

Feed My Sheep

John 21:1-19

WHAT WE FOUND

Both seals are open, and the title explained itself. Back in Galilee, back in the boats, back to empty nets: Jesus rebuilt Peter's first frame (Luke 5 replayed), and then rebuilt a harder one. The word for the fire on the beach, *anthrakia*, charcoal fire, appears exactly twice in the New Testament: the courtyard fire of the three denials (John 18:18) and this one (21:9). The Lord walked Peter back to the scene of the crime, with breakfast, and asked three questions to answer three denials.

The question was never "are you sorry" but only "do you love me," and every answer received a commission, not just a pardon: feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep. The fisherman's new job is shepherd, and the pronoun is the doctrine: *my* lambs, *my* sheep. Christ the Good Shepherd does not resign; he appoints a vicar-shepherd over a flock that stays his. Peter preached his own job description ever after: "Tend the flock of God... and when the chief Shepherd is manifested you will obtain the unfading crown" (1 Peter 5:2-4).

Behind the beach stands Ezekiel 34: God's promise to shepherd his flock himself *and* to set over them "one shepherd" (34:15, 23), one promise, now executing. And the commission ends with its cost revealed in advance: "you will stretch out your hands... Follow me" (21:18-19). Where that following ended, this study will walk in a few weeks.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. Augustine *Tractates on the Gospel of John, Tractate 123*

Augustine hears in the threefold question the medicine for the threefold denial: a triple confession of love answers the triple fear, and the tongue serves love as fully as it had served dread. And he presses the pronoun: feed my sheep, as mine, not yours; seek in them the Lord's glory and not your own, for those who feed Christ's sheep as if the sheep were their own love themselves and not Christ.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom *Homilies on the Gospel of John, Homily 88*

Chrysostom reads the scene as the public restoration and elevation of Peter: the denial is wiped away, and Christ places into his hands the presidency over the brethren, entrusting to the one who loves him the care of the flock he purchased with his blood. If you love me, Chrysostom hears the Lord say, then shepherd what I love.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Gregory the Great *Pastoral Rule, Book I*

Gregory, himself a successor of Peter, calls the government of souls the art of arts, and insists no one takes it up worthily except through love: the shepherd feeds Christ's sheep by holy living, faithful teaching, and a compassion learned in his own weakness. The commission of John 21, for Gregory, is a lifelong examination of the shepherd's love, never a trophy.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1.

Pray with John 21:15-17 once this week, out loud, alone: let him ask you all three times, and answer honestly all three times. Write down what he gives you to do.

2.

Do one concrete act of feeding this week: bring a meal, catechize a kid, visit someone housebound. Shepherding is calories and time, not sentiment.

3.

Keep the daily Our Father for the pope, adding this week: "Chief Shepherd, give your under-shepherd love enough for the whole flock, and bring us all home."

MEMORY VERSE

"Simon, son of John, do you love me? ... Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you. ... Feed my sheep."
(John 21:17, RSV2CE)

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

Read **Acts 1:12-26** and **Acts 2:14-42**. In chapter 1, watch who stands up first and what Scripture he quotes about a vacant position; in chapter 2, note who preaches, who stands with him, and what the crowd asks and of whom.

Catechism Connection: CCC 553; 881; 1551