

Friday of the Octave of Easter “Fishing for Souls”
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This the second day in a row we are told that the Risen Lord liked to eat fish. Yesterday was from the Gospel of St. Luke. This morning, we find out the same thing from the Gospel of Saint John. And it is fitting that this Gospel reading is given to us on a Friday because it used to be that Catholics were supposed to abstain from meat on all Fridays throughout the year, not just during Lent. Fish, of course, was allowed. I think this is why to this day in the Midwest, a lot of places still have a fish fry on Fridays for customers throughout the year, not just during Lent.

The Risen Lord liked to eat fish, even for breakfast. That sounds odd to us but a number of cultures have fish in their diets for their first meal of the day. I first ran into that in Japan, but of course you can find this in Mediterranean countries too. The early Church, however, had another reason why they liked fish that went beyond the fact that their founders were fishermen and the breakfast sensibilities of the region. In addition to the fact that the Risen Lord liked to eat fish, the word fish in Greek is an acronym. The word in Greek is /Ichthoos/ and each letter spells out another word, Jesus Christ Son of God Savior. This is why the fish symbol was popularized by the Christians of the first centuries. When it was illegal to be a Christian, if you wanted to make sure the person you were talking with was also a Christian, the legend is you would make a curved line in the sand with your foot say, and if the other person completed it so it looked like a fish, you were safe with each other. I don't know if that is actually true but it makes for a good fish story. Don't you think?

Nevertheless the point the Gospel of John is making is the same point the Gospel of Luke was making yesterday when it comes to Jesus eating fish. The Risen Lord was not a ghost. The tomb on Easter morning was empty because Jesus resurrected from the dead and we will too if we unite ourselves to Christ as baptized disciples. And what does being a disciple look like in today's Gospel? It looks like fishing for souls. The great miracle of the disciples pulling in a huge catch but the nets wouldn't break suggest that there is enough room in heaven for everyone if his disciple do their work and get out there and evangelize. St. Jerome says as much when he theorizes that 153 fish to mean the number of known species of fish at the time symbolically representing that the net can hold all the races that comprise humanity. It is a missionary mandate.

So we can ask ourselves. What does “going fishing” look like for you and me today? Have we ever invited someone to come to church with us before all this? If not, why? Is there a way to invite people to watch what we are doing on Instagram, our website or another Catholic Church website? Maybe. Perhaps there is someone in your household that you can invite to watch with you or perhaps even pray with you. What does going fishing look like for you and me? We can certainly all take a moment and pray for someone in our lives we would like to see with us in church someday. The Good News is that the Church's nets are big enough for the whole world. However, sometimes I wonder if this story is also another way of saying the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few.