sincere believing is the key to living well* in this world. And, that *living well* in this world *provides an indication of the sincerity* of a person's faith. Starting with our Lord and his first disciples, and all their followers, *these twin notions have been proven false* in every century since. On the contrary, *the Church and her saints are best understood not* in terms of something like a 'hall of fame' museum. *No, the Church as the crucified and risen Body of Christ is best understood in terms of different metaphor ~ an ancient metaphor.* As St Ignatius of Antioch may have been the first to suggest, very soon after Jesus' death, *the Eucharist is 'the medicine of immortality.'*<sup>3</sup> Therefore, we should think of *the Church* as '*a hospital for sinners,*' and *not* as a *hotel* or a *museum for saints.*<sup>4</sup>
- *We find hope* on a Galilee seashore. And *we find hope here.* We find this hope when we say '*yes*'... 'yes' to our Lord's invitation *to return.* *He always* extends it. *How ready are we to accept it?*



James Tissot, *Christ Appears on the Shore of Lake Tiberias*

**John 21:1-19**

Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. 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.

Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." He said to them, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go." (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me."

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The readings appointed for this day are:

Acts 9:16, (7-20); Psalm 30; Revelation 5:11-14; John 21:1-19

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### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The full quote is: "I sometimes feel that a lot of our theology has lost that extraordinarily vivid or exhilarating sense of the world penetrated by divine energy in classical theological terms." Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, in 2005. (as quoted in: Ball, Philip. *Universe of Stone: Chartres Cathedral and the Invention of the Gothic*. HarperCollins. Kindle Edition. )

<sup>2</sup> This idea of his is particularly evident in his personal autobiography, *The Confessions*. The translation I recommend is that of Henry Chadwick {[https://smile.amazon.com/Confessions-Oxford-Worlds-Classics-ebook/dp/B00AAW5EDG/ref=sr\\_1\\_3?crid=2TJOVN8I2WEI4&keywords=augustine+confessions&qid=1557096997&s=gateway&sprefix=Augustine%2Caps%2C159&sr=8-3](https://smile.amazon.com/Confessions-Oxford-Worlds-Classics-ebook/dp/B00AAW5EDG/ref=sr_1_3?crid=2TJOVN8I2WEI4&keywords=augustine+confessions&qid=1557096997&s=gateway&sprefix=Augustine%2Caps%2C159&sr=8-3)}

<sup>3</sup> This can be found in Ignatius' *Epistle to the Ephesians*, chapter 20 {<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0104.htm>}

<sup>4</sup> This is based on a quote attributed to St. Augustine, "The church is not a hotel for saints, it is a hospital for sinners."