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Homily at Mass 3rd Sunday of Easter, Year C – 5 May 2019

The Apostle Peter seems to dominate the usually longer Gospel story today. Peter takes the initiative as he calls the apostles to come fishing. Taken surprise by the appearance of Jesus on the shore, and with his usual impetuosity, Peter leaps into the sea. At Our Lord's command, Peter returns to the boat to drag in the net, filled with 153 big fish, for a hearty breakfast prepared by the Risen Lord. And then St John draws us into the conversation between Jesus and Peter, as Our Lord drills down into Peter's heart: "Simon, son of John, do you love me?"

There's a lot for you and me to learn from in today's Gospel. It is a Resurrection story – one of just a handful that we find in the Gospels of Sts Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. It is a story about the apostles, and especially Peter. Being a story about Peter it is a story about the ministry of Peter's successor in the Church, the Pope, in every age. And being a story about the Apostles and the Pope, it is also a story about the Church. If you have a Sunday Missal with you, you might like to have the Gospel reading open as we think about it step by step today.

Today's Gospel story recalls similar stories that we find elsewhere in the Gospels – stories of the apostles, especially Peter and Andrew, James and John who were professional fishermen whom Jesus called to become "fishers of men". These stories often suggest that Jesus was not with them as they set out by boat on the Sea of Galilee – still today a huge inland sea, which can be calm, but then suddenly becomes stormy and violent. In the Gospels the boat carrying the apostles is always a symbol of the Church on her journey through history – sometimes the Church travels peacefully, certain of herself and her mission, confident in her leaders, at peace in our faith and life together. At other times the Church finds herself tossed about, her children feel confused, her leaders seem to be fearful, timid, voiceless. We all know that the world, especially the Western world, is passing through stormy and troubled times. The Church in Australia is under the pump: there's a disconnect between the Church's moral teaching and the moral outlook of many Australians. The priesthood is bruised. An Australian Cardinal is in a goal. Other Christians in Australia, as well as in Sri Lanka and many countries are targeted, persecuted, imprisoned, killed. No Masses once again this weekend in the churches of Sri Lanka. Where is Jesus? Is he asleep? Is he with us? Can we recognize him silhouetted on the shore just 100 meters away?

The meeting of the apostles and Jesus on the shore, next to a BBQ breakfast, is warm, familiar, we could say relaxed. All Peter needed to do was to grab two or three fish, but instead he chooses to drag the overfull net from the boat to the beach. "153 big fish" was the incredible catch that day. The fifth century biblical scholar St Jerome tells us that Greek experts had identified 153 different kinds of fish in the sea – for Jerome and probably for St John 153 big fish represented the whole world – every people and nation – that Jesus called the apostles to seek out, to preach the Gospel, to baptise, to catch in their nets for the

Kingdom of God. “Big fish” is what Jesus wants: people who believe, people who live the Gospel, people who are glad to be Christians: people like you and me!

Can you imagine the Pope ever being distracted celebrating Mass in St Peter’s Basilica? Perhaps he finds himself looking up into the dome above the Papal Altar. There he sees written in huge letters in Greek and Latin his commission from Jesus: “you are Peter the Rock ...” “Feed my lambs ... look after my sheep.” Three times Jesus asks Peter, searching deep into Peter’s soul. It’s as if he is wanting Peter to revisit the 3 times he denied Jesus beside the fire in the courtyard of the High Priest’s Palace on Holy Thursday night as Jesus was facing trial leading to his Cross. Today Jesus asks Peter “do you love me”. Do you love me as a friend? Do you love me as your teacher and master? Do you love me as your risen Lord? Do you love me enough to look after my Church, my sheep and lambs, the whole flock of God in every time, every place? Do you love me enough to die for me – to stretch out your hands, that they – like mine – might be nailed to a cross? How did Jesus put these questions to Peter: did he look him in the eye? Did Peter perhaps feel awkward, uncomfortable, embarrassed? In the end could Peter answer firmly, boldly, confidently – literally with his life – yes, Lord! Feed my lambs, says Jesus, look after my sheep: the sheep and lambs of my flock, my green pastures, my Church.