



HOMILY 16th Sunday Year B 18th July 2021

Introduction

I've never been to the Holy Land. My travels have taken me to nearly every country around it: Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan. But I've never been to the Holy Land.

There's one spot I'd love to visit when, some day, I get the chance: the Lake of Gennesaret. A lot of the great Gospel events seem to have taken place there:

- Sermon on the Mount
- Drowning of the swine at Gadara
- Multiplication of the loaves and the fishes
- And two towns that Jesus curses Bethsaida and Chorazin (Mt 11)

But I imagine it's going to be a really beautiful lake. The kind of place where you'd want to take a boat out and find a quiet landing place for a summer's picnic. My imagination may be running away with me; but the picture we have in the Gospel today looks like an idyllic spot.

“You must come away to some lonely place all by yourselves and rest for a while”; ... So they went off in a boat to a lonely place where they could be by themselves.”

Main point

The best teachers have a lot of information at their fingertips, but they also know what is **most** important for their pupils: in fact they are not just *teachers*, they are *pastors*.

1st Argument

Jesus shows that he is the best of teachers. He welcomes his disciples back from their mission, sees their tiredness, sees the demands of the people and guards the disciples' energy.

It reminds me of my first years as a Jesuit novice. We were sent away to different places: a residence for the mentally handicapped, a social service centre in Longford Regional Hospital, an SVP old folks' home on the Falls Road, Belfast and so forth.

And after every "experiment" we sat down and shared our experiences and learned from each other under the guidance of our novice director.

As novices we also went to places for complete recreation, to prepare for our Long Retreat: places where it was quiet and peaceful.

Jesus knows where to go: a boat trip on a beautiful lake. And when they get to their chosen rest-spot, only to be assailed once again by the crowds, Jesus takes the lead and sits the people down for a teaching session. I imagine that he let's the disciples off for some free time!

2nd Argument

However, there are teachers who don't know these techniques who don't promote the wellbeing of their disciples, whose concern is more themselves or something else. We've all known them.

When I was starting teaching, again as part of my training, I picked up the very clear warning, that "sarcasm" is the worst thing to use in the classroom. Sarcasm turns a group against you and no matter how you're feeling, you never degrade a pupil in front of the class with sarcastic comments. We had a teacher like that. Perhaps most of us have this experience too.

Our first reading gives us an example. Jeremiah rails against them: they're not *teachers*, or even *pastors*!

"You have let my flock be scattered and go wandering and have not taken care of them."

And for Christians, there are strong resonances with the kind of *pastor* that Jeremiah prophesies:

*See, the days are coming – it is the Lord who speaks
when I will raise a virtuous Branch for David,
who will reign as true king and be wise,
practising honesty and integrity in the land.
In his days Judah will be saved
and Israel dwell in confidence.*

Conclusion

Teaching, training or *formation*, as it is known in faith circles, is more than the transfer of information. It is the engagement of the full person, cared for, nurtured and encouraged. Everybody has different needs in their *formation*. And a good *pastor* will see these needs and satisfy them.

Our Christian story is *not* a success story. Even those favoured, pastored and *formed* disciples made repeated mistakes .. right up to the end. It's the mystery of their teacher, Jesus, whom they never fully understood and, in the end, whom they abandoned.

I don't think we can claim to be any better. Indeed priests and people in Ireland; perhaps especially priests, are called to a deep humility with the developments in the Irish church that have in large part led to the collapse of faith in Irish culture.

Let us pray for each other; pray for our pastors and our bishops ... and all leaders, male and female in our church. That they may come back to that lonely place where they can be by themselves with our Lord and Saviour, Jesus the Nazarene. And if not at Gennesaret, then here in Ireland at some quiet and lonely lakeshore.