

Reflection

By the Revd Nigel Parker at the Consecration of The Revd Pat Storey as Bishop of Meath and Kildare, Saturday 30 November 2013, Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin



Consecrate yourself to the Lord

John 21. 1-17

Picture the scene:

Thursday evening – before Jesus was crucified. Jesus eats the last supper with the disciples; He says that one will betray and the rest deny Him; Simon Peter says, ‘everyone else, never me!’; Jesus says – ‘before the cock crows twice you will disown me three times’; they go out to Gethsemane with heavy hearts; Judas arrives with soldiers to arrest Jesus; the disciples flee; Jesus endures the mockery of a trial. In a courtyard, Peter warms himself by the fire and is challenged three times about being a disciple of Jesus, and each time he denies even knowing Him; the cock crows for the second time and Simon Peter weeps.

Friday – Jesus is crucified, and Simon Peter is nowhere. Saturday (the Sabbath) – the same. Sunday – Jesus is risen. Alleluia! In the morning, He appears to Mary Magdalene in garden. In the evening, to the disciples, except Thomas, in a locked room in Jerusalem.

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One week later, they are back in room with Thomas. Days roll by, silence. The eyes of the others are on Peter, looking for leadership! He is in inner turmoil: ‘How can I lead, I denied my friend! Does Jesus still want me? Would people still want to follow?’ He can’t take the pressure any longer. Simon Peter says: ‘I’m going out to fish.’ Six other disciples say: ‘We’ll go with you.’ So, Simon Peter runs! Out of Jerusalem, back to Galilee, to his boat.

Picture a second scene:

First thing – one of the unnamed disciples was Church of Ireland – an accountant, because Jesus, risen from the dead, is sitting by a fire, with barbecued fish and bread ready for their breakfast and he stops to count the fish! Perhaps that was his gift – the gift of administration is very important – it verifies the miraculous catch of 153 large fish.

So here are seven disciples around a fire with the Son of God. There’s a boat on the edge of the water, net full of wriggling writhing fish beside them. For at least three of them (Simon Peter, James, John), a

beach (perhaps this very beach) is highly significant. This may be the very place where Jesus said to them, 'Come follow me and I will make you fishers of men.' (Mark 1. 17) The Lord has a wonderful way of taking us full circle.

In a similar way, after breakfast, Jesus talks to Simon Peter about the matter, which is foremost in Peter's mind – denying Jesus three times. Jesus doesn't reprimand him or warn him, Peter has cried enough tears, he is a penitent man.

Jesus, as always, has not come to condemn, but to save – to restore. So to redeem Peter's threefold public denial of Jesus, even after his boasts of eternal faithfulness on that Thursday evening, Jesus asks Simon Peter three questions.

The core of each question is the same:

'Simon son of John, do you love me?'

And Simon Peter's response is, in essence, the same each time:

'Yes Lord, you know that I love you.'

Sometimes a word or phrase stands out.

'Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?''

Perhaps, Jesus was asking:

- Simon – do you love me more than you love these men? Am I, your God, first in your affection?

- Simon – you said you would never forsake me even if all others did. Do you love me more than these men love me?
- Simon – do you love me more than you love these fish?

Fish are everywhere in the story, at least 155 of them! 153 in the net when it came ashore, some on the barbecue. They've just eaten fish. Fish bones are all around them. Fish meant a great deal to Simon Peter – both a livelihood and a way of life. Was it a sense of uselessness that drove Peter out of Jerusalem and back to Galilee? A hunger for income, security, self-respect, standing in a community where he hadn't totally disgraced himself?

Simon knew fish. How to catch them, gut them, sell them, cook them, eat them. Simon knew how to lead men on a boat to catch fish. He knew where fish were to be found. Except, of course, for this night, for they had caught nothing. Imagine Simon Peter's mood:

'I don't believe it!'

'Can't lead men to catch men!'

'Now can't lead men to catch a single sardine!'

As they approach the shore, failure weighs heavy on Simon Peter's shoulders. Then a man, somehow familiar, standing on the beach, calls out, seemingly with a wry smile on His face:

'Friends, haven't you any fish?'

'Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.'

As soon as Peter realizes it is the Lord Jesus, he's in the water heading towards Him – demonstrating the abandonment, which Jesus has always loved in Peter; the passion in his heart. All through the meal, the irony would not have been lost on Peter, that Jesus the carpenter was a better fisherman than he.

And then as he sits drying himself in front of the fire (the setting where he betrayed Jesus in the courtyard), with his belly full of cooked fish, surrounded by fish bones, a net full of fish beside them, Jesus asked him:

'Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?'

Story

A French monk, Dominic Valome, had terminal cancer. He asked to be released from the monastery so he could go and live in a slum area of Paris. He rented a flat and took on a job as a night watchman. Every morning on his way back from work, he would sit on a park bench and talk to whoever came by. Often men would come to drink and leer at the girls walking past. He would listen to the story of their lives and sometimes their language was very choice and sometimes their stories were far from clean. But he never judged them, he just listened to

them and shared his sweets with them.

Then came the day when someone asked him, *'What's your story?'* He told them and from that day there was no more swearing and no more dirty stories. They found him dead not long after that in his single-tap cold water flat. Do you know how many people came to his funeral? 7,000 people. All that it says on his tombstone is, *'Dominic Valome, a witness to Jesus Christ'*.

What had he done? He listened to people and shared his sweets with them. Somehow through that people had been touched by the love of God. After that they found his journal in his flat. The last entry in his journal read, *'I can genuinely say I have no other interest other than the love of God'*.

Application

That is consecration:

- Our love for Him who first loved us
- Placing ourselves entirely at His disposal
- Declaring, 'Whatever it takes!'

Whenever we truly love someone or something, we are willing to make the necessary sacrifices. In pursuit of a closer walk with Jesus, Dominic Valome consecrated himself and left the secure setting of the monastery and lived his final months among the poor in the slums of Paris. In the

midst of his sacrifice, he was not disappointed.

Above all sacrifices, of course, stands the sacrifice of Jesus, the Word made flesh, who stepped out of heaven to live, suffer and die among us to bring us back to the Father who loves us so much that He willingly gave everything. *‘For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.’* (John 3.16) Today, as we gather for consecration, we follow in the glorious footsteps of our Master, who has unleashed heaven on earth, declaring, *‘My Father, not my will but yours be done’*.

Consecration is so vital, because it is an invitation to the Holy Spirit to have His way. No wonder, as the People of Israel prepared to cross the River Jordan, Joshua told them, *‘Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you.’* (Joshua 3.5)

Those amazing things are not dependent on who we are, but on who God is!

Dwight L. Moody was a shoe salesman who felt the call of God to preach the gospel. Early one morning he and some friends gathered in a hay field for prayer, confession and consecration. A man called Henry Varley said, *‘The world has yet to see what God can do with*

and for and through someone who is fully and wholly consecrated to Him.’

Moody was deeply moved by those words. Later, as he listened to the great preacher Charles Spurgeon, Moody thought *‘I could be that person. Well by the Holy Spirit in him, he would be that person.’* And then suddenly, in the high gallery, he saw something he’d never realised before – it was not Mr Spurgeon, after all, who was doing that work: it was God. And if God could use Mr Spurgeon, why should he not use the rest of us, and why should we not just lay ourselves at the Master’s feet, and say to Him, *‘Send me! Use me!’*

Through that one ordinary life God began to do the extraordinary. Moody became one of the greatest evangelists of modern times. He preached in services across Britain and America where many thousands came to Christ.

Pat – It has been our privilege over the years to see you respond to our Father’s love with love, trust and obedience:

- You have given yourself whole-heartedly to Him and His Church, serving His people as a deacon and priest – teaching the Scriptures and pastoring with that disarming directness, which is your hallmark, a directness, which speaks the truth in love, with a

ready laugh and delightful sense of humour.

- You have demonstrated your love for the Father in your hard work, impeccable organisation and evangelistic heart, which longs to see many come into the family of God, through the completed work of Jesus Christ.
- You have shown your care and thoughtfulness to many, not least your family, Earl, Carolyn and Luke, and to us, your friends.

So today, it is our privilege to pray for you, as the Lord Jesus calls you to a deeper life of sacrificial service, calls you to consecrate yourself to Him, His Church and His Cause.

And not only you, all of us. Do you want to see the Lord move powerfully in your life, parish, diocese? Then consecrate yourself to the Lord!

Then expect to be challenged to leave the familiar, because we will find ourselves, like Simon Peter, as he looked into the face of man with eyes like fire, hearing the voice of the Master addressing us by name and asking, *'Do you love me more than these?'*

We may not, like Simon Peter, be sitting on a beach warming ourselves by a fire. For us, the

question will be posed in surroundings familiar to us – our home, a church service, a coffee shop, our workplace, just as those surroundings were so familiar to Simon Peter. The setting is immaterial the reality is the same:

Do you love me more than:

- You love your family, country
- Your comfort / security
- Career / Reputation
- Ministry, denomination
- Money, house, holidays
- Old familiar ways

And so we should pray for one another, because we know that the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak, that we have this treasure in jars of clay. Simon Peter's story of failure, forgiveness and restoration is so encouraging for us, because the Risen Lord Jesus deals with us in similar fashion. Again and again, He comes to us, His disciples, in awesome humility, and says: *'Do you love me more than these?'*

Each of us will answer in different words. Two of my favourites:

Apostle Paul – *I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.*
(Philippians 3.10-11)

C.T. Studd, former England cricket captain, who gave up fame and a

glittering career to serve the Lord as a missionary in inland China, said: *'If Jesus Christ be God, and He died for me, then nothing is too hard for me to do for Him!'*

But perhaps the simple words of a former fisherman are the most poignant of all: *'Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.'*

'Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you.' (Joshua 3.5)