

Who, then, receives this sacrament worthily?

Fasting and bodily preparation are in fact a fine external discipline, but a person who has faith in these words, “given for you” and “shed for you for the forgiveness of sin,” is really worthy and well prepared. However, a person who does not believe these words or doubts them is unworthy and unprepared, because the words “for you” require truly believing hearts.

Peter and six friends are sitting around one evening (John 21:1-14). Jesus has made two Easter appearances and that was nice, but it was time to get practical. Following Jesus around for three years was wonderful and instructive and they had all undeniably grown from doing so. He had given them clear instructions for what to do while he was away. But you know, it was time to get a job, or go back to graduate school, or start a family—you know, re-enter the real world. If I’m counting heads correctly, there are seven guys sitting around the den that night. We know what happened to Judas, but that leaves four absentees, suggesting that it was just difficult for those early disciples to hold things together. People started missing church meetings and doing other things. And with Jesus absent, with their leader missing, well, who could blame them? We all behave differently when no one’s watching.

So Simon Peter says that night, “I am going fishing.” It’s impossible to detect the voice inflection Peter may have used here, but I think he said that with some resignation and maybe a bit of boredom. “We will go with you,” say the other six. Peter knew he was supposed to be “fishing for people” from now on, but he returns to his old job—the old familiar nets. They fish through the night, but strike out. It’s important to remember that the disciples never catch a fish in the gospels, not even a guppy, without Jesus.

Dawn breaks. A man is on the beach grilling fish and bread. We know exactly who this man is, but please note that the disciples do not. From their perspective, it’s just some guy on the beach. Is Jesus playing with them? Is it a loaded question when he says, “Children, you have no fish, have you?” I’ll let you decide.

It is the point of recognition that interests me the most. Peter is naked, by the way, as he fishes. Make of that what you will, but I think it might be easy for us to have a psychological heyday with Peter’s lack of clothing. When Peter realizes who it is on the beach, when he suddenly realizes the presence of the divine eye of “the hidden camera,” when Peter realizes he’s been caught at work he supposedly left, ignoring the clear marching orders of the voice he now recognizes over the waves—then his lack of clothing perhaps becomes a symbol for what we’ve all felt from time to time: Jesus can see right through him. He’s been caught, busted, nailed. The story says, “He put on some clothes and jumped into the sea.” It sounds rather irrational, but maybe not given the circumstances.

Now I don't know if you've ever felt like Peter. I don't know if you've ever been caught doing something you shouldn't have done. Maybe you've felt powerless to break old habits, old routines. Maybe you've felt that religion was largely an exercise where some divine authority was waiting for you to slip-up, to catch you in some indiscretion. Maybe there is something in your own past for which you feel Jesus is standing in judgment—the divine Cop in the Sky.

Peter was naked in the boat and Jesus could see right through him. As he swam to shore, I'm sure that many of the feelings I just mentioned must have raced through his mind. Was he excited to see Jesus? Undoubtedly. Was he apprehensive to see Jesus? Absolutely.

What Peter found on shore that morning perhaps defined his understanding of Easter more than any empty tomb or any resurrection appearance. With soggy clothes, he walked towards a man tending a charcoal fire. This was a man who knew everything about Peter, who could see right through him. A man from whom no secrets could be hid. A man who could have had a fairly honest and loud and straightforward conversation with our erstwhile fisherman.

It's curious to me, given what could have been said, that this man tending the fire only offers four words: "Come and have breakfast." I suspect that Peter truly understood Easter for the first time on that beach. Peter may have been caught red-handed, but Jesus offers him some red snapper.

We are all very dark and complicated people. We behave certain ways when others are looking. Differently, quite often, when they're not. Like Peter, God has given us very specific marching orders. But we have a hard time maintaining the excitement of his call, falling into routine and old habits.

Jesus can see right through us—our failures, our behaviors. And even though our sin and rebellion disappoint him, he waits for us on a new shore, the dawn of a new day. He points to a fire, to an altar, towards heavenly food, his invitation always leading sinners like us from death to life. Four little words:

"Come and have breakfast."

It's waiting and served every Sunday morning.