

Along the track

Returning to Galilee

There is a very appealing post resurrection scene described in John's Gospel by the Sea of Galilee where the disciples were about to moor after a fruitless night of fishing. They were not too happy! When they got to the shore, they found Jesus making breakfast for them—fish cooking over a charcoal fire, and some bread. "Bring some of the fish you've just caught," Jesus said. It sounds like it was a familiar sight to them from the years they spent together. They had been told to go to Galilee in the message to the women who came to the empty tomb: "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me." Mtt 28:10

That was not surprising. Not only is Galilee a beautiful place, it had an emotional attachment as well. Jesus and his disciples had spent a lot of time there, Jesus called many of them to follow him in Galilee and much of their formation as followers of his vision took place there. They were changed there in mind and heart. It was most likely the place where they felt least 'afraid'.

In the words of Fr Ronald Rolheiser: *In the gospels, Galilee is not simply a geographical location, a place on a map. It is first of all a place in the heart. As well, Galilee refers to the dream and to the road of discipleship that the disciples once walked with Jesus and to that place and time when their hearts most burned with hope and enthusiasm. And now, after the crucifixion, just when they feel that the dream is dead, that their faith is only fantasy, they are told to go back to the place where it all began: "Go back to Galilee. He will meet you there!"*

And so they went back to Galilee and, in their grief, their disappointment, their lost hopes, they go back to the place they loved, to where their hearts were afire, to what they knew, back to their boats and fishing. They went back to where it all began. It is natural to keep busy in the bad times, when grief comes or disappointments or failures. It's the way we work through it. And there it is that Jesus is waiting for them. Cooking breakfast!

During his Easter homily a couple of years ago, Pope Francis asked us all 'to return to Galilee', to return to where we first experienced the call to

follow Jesus, to where God's grace first touched us. That Galilee does not have to be a place; it could be an event, a situation, a frame of mind, or a choice made. It could be a challenging time, a time of sickness or pain. It could be a moment of joy too – the birth of a child perhaps, or just a very happy event or set of circumstances. On the other hand it could be a time of disappointment, dashed hopes or dreams. Where is your Galilee?, Pope Francis asked.

Every year is different – beginnings and endings, illness and health, frustrations and the joys of success, stagnation on some fronts, growth on others. It is easy to drift along rather than making the space to begin again, to return to what gives us hope, to what makes our hearts burn within us, to fix the eye of the mind and heart on the really important things of life, to recall where God's grace is at work in our lives.

Returning to our Galilee is also a reminder that, just like these first disciples, we too have been called by God. It is a reminder that we too are loved by God despite our failures and lack of faith, despite our wanderings and disappointments, despite what we have done or failed to do.

The message of Galilee is that Jesus is waiting there for us. Do not be afraid, do not fear, return to Galilee! He has gone ahead of us, He has been there before us, he has experienced the joys and the pain, the sadnesses and disappointments, the highs and the lows just as we have, he too has been disillusioned but now he has risen, he has overcome all and is waiting.

In his poem 'Invitation' about this meeting in Galilee, Father Philip Chircop SJ, wrote
Stand in our midst
again, today
enter the circle of our fears
penetrate the darkness of our doubts
meet us where we are

So where is your Galilee?

Regards
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