

Homily for the Saturday in the Seventh Week of Easter

May 30, 2020

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

*Acts 28:16–20, 30–31, Psalm 11:4–8, John 21:15–25**

With the advent of live-streaming, we priests here at Saint Mary's have been doing more formal preparation and writing out our homilies for weekday Eucharists. On Monday, March 30, Monday in the Fifth Week of Lent, the gospel was John's account of Jesus and the woman caught in adultery.¹ My preparation included coming across an explanation for its complicated textual history. In some important manuscripts it's found in Luke. It is absent "from the best Greek [manuscripts]."² Raymond Brown in his *An Introduction to the New Testament* wrote that, though canonical, "almost certainly it is out of context here in John."³ He suggests that the story may have "traveled independently of the four Gospels and could not be included until there was a change in the church's reluctance to forgive adultery."⁴

Today's gospel, the conclusion of the last chapter of John, with its resurrection appearance at the dawn of

¹ John 7:53–8:1.

² Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 376.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 375–76.

the day, fishing, and breakfast with seven disciples sounds not unlike other meals shared by Jesus and his friends before his death. In John, the Risen Jesus is suddenly there, or suddenly revealed, once at the tomb and twice in a room where the doors were shut. In this last chapter he is suddenly by the sea where his disciples are fishing.

As a lifelong Protestant Christian, when I hear John's Jesus say to Simon Peter, "Feed my lambs . . . Tend my sheep . . . Feed my sheep,"⁵ I don't turn to Matthew's gospel, with its words about Peter being the rock on which Jesus will build his church.⁶ Instead, I let the words in John speak for themselves. These lambs, these sheep, belong not to Peter but to Jesus. Jesus has already described himself in John as the shepherd of the sheep, the good shepherd.⁷

He's also taught that every believer is in a direct relationship with him, all are branches of the True Vine, who is Jesus. If I need to discuss Matthew's words about Peter, I turn to Paul's Letter to the Galatians, "But when Cephas came to Antioch I opposed him to his face, because he stood

⁵ John 21:15–18.

⁶ Matthew 16:17–19.

⁷ John 10:1–30.

condemned.”⁸ Peter had stopped sharing meals, sharing their thanksgiving, with uncircumcised believers. I think it is still true that there is no reliable historical record for Peter, the fisherman from Galilee, to have traveled to Rome. There were no popes when Peter lived. He was an apostle, not a bishop.

In Luke’s second book, the Acts of the Apostles, Peter has a prominent role in the first fifteen chapters but speaks for the last time when the question arises about how non-Jews are to be received within the fellowship of believers. In Acts, it is James, the brother of the Lord, and not Simon Peter, who says, “Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, but should write to them to abstain from the pollutions of idols and from unchastity and from what is strangled and from blood.”⁹ The ministry to the gentiles is entrusted to Paul.

In my early 20s, while in graduate school before seminary, my adult conversion experience was of Jesus’ love for me. It was enough to keep me moving forward at a time when I believed that I really didn’t matter to anyone, family or friend. I’ve been blessed

⁸ Galatians 2:11.

⁹ Acts 15:19–20.

since then with faith and new relationships with family and friends. The deaths of my parents were not easy, but the words of faith that I've prayed and sung since childhood, have enlarged a place in my spirit where there is a greater peace about life and God, and I hope that peace may be, in the words of Paul to the Philippians, "the peace which passeth all understanding."¹⁰

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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¹⁰ Philippians 4:7.