

Week 32

Jesus Is with Us—To Nourish Us for Our Mission

Guide: Feed My Sheep



The final scene we contemplate in the Gospels prepares us for the end of this retreat. It's after the Resurrection. Peter says, "I'm going fishing." He doesn't know what to do with the resurrection of Jesus. Each of us could end this retreat and say, "I'm going back to whatever I was before."

This is a scene of recalling. When Jesus asks them if they have caught anything, and then shows them their ability to haul in an enormous catch, with his power, they recognize him, as they hear their call again.

This week, we can let our experiences of prayer—even in the background times—renew the call we have received in this retreat. The Lord, who is alive and with us in our everyday lives after this retreat, is the same Lord who has shown us such power in our lives these past months.

He is there with them—preparing food for them but inviting them to bring what they have received through his power. Haven't we experienced in this retreat that his nourishing presence is most effective when we have accepted his invitation to bring what we have been receiving to the table? Haven't we discovered that it's all gift, but that it is not received by passive waiting? Hasn't it taken some work and discipline on our part to bring previous gifts to the experience, in order to receive even more?

Jesus asks Peter about the degree of his love. How much? We see that the one who denied him three times is able to say that his love is three times stronger for that. And Jesus is then able to make the connection to mission—if you love *me*, then be *with me* in feeding my sheep. Aren't these the movements we have experienced in this retreat? Now, our joy with Jesus becomes fruitful. We are sent by the love we have for him. Having grown in love for him, we have grown in love for his mission.

Use the resources this week to enter more deeply into this week. Throughout the week, the dynamics of this scene can fill our consciousness with joy, gratitude, and growing freedom to give ourselves to nourish others.

Some Practical Help for Getting Started This Week

Our way of proceeding for this week takes us more deeply into the scene depicted in John 21.

The Mystery We Contemplate

This week we reflect on *Jesus alive and present with us as one who nourishes us for our mission*. Our reflection is in the context of our nearing the end of this retreat—as we look back and look forward.

The Grace We Ask For

We still seek a deepening sense of *joy with Jesus*. Jesus is risen and alive forever. We want to experience his presence, especially as we return to our daily life after this retreat. This week we desire to experience his renewing our call to be *with him* in his mission.

Our Daily Life Contemplation

This week we want to imagine that lakeside scene and its parts:

- Peter returns to fishing.
I could end this retreat, saying "I'm returning to . . ."
- Jesus again shows them his power—a renewal of their call.
I have known his power these months, and his call, and long for its renewal now.
- Jesus makes them breakfast and invites them to bring what they had already received.
I've experienced his feeding me and inviting me to actively bring what he's given me previously to that new experience of nourishment.
- Jesus transforms Peter's three denials into three missions to feed his people.
I know I'm a loved sinner; that I've grown in love for him and for his mission.
- Jesus says to Peter, "Follow me."
I hear that call and desire to say "yes."

The Daily Means

Each morning, among the first things to do is pause for just a moment to focus on the grace we desire this week. For example, as I put on my slippers or robe, I will recall the *dynamic* I wish to be so conscious of this day: my everyday life events are part of this mystery. I'm nearing the end of this wonderful retreat experience. I have experienced the Lord's movements within me in these daily moments these past months. Now I am renewed in them and feel the call to be more deeply with Jesus in his mission.

Throughout the day, in all the *background* times, return to these thoughts. This will help us be more conscious of Jesus' being with us. It will also help us see and experience the graces we desire this week. Some examples might help. Are there moments in your day when you experience *old patterns*, or *moments* within you that *return* to patterns that had been touched by grace in this retreat but now are still not what you desire? Be conscious of those times all week long. That is precisely where you can experience Jesus renewing his call and reminding you of his presence with you.

You might find yourself *on the edge* of a grace experience. I've come to recognize it in this retreat before. A conflict or a struggle or some opportunity arises to surrender myself and help someone. I stop for a brief moment and see Jesus there, making me breakfast. And he says, so calmly and with such confidence in my companionship with him, "Bring to this experience some of what I've allowed you to receive. This moment can be nourishment, if you bring to it what I've given you."

Many choice moments arise in our week. Are we going to do something this way or that way? Are we going to go to this or go to that? Will we try to save our life or lose it in loving others? At those choice crossroads, we can pause briefly and listen to Jesus ask, "Do you love me?" We can let the words and feelings be expressed, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." In that concrete life moment, let Jesus say, "Then choose what will be an act of nourishment for others."

Throughout my day, as we walk from one place to another, or get in the car to go to our next commitment, we can hear Jesus' call, "Follow me." And in that background moment, we can breathe a peaceful "Yes, Lord, I am with you, here."

Each night find a brief moment to bring the day together in gratitude. Expressing thanks each evening will help us grow in confidence that Jesus is indeed present, nourishing us this day for mission with him.

Make use of the various resources provided for this week: the "For the Journey" and sample words for our attempts at expression in "In These or Similar Words . . ." As the "yes" moments of your week grow, they can form a fabric of nourishing mission moments that not only lift our spirits but also offer the gift of companionship in mission with Jesus that his Spirit desires for us all, for God's greater glory and the service of others.

For the Journey: Come Follow Me

Simon Peter is about to be caught again by the Fisherman. Again, we watch and listen to all that is going on. It is daybreak; it is no longer night. Jesus as light has come to illumine the dark and "overcome the darkness." Peter had denied his teacher three times while warming himself at night by a charcoal fire.

Perhaps Jesus has a loving smile as he prepares a charcoal fire around which he will initiate a reconciliation with his student. The scene is set. Where are you sitting or standing? Perhaps you can stand next to Jesus as he again invites his friends to face the fact: not that they aren't good fishermen but to remember his words, "Apart from Me you can do nothing." So he asks them if they have caught anything. Their brief negative answer heightens the drama.

Perhaps Jesus asks you whether it is time for the big catch. They are the ones who will be caught by following the instructions of Jesus. They make a great haul and so does Jesus. Peter gets a funny feeling that he has seen this picture before, and he jumps into the water and makes his way into the light of the morning. Fish is already cooking, and Jesus gently invites Peter to bring some of the other fish for a fine breakfast. Jesus offers them bread and fish as a sign that it is really him; he has come to catch them up in his net of forgiveness.

This is not the happy ending, though. As you sit with them, Peter needs something more than breakfast; he needs some words, some conversation, to make this all real. So Jesus, knowing this human need in us all, directly asks Peter three times, while warming himself again by a charcoal fire, "Do you love me?" Three times Peter unties the knot of denial with which he bound himself in the darkness. Jesus is not insisting, he is loosening and freeing Peter from his shame. This is still not the happy ending.

The happy ending has echoes of the first happy beginning when Jesus first called Peter to "be not afraid" and "come follow me." Jesus reminds Peter of his first call and his first beginning. Peter looks back to where he has been and then forward to the unknown of his future. "When you were young, you put on your own belt and walked where you liked, but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will put a belt round you and take you where you would rather not go."

This is the happy ending, though it might sound somber and frightening. Peter follows Jesus, though he does have some concerns about his friend John: "What about him?"

We are called this week to again be caught by his love. Again, we are asked to put our regrets and infidelities into the charcoal fire. Again, we have our own questions about our futures, but he calls us again back to our dignity as his sisters and brothers. We would like to stay on the shore eating bread and fish. We would like to build three tents here and not hand out any maps. We have prayed enough these weeks to know that He was sent to us, “as the Father has sent me, so I send you.” Reconciliation, nourishing, gathering, comforting, are all essential elements of being on mission with Christ.

So, we pick up the pieces of bread and fish and they go with us as signs that he came to stay while being with us as men and women for others.

In These or Similar Words . . .

Dear Jesus,

What a joy to be here on the beach with you! After the drama and excitement of the past weeks, it was nice to get away from it all, to go back to what I know, my simple life—the life I led before I met you.

But then as I sat in the boat with Peter and the others, idling in the last moments of a long night, catching nothing, we saw you calling to us from the shore. Peter plunged into the water and swam in, while the rest of us laughed and got the boat into shore as quickly as we could. It’s you! I am so thrilled to be here with you. Did I really think my life would ever return to “normal”? What was I thinking? What in the world is normal to me now? I’m sitting here with you, my beloved friend, as you make me breakfast and ask how I am. Yes, I’ve been a little overwhelmed by the events of recent weeks as I tried to stay with you through it all. I’ve been so joyful that you are back and are with me at such a deep level. But what does that mean for my life, Jesus?

What will happen to me now? How will this joy I feel in you and for you affect my life? You ask if I care for you. *Yes!* Yes, dearest friend, I care for you and love you so much. I will feed your sheep. I will tend to your flock, to the poor and the downtrodden, as you have. Is that what you are asking of me? Is that how I can continue to feel you in my life—to care for your sheep?

And then you looked so deeply into my eyes, with such love and understanding and said, “Follow me.” I will! Yes, I will follow you! Maybe I held back a little on the boat, afraid of taking the plunge into the water as Peter did, but no longer. I am ready to follow you, to feed your sheep. Show me where, tell me how!

Thank you, Jesus, for such joy! My heart is soaring with love for you. Thank you for holding my hand past the fears of the unknown and asking me to follow you. I’m not sure what my “yes” is or where it will take me, but *yes!*

Scripture Readings

John 21:1–19