

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

3rd Sunday of Easter | For Sunday, May 1, 2022

What We Bring to the Fire

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Acts 5:27-32, 40b-41

Rev 5:11-14

Jn 21:1-19 or 21:1-14



Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you just caught." So Simon Peter went over and dragged the net ashore, full of one hundred fifty-three large fish. - John 21:10-11

One of the stories that has earned the place of legend in my family lore is "The Time Colleen Made the Johnnycakes."

A Johnnycake, if you don't know, is a thin cornmeal pancake apparently popular during colonial times, and it was the recipe I selected from my American Girl doll cookbook when I was so young I could barely read correctly, but nevertheless decided I was going to bake something on my own.

My mother was kind enough to let me, but in the chaos of a kitchen full of children fumbling with measuring spoons and seeing who could talk the loudest, she was too distracted to realize that I had mistaken the abbreviation "tsp" to mean "cup." Thus, I had decided that the "¾ tsp salt" required by the recipe indicated that I was to put three to four cups of salt into the batter.

Those Johnnycakes were literally painful to eat. We spit them out into the sink and rinsed our mouths with cold water. When we finally realized exactly what my mistake had been, we all had a good laugh, and my mother had a big mess. I'll tell you what, though: after that, I knew what the abbreviation "tsp" meant.

I think of the Johnnycakes every time my children ask to help me with a grown-up task. When a child offers his help, it's so tempting to brush him off and tell him to go occupy himself with the work of a child and leave the work of an adult to someone who can do it properly.

But then I remember that, when he already had a fine meal cooking, Jesus invited his disciples to bring their fish to the fire.

God does not really *need* anything from us, does he? We do not have the ability to add to His glory, His power, His perfection or His joy. We can't really *help*.

But he created us, as the Catechism says so beautifully, out of His "sheer goodness," as a parent conceives a child, "to make him share in his own blessed life." So here we are, with our dead, smelly fish. And any parent will know that accepting the offering of a child is a gift to the child more than it is a help to the parent. It gives him honor. It gives him purpose. It gives him pride. It gives him knowledge.

So, what does God do, time and time again? He doesn't just allow us to drag our dead fish to his already blazing fire — he *tells* us to. He accepts our offering — our good works, our suffering, our praise, our love. He accepts everything we have to give, and then He sits with us, and He gives us a job to do. And for just a moment, he lets us in on the glorious mystery of the love of an omnipotent God — the happiness He allows us to give Him, happiness He did not need and can thrive without.

No, the work will never be done more quickly or proficiently with the help of the child. The dishwasher will need to be clandestinely reloaded after he runs off to play. The dust rag will be oversaturated with water, wreaking havoc on the furniture finish if you don't intercept it and wring it out. Best-case scenario, the recipe will have a little too much flour in it, worst-case scenario, it'll be totally inedible and you'll find yourself out of salt.

But the point of letting the child help is no more to expedite the work than the point of life is having a clean house. A change occurs inside of him when he is allowed to participate in the family mission. Little seedling feelings of responsibility and fulfillment begin to take root.

For just a moment, we let him in on the glorious mystery of parenthood — all-consuming happiness that accompanies (or does it derive from?) never-ending work — perhaps the only such work since Eden to ever really bring fulfillment.

PRAYER

May we never forget, Lord,
the honor you bestow on us
by allowing us to share in your mission.
May we have renewed strength
to bring our offering to the fire.

It is a gift to him, not to us.