

### Homily 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter

In Luke 5:4 Jesus tells Simon Peter to 'Go out into the deep....'The deep is fraught with danger, uncertainty and the unknown. Peter reluctantly does as the Master tells him and in doing so lands an unimaginable catch of fish.

One of the major things which attracted me to Religious Life were the selfless heroics and example of many good priests and sisters. In 1971, whilst in Novitiate, we were sent every Thursday to do pastoral work of service in and around Glasgow. I, with Kevin Ryan who is now a missionary priest, were sent out to Nazareth House, a care home for the elderly of The Little Sisters of The Poor, in the East End of the city. There I met one of the most selfless people I have ever known. Sr Mary Joe was not much older than us, about 25 years of age. She always looked exhausted and drained, no doubt by the strains of the work with the very frail and elderly. The most humbling of tasks she did herself and never ever asked Kevin nor I to do anything she wouldn't do herself and in fact sheltered us from the most menial and base aspects of care of the very old and infirmed. It was her vocation, as a Little Sister of The Poor, to embrace even the most challenging of the needs of the people she was called to serve as if they were her own mother or father.

'When you are young you go where you will but when you grow old someone will put a belt around your waist and lead you where you would rather not go.' These are the words of St John in today's Gospel which all of us have experienced in our lives. Whether it be our own ill health or frailty due to the ageing process, the death of a spouse or a relative, illness in the family or tragedy, we are all in one way or another 'lead where you would rather not go.'

The Gospel passage today is rich in content with the miraculous haul of fish, Peter walking on the water, the appearance of Jesus on the shore and his eating fish for breakfast with the disciples, the threefold questioning of Peter, 'Do you love me?' and finally the warning that Peter will be expected to follow Jesus to death, 'where he would rather not go.' Jesus in John's account performs a miracle after his Resurrection which in St Luke's Gospel happens early in his Galilean Ministry when he calls the first 4 disciples. In Luke's account, as we have already noted, Jesus tells Peter to 'go out into the deep', a place of danger and uncertainty but in doing so Peter makes a miraculous catch of fish too many to be counted. Both texts are asking the reader or listener, 'Are you, as a member of The Easter People, willing to accept a life of danger, uncertainty, suffering and be ready to be put to death for Jesus?' Most of us are not expected literally to subject ourselves to martyrdom but we are expected to accept willingly, as Sr Mary Joe did, the Cross of Christ being led where we 'would rather not go' in our ministry, in our suffering and in our pain. Jesus, in today's Gospel also questions Peter 3 times, as if to redress the balance of his threefold denial in the courtyard of The High Priest. The question is, 'Peter do you love me more than these?' to which Peter replies, Lord of course I love you!'. Having recommitted himself to The Lord Jesus then tells Peter to 'feed my lambs' and 'feed my sheep.' Pope Francis also encourages our servant priests, in the spirit of Jesus' command to Peter, to go out and 'get the smell of the sheep' no matter how smelly they are and indeed in the spirit of Jesus' ministry and The Gospel, the smellier the better.

It is clear from today's First Reading that Peter and the other Apostles went out into Jerusalem, a place of danger and uncertainty, and fearlessly proclaimed Jesus' Resurrection and that he is The Son of God and the Saviour of the world. They did so among the ordinary people, the sick, the sinners, the outcasts, the marginalised. As we heard in last Sunday's Reading from Acts, they flocked to even touch Peter's shadow as they witnessed great signs and wonders performed by the Apostles.

Sr Mary Joe probably would cringe at the thought of being held up as an example and a source of inspiration. However, although 51 years have passed I still remember that young nun who left everything to follow Christ to places she perhaps would rather have not gone, to serve the poorest of the poor in one of the poorest parts of Glasgow and to witness by her life that the 'sick' are the ones most in need of Jesus' message of hope and joy of The Resurrection whilst consuming herself in their service. How she so inspired me all those years ago and continues to challenge me to this very day. By going out into the deep Sr Mary Joe certainly became a true 'fisher of men and women.'