

## **The Third Sunday of Easter May 1, 2022**

Catherine had been teaching religious education at her parish for almost thirty years, and she was beginning to wonder whether she should continue. It just seemed as though she couldn't reach the kids she was teaching. And she was tired of dealing with parents who didn't seem very interested in having their children learn anything. She wondered whether she was too old to relate to the kids. In her heart, she began doubting whether any of her work over the past thirty years had really done any good.

Then, a few weeks later, a young man approached her after Mass. She recognized him as a kid she had taught several years before. After introducing himself, he said, "Miss Catherine, I just want to thank you. In your class, I learned to love the Bible. Every day, I make a point of reading it and it has gotten me through some really tough times. I don't know what I would have done if you hadn't taught me about the word of God."

In that instance, Catherine knew that she had made a difference, at least in the life of one young person. That gave her the inspiration to continue to teach religious education in her parish with the hope that she would reach other students, whether she ever found out about it or not.

Most things that are worth doing require much patience and perseverance. We don't always see the good that we are doing until many years later - if at all. That is true for our work here in the parish. That is also true in your families or in any other good work that you do. Like Catherine, we persevere - putting in the work every day - in hopes that it will make a difference.

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In today's gospel, Peter and the other disciples persevere through the night trying to catch fish. It was tiring work to row out into the sea, cast out nets time after time, and catch nothing. But they refused to give up. When Jesus told them to cast their nets on the right side of the boat, they couldn't have told Him that it was no use. They could have given up. But they didn't. They listened, persevered, and were rewarded with a great catch of fish.

There are many times when we are tempted to just give up. All our efforts seem to be useless. We give and we give but no good seems to come from it. Sometimes, these are opportunities for us to ask ourselves whether this is really what God wants us to be doing. We might need to change the way we are doing things. But, many times we just need to stick it out, put the time in, and hope that good will come of it.

Today's readings give us some ways that we can grow in our ability to persevere through difficulty.

The first thing is to always keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. In the gospels, the disciples never catch fish unless Jesus is with them. In the same way, we cannot accomplish anything good unless Jesus is with us. If Jesus is the reason why we are striving to do good, then good will come out of it. A good prayer for us to say when we feel our strength start to falter is, "Jesus, you know I'm doing this for you. Help me to get it done." That is a prayer that I'm sure Jesus will always answer.

When we are struggling, it is also an opportunity for us to reflect on our motives. Am I doing this because I want to impress people? Am I doing

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this so that others will applaud me? If so, we will face a lot of disappointment. We'll want to give up as soon as we feel like no one is noticing us. If we discover that this is the case, then we must turn to God and recommit ourselves to serving Him and Him alone.

Another way for us to persevere through difficulty is to allow Jesus to feed us. In today's gospel, Jesus prepares breakfast for the disciples. Jesus enjoyed spending time with those He loved around a meal. The Pharisees even accused Him of "eating with sinners" and "being a drunkard". That is because He loved having people around Him. The same is true for us. Jesus loves it when we gather in church to share a meal with Him. But, this meal is unlike any other - it is His very Body and Blood that He feeds us with.

If we are going to make any progress in the spiritual life or in serving others, then we must make it a point of allowing Jesus to feed us regularly in the Eucharist. At Mass we bring Jesus our victories and our failures, our good works and our sinfulness, and He transforms them. Just as Jesus fed and strengthened the disciples after their long night out on the sea, so He feeds and strengthens us after a long week of serving others so that we can go out again and face whatever difficulties the world throws at us. Holy Communion is nourishment for our weary souls, giving us the energy to carry on.

Finally, in the end, we will not be able to persevere in any good work unless we have the love of Jesus in our hearts. Jesus asked Peter three times whether he loved Him. That is because Jesus really cared whether Peter loved Him or not. Jesus really cares whether we love Him or not too. There is nothing more in this world that He wants except that we love Him.

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With that love, however, comes a challenge. When Peter professed his love for Jesus, our Lord told him, "Feed my lambs," and "Tend my sheep." Just so, we show our love for Jesus by serving others. The more we love Jesus, the more available we will make ourselves to love the people around us. The more we love Jesus, the harder we'll work to serve them. The more we love Jesus, the more we'll be able to put up with any difficulty to show His love to others.

Love is the most powerful motivating force in the world. It is love that motivated Jesus to suffer and die for us. It is love that gives mothers the strength to give birth to their children and then to nourish them with their own bodies. If we are to persevere in doing good, it will only be because we love.

There is a great catch of fish that Jesus is calling us to bring to shore. Beyond the doors of this church, there are millions of people who do not know the love of God. All of us will have to pitch in to bring this great catch of fish to shore. We will only find the strength to do it by keeping our eyes on Jesus, allowing Him to feed us, and by making His love the driving force in our lives.