
THE RECOLLECTION RETREAT - OVERVIEW

DATE: Saturday, 15 May 2021

LOCATION: In the Retreatant's home via ZOOM, 9 AM to 2:40 PM

PRESENTER: Father (ret.) Rick Ganz

PRESIDER: Mary Edmonds

ABOUT WORDS

A RETREATANT is name we give to him or her who, responding to some impetus of the Holy Spirit, resolves to “go” on Retreat, and to give himself or herself to what the Retreat asks.

A DIRECTOR of the Retreat is he or she who “works for” *the* Director, Who is the third Divine Person, the Holy Spirit, which in John's Gospel is called by Jesus “the other Advocate”:

John 14 – ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate* to be with you always,^{k 17} the Spirit of truth,* which the world cannot accept, because it neither sees

* *Another Advocate*: Jesus is the first advocate (*paraclete*); see 1 Jn 2:1, where Jesus is an advocate in the sense of intercessor in heaven. The Greek term derives from legal terminology for an advocate or defense attorney, and can mean spokesman, mediator, intercessor, comforter, consoler, although no one of these terms encompasses the meaning in John. The Paraclete in John is a teacher, a witness to Jesus, and a prosecutor of the world, who represents the continued presence on earth of the Jesus who has returned to the Father.

^k 15:26; Lk 24:49; 1 Jn 2:1.

* *The Spirit of truth*: this term is also used at Qumran, where it is a moral force put into a person by God, as opposed to the spirit of perversity. It is more personal in John; it will teach the realities of the new order (Jn 14:26), and testify to the truth (Jn 14:6). While it has been customary to use masculine personal pronouns in English for the Advocate, the Greek word for “spirit” is neuter, and the Greek text and manuscript variants fluctuate between masculine and neuter pronouns.

nor knows it. But you know it, because it remains with you, and will be in you.^{1 18} I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.*¹

WHAT IS A RETREAT?

A “retreat” as we mean it is a deliberate act of generosity towards God – Who is never outdone in generosity – *a making of ourselves available to God* with the fullest amount of zeal we can muster. “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.”

1 Samuel 3 – ⁷ Samuel did not yet recognize the LORD, since the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. ⁸ The LORD called Samuel again, for the third time. Getting up and going to Eli, he said, “Here I am. You called me.” Then Eli understood that the LORD was calling the youth. ⁹ So he said to Samuel, “Go to sleep, and if you are called, reply, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.’” When Samuel went to sleep in his place, ¹⁰ the LORD came and stood there, calling out as before: Samuel, Samuel! Samuel answered, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”²

This spiritual effort is as much the task of the Retreatant as it is of the Directors This effort of real presence and attentiveness to God is what we *all* have in common during the Retreat.

To do this at our homes has certain challenges, because our home has so much in it that can distract us from making ourselves available to God. And “the fullest amount of zeal” has largely to do with making sure that we guard the time set aside for the Retreat. Plan ahead about how you will secure your privacy!

In this case, what we together offer to God on Saturday, from 8:45 AM to around 3 PM, is an **undivided heart** – a single focus of attention for a part of one day; a “silencing” of anything that seeks to divide our consciousness (e.g., turning off phones; computers; TV; radio).

Psalm 86 –

¹¹ Teach me, LORD, your way

¹ 16:13; Mt 28:20; 2 Jn 1–2.

* *I will come to you: indwelling, not parousia.*

¹ [New American Bible](#), Revised Edition. (Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011), Jn 14:16–18.

² [New American Bible](#), Revised Edition. (Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011), 1 Sa 3:7–10.

that I may walk in your truth,^f
single-hearted and revering your name.
¹²I will praise you **with all my heart**,
glorify your name forever, Lord my God.³

THE EXPERIENCE OF TIME

If we direct this Retreat well, in accord with the rhythm of the Holy Spirit and while being alert to you, then you will not notice the passage of Time at all. *The day will seem to fly by.* This is important, because it means that we have **abided/remained** in a place of depth, where timelessness touches us.

John 15 – ⁴**Remain** in me, as I **remain** in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it **remains** on the vine, so neither can you unless you **remain** in me. ⁵I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever **remains** in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing.⁴

THE SCHEDULE

8:45 AM – Log in to ZOOM to say hello to your fellow Retreatants

9 to 9:30 AM – THE ENTRY THRESHOLD⁵ - a Painting and John 21:1-14 and Prayer

9:30 to 10:00 AM – WALKING YOUR THOUGHTS outside and alone

10:00 to 10:30 AM – AIMING OURSELVES – Memory, History, Significance, Re-collection

10:30 to 10:50 AM – CONVERSATION

^f Ps 25:4; 26:3; 27:11; 119:12, 35; 143:8, 10.

³ [New American Bible](#), Revised Edition. (Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011), Ps 86:11–12.

⁴ [New American Bible](#), Revised Edition. (Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011), Jn 15:4–5.

⁵ The *Oxford English Dictionary* at “**threshold**” – “Border, limit (of a region); the line which one crosses in entering or exiting.”

11:00 to 11:50 AM – FIRST RECOLLECTION - Thanksgiving

12 Noon to 12:45 PM – Lunch

12:45 PM to 1 PM – We come back together; check in; enjoy visiting with each other

1 PM to 2 PM – SECOND RECOLLECTION – Insight into the Pattern

2:10 PM to 2:35 PM – THE EXIT THRESHOLD - John 16:16-24 and Reflection together

2:35 PM to 2:40 PM – FINAL BLESSING and GOODBYE

DESCRIPTION

“Recollection” is a 16th century word that meant, and means, “serious concentration of thought,” especially in a religious context. Its meaning also, by the early 17th century included the accompanying inner disposition needed for such “recollection” to happen: “composure, calmness of mind, self-possession.” Finally, by the mid-17th century, “recollection” also meant “the action of recalling something to the memory ... the mental operation by which objects or ideas are revived in the mind.”

All of these meanings are included in the spiritual exercise we intend for May 15th, Saturday, 9 AM to 3 PM. The location of the retreat will be your own home (using the ZOOM platform).

The year 2020 has been profoundly unsettled, and unsettling, for all of us. It was about *loss* ... and *gain*. But in order for us to know “what happened”, we must know how effectively to “recollect”. It is not about us “remembering everything” - this, that, and the other thing - but about gaining the ability to grasp what specifically we “lost” and what specifically we “gained”. And THIS great achievement of understanding can best be accomplished when a group of people seek in the Holy Spirit to help one another get there.

Rick Ganz will lead us. Or better, the Holy Spirit will lead us and Rick will work to keep us attentive to that divine action at work throughout the day.

Join us for the day. We will look after you - Rick and Mary and Tara, making sure that we have the pacing right - the conversations, the quiet time, the time for lunch and a walk, etc. And when Rick judges that we are “full”, he will bring the day to a conclusion.

THE RECOLLECTION RETREAT WITH THE FABER INSTITUTE

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FEAST DAY

Today is the feast of **St. Isidore the Farmer (1070-1130 CE)** – “He died May 15, 1130, and he was declared a saint in 1622 with Ignatius of Loyola, Francis Xavier, Teresa of Avila, and Philip Neri. Together, the group is known in Spain as ‘the five saints.’” [Foley, Leonard. *Saint of the Day: The Definitive Guide to the Saints* (pp. 213-214). Franciscan Media. Kindle Edition.]

Today is also the birthday, in 1265 CE, of an alumnus of The Night School – **Dante Alighieri**.

ENTRY THRESHOLD – A PAINTING & JOHN 21:1-14

The *Oxford English Dictionary* at the Old English (c 888 CE) noun “**threshold**” – “The piece of timber or stone which lies below the bottom of a door and has to be crossed in entering a house; the sill of a doorway; hence, the entrance to a house or building.” It also means, “In reference to entrance, the beginning of a state or action, outset, opening.”

The *Oxford English Dictionary* at the adjective “**liminal**” (from Latin *limen* – “threshold”) – “Characterized by being on a boundary or threshold, esp. by being transitional or intermediate between two states, situations, etc.”

I will do a SHARE SCREEN on ZOOM and let people contemplate this painting.



Holman Hunt (1827-1910) – “The Light of the World” (1851-1852)² at Keble College, Oxford.

Revelation 3, addressed to the Angel of the Church of Laodicea – ²⁰ “ ‘Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, [then] I will enter his house and dine with him, and he with me.’ ²¹ I will give the victor the right to sit with me on my throne, as I myself first won the victory and sit with my Father on his throne.”^k

³

The text from John 21 that follows is a text describing a “liminal” experience for the Apostles – the seven of them who were on that seashore. *Jesus now more than ever liminal*, the crossing-place in His own resurrected body between “on Earth / as it is in Heaven”. Remember that in John 10, Jesus spoke of Himself in this way at **John 10:7-10**:

⁷* So Jesus said again, “Amen, amen, I say to you, **I am the gate** for the sheep. ⁸* All who came [before me] are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ **I am the gate**. Whoever enters through me will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰ A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy; I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly.”⁴

THE TEXT FOR WALKING

- ² *Grove Art Online* (Oxford) - <https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T039544> – “Holman Hunt was concerned to expand the frontiers of what could be portrayed in art, whatever challenges this entailed. It was therefore deeply characteristic that, just as his reputation was assured, he left England in January 1854 for the Near East. His desire to paint in the Holy Land stemmed partly from a strong Christian commitment. **This was the result of a conversion that, according to Holman Hunt’s letter of August 1853 to Thomas Combe, he experienced during the painting of the *Light of the World* (1851–3; Oxford, Keble Coll.), a work destined to become, through replicas and engravings, the most popular Protestant picture of the 19th century.**”

* Christ invites all to the messianic banquet in heaven; cf. Is 25:6; Lk 14:15; 22:30.

^k Lk 22:28–30; Mt 19:28.

³ *New American Bible*, Revised Edition. (Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011), Re 3:20–21.

* In Jn 10:7–8, the figure is of a gate for the shepherd to come to the sheep; in Jn 10:9–10, **the figure is of a gate for the sheep to come in and go out.**

* [*Before me*]: these words are omitted in many good early manuscripts and versions.

⁴ *New American Bible*, Revised Edition. (Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011), Jn 10:7–10.

John 21:1-14 – The Appearance to the Seven Disciples. ¹ After this, Jesus revealed himself again to his disciples at the Sea of Tiberias. He revealed himself in this way.^a ² Together were Simon Peter, Thomas called Didymus, Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, Zebedee’s sons,^{*} and two others of his disciples. ³ Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.” They said to him, “We also will come with you.” So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.^b ⁴ When it was already dawn, Jesus was standing on the shore; but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.^c ⁵ Jesus said to them, “Children, have you caught anything to eat?” They answered him, “No.”^d ⁶ So he said to them, “Cast the net over the right side of the boat and you will find something.” So they cast it, and were not able to pull it in because of the number of fish. ⁷ So the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord.” When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he tucked in his garment, for he was lightly clad, and jumped into the sea. ⁸ The other disciples came in the boat, for they were not far from shore, only about a hundred yards, dragging the net with the fish. ⁹^e When they climbed out on shore, they saw a charcoal fire with fish on it and bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish you just caught.” ¹¹ So Simon Peter went over and dragged the net ashore full of one hundred fifty-three^{*} large fish. Even though there were so many, the net was not torn.^f ¹² Jesus said to them, “Come,

^a Mt 26:32; 28:7.

^{*} *Zebedee’s sons: the only reference to James and John in this gospel* (but see note on Jn 1:37). Perhaps the phrase was originally a gloss to identify, among the five, the *two others of his disciples*. The anonymity of the latter phrase is more Johannine (Jn 1:35). The total of seven may suggest the community of the disciples in its fullness.

^{*} This may be a variant of Luke’s account of the catch of fish; **see note on Lk 5:1–11**.

^b Mt 4:18; Lk 5:4–10.

^c 20:14; Mt 28:17; Lk 24:16.

^d Lk 24:41.

^{*} It is strange that Jesus already has fish since none have yet been brought ashore. This meal may have had eucharistic significance for early Christians since Jn 21:13 recalls Jn 6:11 which uses the vocabulary of Jesus’ action at the Last Supper; but see also note on Mt 14:19.

^e Lk 24:41–43.

^{*} The exact number 153 is probably meant to have a symbolic meaning in relation to the apostles’ universal mission; Jerome claims that Greek zoologists catalogued 153 species of fish. Or 153 is the sum of the numbers from 1 to 17. Others invoke Ez 47:10.

^f 2 Chr 2:16.

have breakfast.” And none of the disciples dared to ask him, * “Who are you?” because they realized it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came over and took the bread and gave it to them, and in like manner the fish.^{g 14*} This was now the third time^h Jesus was revealed to his disciples after being raised from the dead. ⁵

WHAT HAPPENED? TIME & HISTORY

For us successfully to know what we are seeking together today as we “rummage” through our experiences since the Age of COVID commenced in March 2020, we need to sort out a few things.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* at the 16th century verb “**to rummage**”, a nautical term: “*intransitive*. To make a thorough search of a ship or its hold.”

But, as we know from the scientific method, we have to establish at the outset what is it that we are seeking, because it is normally the case that *we only find what we are looking for*.

So, then, what are we looking for today?

WHAT HISTORY IS NOT

History is not a record of “everything that happened”, or as one might put it, “a record of one damn thing after another.” -

“Now the foregoing notion of time certainly is of great importance to the historian, for he has to date his events. It is not, however, an adequate account of what time is, for it is limited to counting, measuring, and relating to one another in a comprehensive view **all possible instances** of such counting and measuring. Moreover, it is this aspect of time

* *None ... dared to ask him*: is Jesus’ appearance strange to them? Cf. Lk 24:16; Mk 16:12; Jn 20:14. The disciples do, however, recognize Jesus *before* the breaking of the bread (opposed to Lk 24:35).

^g Lk 24:42.

* This verse connects Jn 20 and 21; cf. Jn 20:19, 26.

^h 20:19, 26.

⁵ [New American Bible](#), Revised Edition. (Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011), Jn 21:1–14.

that suggests the image of time as a **raceway of indivisible instants**, an image that little accords with our experience of time.” [Lonergan, Bernard. *Method in Theology*: Volume 14 (Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan) (pp. 165-166). University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division. Kindle Edition.]

TO RECOLLECT

The etymology from the OED of the English verb “**to collect**” – “But it is probable that the introduction of the verb as English was partly due to the earlier use of *collect* past participle as a direct adaptation of Latin *collectus*, past participle of *colligere* to gather together (< *col-* + *legere* to gather).”

Notice the intellectual aspect of “to gather together” or “to collect”. There is *insight* here (intelligence at work); an ability to organize apparently unrelated pieces into a *collection*.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* at the 16th century verb “**to recollect**” – “*transitive*. To call or bring back (something) to one's mind; to recall the knowledge of (a thing, person, etc.); to remember.” It also means, “*transitive*. To concentrate or absorb (the mind, oneself, etc.) in contemplation, esp. in mystical religious meditation.” And the meaning of the noun “**recollection**” – “The action of recalling something to the memory; the mental operation by which objects or ideas are revived in the mind; an instance of this.”

What I want to propose is that what re-collection means is that we each (but also together today), with greater insight, *challenge all of the narratives out there* about “what happened” in 2020. A “**narrative**” is a way of collecting and organizing experiences, which includes the choosing of which experiences to include in the collection. For us *to re-collect* means a process by which **we make our own selection of experiences**, ones that we judge significant, seeking **insight into the pattern**.

SIGNIFICANT EVENTS/MOMENTS

The *Oxford English Dictionary* at “**significant**” – “Sufficiently great or important **to be worthy of attention**; noteworthy; **consequential, influential**.”

It can help *recollection* to compel our memory to *remember* what happened (checking one's calendar, say) from month to month since the COVID pandemic commenced in March 2020. But such an inventory of all that is recorded on one's calendar can also greatly misdirect our

attention, confusing our ability *to abide in what was significant* in from March 2020 until now, May 2021.

Significant events/moments have an enormous impact on how we experience **Time** –

“Analysis may reveal that the sounds produced are a succession of notes and chords; but experience reveals that what is heard is their synthesis into a melody. There results what is called *the psychological present*, which is not an instant, a mathematical point, but a time span, so that our experience of time is, not of a raceway of instants, but a now leisurely, a now rapid succession of overlapping time spans. The time of experience is slow and dull when the objects of experience change slowly and in expected ways. But time becomes a whirligig when the objects of experience change rapidly and in novel and unexpected ways.” [Lonergan, Bernard. *Method in Theology*: Volume 14 (Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan) (p. 166). University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division. Kindle Edition.]

When we emerge from an undoubtedly significant moment in our life, and then speak of it to someone whom we trust, who will recognize the significance that I found in the “moment”, we would be puzzled, even irritated, if the other were to ask us to tell them *how long* the “moment” was. We might reply, “Time has nothing to do with it!”

ETERNITY

The *Oxford English Dictionary* at “**eternity**” – “In metaphysical sense (cf. [eternal adj. 1b](#)): Timelessness; existence with reference to which the relation of succession has no application.”

Significant moments in our lives are those that have something of **eternity** about them – something of no-Time, or “more than Time”. We have the expression: “Time stood still.”

MEANING-FULL EXPERIENCES & MEMORY

Significant moments are meaning-full experiences. The reason that we human beings forget vastly more than we remember is that we let go by us unnoticed, or *we fail to attend to the meaning* of much of what we experience in a single day. **We are far more likely to remember experiences that we have also understood, judged, and evaluated.**

“Meaning, then, is a constitutive element in the conscious flow that is the normally controlling side of human action. Common meaning is a constitutive element in human

community. *It is this constitutive role of meaning* in the controlling side of human action that grounds the peculiarity of the historical field of investigation.” [Lonergan, Bernard. *Method in Theology: Volume 14 (Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan)* (p. 167). University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division. Kindle Edition.]

RECOLLECTION AS HISTORY

“It is in this field of meaningful speech and action that the historian is engaged. It is not, of course, the historian’s but the exegete’s task to determine what was meant. The historian envisages a quite different object. He is not content to understand what people meant. He wants to grasp *what was going forward* in particular groups at particular places and times. **By ‘going forward’ I mean to exclude the mere repetition of a routine. I mean the change that originated the routine and its dissemination. I mean process and development but, no less, decline and collapse.** When things turn out unexpectedly, pious people say, ‘Man proposes but God disposes.’ The historian is concerned to see how God disposed the matter, not by theological speculation, not by some world-historical dialectic, but through particular human agents.” [Lonergan, Bernard. *Method in Theology: Volume 14 (Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan)* (pp. 167-168). University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division. Kindle Edition.]

“In brief, where exegesis is concerned to determine what a particular person meant, **history is concerned to determine what, in most cases, contemporaries do not know.** For, *in most cases, contemporaries do not know what is going forward*, first, because experience is individual while the data for history lie in the experiences of many; secondly, because the actual course of events results not only from what people intend but also from their oversights, mistakes, failures to act; thirdly, because history does not predict what will happen but reaches its conclusions from what has happened; and fourthly, because history is not merely a matter of gathering and testing all available evidence but also involves a number of interlocking discoveries that bring to light the significant issues and operative factors.” [Lonergan, Bernard. *Method in Theology: Volume 14 (Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan)* (p. 168). University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division. Kindle Edition.]

HISTORY AND UN-HISTORY

I believe that it was somewhere in the work of Bernard Lonergan that he said, or else I formulated the thought because of something that Lonergan said, that **History is what Love has done through Time; un-History is what human beings “on their own” have tried to pull off through Time.**

“Two loves,” Augustine writes, “have made two cities. Love of self, even to the point of contempt for God, made the earthly city; and love of God, even to the point of contempt for self, made the heavenly city.” (XIV,28) For all its vast scale and intricate complexity, then, *The City of God* is a story of love. It is, however, a love story played out in a cosmic setting, across an immense

historical range, and within complicated patterns of social order.” [Augustine, Saint. *The City of God: Books 1-10* (I/6), translator William Babcock; editor Boniface Ramsey (The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century). New City Press. Kindle Edition.]

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THE PROBLEM OF IRRITABILITY

It is my experience of Americans – broad generalization! – that we place far too much weight on *convenience*. We want; we demand our conveniences. And when our conveniences are taken from us, we judge that *significant*.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* at “**petty**” – “Of persons, their behaviour, etc.: characterized by an undue concern for trivial matters, esp. in a small-minded or spiteful way. Cf. [petty-minded adj.](#) Now usually *depreciative*.”

FIRST RECOLLECTION

The *Oxford English Dictionary* at the early Old English noun (735 CE) “**thank**”, which originally meant “a thought”. But then, it came to mean *a particular kind of thought* that appears in our

awareness – “Favourable thought or feeling, good will; graciousness, grace, favour. *Obsolete.*” One hundred years later (888 CE) there appeared the verb “**to thank**”, which was the verb describing *the appropriate or sufficient reaction* to having received, unlooked for, a “favorable thought or feeling.”

A point worth noticing: I believe that we have no ability **to make ourselves** thankful/grateful. Coming earlier than our thought “I should feel grateful for this or that” is the experience of receiving “a favorable thought or feeling; a feeling of good will”.

Thanksgiving. What have we noticed that was “done” in us, or among us, over which we had no control or power to make happen?

1 Kings 19 – Elijah on Mount Horeb

SECOND RECOLLECTION – INSIGHT INTO THE PATTERN

What we are seeking together here is to help each other get an insight in the Pattern of experiences (some of which “found” during the First Recollection – experiences of this past year that cause gratitude within us, experiences “tinged” with eternity. This Recollection about discovering and answer to the question: “What has God been up to with us as a people in all of this?” or “What is the *meaning* of this “collection” of carefully curated experiences?” We want to find a better, more expansive, a truer *narrative* – the real Story unfolding in this Age of COVID and Calamity.

This poem by Rainer Marie Rilke -

MAY 11

Orchard and Road

In the traffic of our days
may we attend to each thing
so that patterns are revealed
amidst the offerings of chance.

All things want to be heard,
so let us listen to what they say.
In the end we will hear what we are:
the orchard or the road leading past.

Collected French Poems

And this poem by David Whyte -

THE LIGHTEST TOUCH

Good poetry begins with
the lightest touch,
a breeze arriving from nowhere,
a whispered healing arrival,
a word in your ear,
a settling into things,
then like a hand in the dark
it arrests your whole body,
steeling you for revelation.

In the silence that follows
a great line
you can feel Lazarus
deep inside
even the laziest, most deathly afraid
part of you,
lift up his hands and walk toward the light.⁶

EXIT THRESHOLD – JOHN 16:16-24

Today's Gospel: John 16:16-24 (J.B. Phillips) – Sorrow will turn to Joy

16 “In a little while you will not see me any longer, and again, in a little while you will see me.”

17-18 At this some of his disciples remarked to each other, “What is this that he tells us now, ‘A little while and you will not see me, and again, in a little while you will see me’ and ‘for I am going away to the Father’? What is the ‘little while’ that he talks about?” they were saying. “We simply do not know what he means!”

19-23a Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him what he meant, so he said to them, “Are you trying to find out from each other what I meant when I said, ‘In a little while you

⁶ David Whyte from *Everything is Waiting for You and River Flow: New & Selected Poems* ©2003 Many Rivers Press.

will not see me, and again, in a little while you will see me'? I tell you truly that you are going to be both sad and sorry while the world is glad. Yes, you will be deeply distressed, but your pain will turn into joy. When a woman gives birth to a child, she certainly knows pain when her time comes. Yet as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers her agony for joy that a man has been born into the world. Now you are going through pain, but I shall see you again and your hearts will thrill with joy—the joy that no one can take away from you—and on that day you will not ask me any questions.

23b-24 “I assure you that whatever you ask the Father, he will give you in my name. Up to now you have asked nothing in my name; ask now, and you will receive, that your joy may be overflowing.

This comment by Lincoln⁷ about how Jesus now considers the **reactions** of His disciples to what He is telling them is a beautiful insight! Jesus has always been He Who was most able to “read” the people He was with, as any Master Teacher is able to do. And their reactions guide how He teaches them, getting the clues from His hearers. **This ability that Jesus demonstrates to submit to the priority of the other, letting the other guide how He then teaches, is one of God’s greatest and most beautiful capacities.**

⁷ Andrew T. Lincoln, [*The Gospel according to Saint John*](#), Black’s New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 2005), 417.

JESUS APPEARS TO SEVEN DISCIPLES AT THE SEA OF TIBERIAS (JOHN 21: 1-14)

Version: 13 April 2012; 29 March 2016; 9 May 2021

STUDIES

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TEXT

IV. EPILOGUE: THE RESURRECTION APPEARANCE IN GALILEE

CHAPTER 21

The Appearance to the Seven Disciples. ¹* After this, Jesus revealed himself again to his disciples at the Sea of Tiberias. He revealed himself in this way.^a ² Together were Simon Peter, Thomas called Didymus, Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, Zebedee's sons,* and two others of his disciples. ³* Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We also will come with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.^b ⁴ When it was already dawn, Jesus was standing on the shore; but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.^c ⁵ Jesus said to them, "Children, have you caught anything to eat?" They answered him, "No."^d ⁶ So he said to them, "Cast the net over the right side of the boat and you will find something." So, they cast it, and were not able to pull it in because of the number of fish. ⁷ So the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord." When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he tucked in his garment, for he was lightly clad, and jumped into the sea. ⁸ The other disciples came in the boat, for they were not far from shore, only about a hundred yards, dragging the net with the fish. ⁹*^e When they climbed out on shore, they saw a charcoal fire with fish on it and bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you just caught." ¹¹ So Simon Peter went over and dragged the net ashore full of one hundred

* There are many non-Johannine peculiarities in this chapter, some suggesting Lucan Greek style; yet this passage is closer to John than Jn 7:53–8:11. There are many Johannine features as well. Its closest parallels in the synoptic gospels are found in Lk 5:1–11 and Mt 14:28–31. Perhaps the tradition was ultimately derived from John but preserved by some disciple other than the writer of the rest of the gospel. The appearances narrated seem to be independent of those in Jn 20. Even if a later addition, the chapter was added before publication of the gospel, for it appears in all manuscripts.

^a Mt 26:32; 28:7.

* *Zebedee's sons*: **the only reference to James and John in this gospel** (but see note on Jn 1:37). Perhaps the phrase was originally a gloss to identify, among the five, the *two others of his disciples*. The anonymity of the latter phrase is more Johannine (Jn 1:35). **The total of seven may suggest the community of the disciples in its fullness.**

* This may be a variant of Luke's account of the catch of fish; see note on Lk 5:1–11.

^b Mt 4:18; Lk 5:4–10.

^c 20:14; Mt 28:17; Lk 24:16.

^d Lk 24:41.

* It is strange that Jesus already has fish since none have yet been brought ashore. This meal may have had eucharistic significance for early Christians since Jn 21:13 recalls Jn 6:11 which uses the vocabulary of Jesus' action at the Last Supper; but see also note on Mt 14:19.

^e Lk 24:41–43.

fifty-three* large fish. Even though there were so many, the net was not torn.^{f 12} Jesus said to them, “Come, have breakfast.” And none of the disciples dared to ask him,* “Who are you?” because they realized it was the Lord.¹³ Jesus came over and took the bread and gave it to them, and in like manner the fish.^{g 14}* This was now the third time^h Jesus was revealed to his disciples after being raised from the dead.¹

The Appearance of Jesus to the Seven Disciples

21 Μετὰ ταῦτα ἐφάνερωσεν ἑαυτὸν πάλιν ὁ Ἰησοῦς τοῖς μαθηταῖς ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης τῆς Τιβεριάδος· ἐφάνερωσεν δὲ οὕτως. **2** ἦσαν ὁμοῦ Σίμων Πέτρος καὶ Θωμᾶς ὁ λεγόμενος Δίδυμος καὶ Ναθαναὴλ ὁ ἀπὸ Κανὰ τῆς Γαλιλαίας καὶ οἱ τοῦ Ζεβεδαίου καὶ ἄλλοι ἐκ τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ δύο. **3** λέγει αὐτοῖς Σίμων Πέτρος, Ὑπάγω ἀλιεύειν. λέγουσιν αὐτῷ, Ἐρχόμεθα καὶ ἡμεῖς σὺν σοί. ἐξῆλθον καὶ ἐνέβησαν εἰς τὸ πλοῖον, καὶ ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ νυκτὶ ἐπίασαν οὐδέν. **4** πρωΐας δὲ ἤδη γενομένης ἔστη Ἰησοῦς εἰς τὸν αἰγιαλόν, οὐ μέντοι ἤδεισαν οἱ μαθηταὶ ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστίν. **5** λέγει οὖν αὐτοῖς [ὁ] Ἰησοῦς, Παιδιά, μή τι προσφάγιον ἔχετε; ἀπεκρίθησαν αὐτῷ, Οὐ. **6** ὁ δὲ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Βάλετε εἰς τὰ δεξιὰ μέρη τοῦ πλοίου τὸ δίκτυον, καὶ εὐρήσετε. ἔβαλον οὖν, καὶ οὐκέτι αὐτὸ ἐλκύσαι ἴσχυον ἀπὸ τοῦ πλήθους τῶν ἰχθύων. **7** λέγει οὖν ὁ μαθητῆς ἐκεῖνος ὃν ἠγάπα ὁ Ἰησοῦς τῷ Πέτρῳ, Ὁ κύριός ἐστιν. Σίμων οὖν Πέτρος ἀκούσας ὅτι ὁ κύριός ἐστιν τὸν ἐπενδύτην διεζώσατο, ἦν γὰρ γυμνός, καὶ ἔβαλεν ἑαυτὸν εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν, **8** οἱ δὲ ἄλλοι μαθηταὶ τῷ πλοιαρίῳ ἦλθον, οὐ γὰρ ἦσαν μακρὰν ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς ἀλλ’ ὡς ἀπὸ πηχῶν διακοσίων, σύροντες τὸ δίκτυον τῶν ἰχθύων. **9** ὡς οὖν ἀπέβησαν εἰς τὴν γῆν βλέπουσιν ἀνθρακιὰν κειμένην καὶ ὀψάριον ἐπικείμενον καὶ ἄρτον. **10** λέγει αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Ἐνέγκατε ἀπὸ τῶν ὀψαρίων ὧν ἐπίασατε νῦν. **11** ἀνέβη οὖν Σίμων Πέτρος καὶ εἴλκυσεν τὸ δίκτυον εἰς τὴν γῆν μεστὸν ἰχθύων μεγάλων ἑκατὸν πενήκοντα τριῶν· καὶ τοσοῦτων ὄντων οὐκ ἐσχίσθη τὸ δίκτυον. **12** λέγει αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Δεῦτε ἀριστήσατε.

* The exact number 153 is probably meant to have a symbolic meaning in relation to the apostles’ universal mission; Jerome claims that Greek zoologists catalogued 153 species of fish. Or 153 is the sum of the numbers from 1 to 17. Others invoke Ez 47:10.

^f 2 Chr 2:16.

* *None ... dared to ask him:* is Jesus’ appearance strange to them? Cf. Lk 24:16; Mk 16:12; Jn 20:14. The disciples do, however, recognize Jesus *before* the breaking of the bread (opposed to Lk 24:35).

^g Lk 24:42.

* This verse connects Jn 20 and 21; cf. Jn 20:19, 26.

^h 20:19, 26.

¹ *New American Bible* (Revised Edition.; Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011), Jn 21:1–14.

οὐδείς δὲ ἐτόλμα τῶν μαθητῶν ἐξετάσαι αὐτόν, Σὺ τίς εἶ; εἰδότες ὅτι ὁ κύριός ἐστιν.
13 ἔρχεται Ἰησοῦς καὶ λαμβάνει τὸν ἄρτον καὶ δίδωσιν αὐτοῖς, καὶ τὸ ὄψάριον ὁμοίως.
14 τοῦτο ἦδη τρίτον ἐφανερώθη Ἰησοῦς τοῖς μαθηταῖς ἐγερωθεὶς ἐκ νεκρῶν.²

COMMENTARY

Chapter 21 has been tied to the previous chapters by a host of literary and theological links. Johannine characteristics found in this chapter are the Sea of Tiberias in verse 1; the names of Simon Peter, Thomas the Twin, Nathanael from Cana in verse 2; the night-day contrast of verses 3–4; the lack of recognition in verse 4; the Beloved Disciple of verse 7, who relates to Peter and who first recognizes the Lord; the charcoal fire of verse 9, together with the image of Jesus as servant and giver of bread to the disciples; the reference in verse 14 to two previous appearances (in ch. 20); Peter’s triple profession (vv. 15–17) to counterbalance the triple denial and to reintroduce the shepherd theme (ch. 10); the glorifying aspect of Peter’s death in verse 19; the reference to the Beloved Disciple’s position next to Jesus at the Last Supper in verse 20. If this chapter is an addition — and it is — it is nonetheless a beautiful addition, and the Christian community would be considerably poorer without it.³

Having studied chapter 21, we can now hazard a guess as to why it was added to the original Gospel. There are two centers of attention in the chapter. The first is Peter, who is successively reconciled through his profession of love, then constituted the shepherd, and finally described as a martyr whose death glorified God. The second is the Beloved Disciple, whose death has deeply disturbed the community, but whose eyewitness testimony remains the secure foundation of its faith. **This chapter has taken origin from these two concerns: to paint a portrait of Peter as the reconciled, loving, and martyred community shepherd, and to base the faith of the community in the Beloved Disciple on firmer footing.** All-important for the Christians is not the Beloved

² Barbara Aland et al., eds., *The Greek New Testament* (Fifth Revised Edition.; Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2014), Jn 21:1–14.

³Bergant, D., & Karris, R. J. (1989). *The Collegeville Bible commentary: Based on the New American Bible with revised New Testament*. Previously published in 36 separate booklets. (1017). Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press.

Disciple's visible presence but his life-giving word. And this is enclosed forever in this Gospel. ⁴

Ernst Haenchen (1984:222) writes: “**It is also thought that there is a certain resemblance between this story and the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:16-31); that Jesus appears unrecognized in 21:4 is not enough to confirm the conjecture that our story was once so structured that Jesus was recognized in the breaking of the bread and then disappeared.**”

Ernst Haenchen (1984:229) writes: “If one reads chapter 20 through to the end, one is then convinced that 20:30ff form a good conclusion. And yet the story continues—but in what a curious way! The disciples are no longer in Jerusalem; we find them again on the Sea of Galilee, although we are not told how they came to be in this new situation. Apparently, they have entered once again into their old jobs as fishermen. Peter appears—in strong contrast to chapters 1-20—to set the tone. **To our surprise, the disciple Nathaniel, from Cana, has rejoined the group; we have heard nothing of him since chapter 1.... Nothing is said of a group of twelve: there are only seven on the scene....** It almost appears as though they have returned to the pre-Easter period.”

Ernst Haenchen (1984:234) writes: “What does the story, which was undoubtedly very deliberately composed, and to which the whole chapter leads up, really intend to say to the reader? **It is concerned with two persons: Simon Peter and the beloved disciple.** Peter receives something like the promise or the concession of the leadership of the church—that is clear and rather widely recognized by scholars. But why does the text assure the reader of this point? Does it involve something that has been under dispute? Why must the Fourth Gospel of all documents rehabilitate Peter in its conclusion and extend recognition to him so solemnly? It is perhaps because earlier in the Gospel the beloved disciple always relegates Peter to second place? It was not Peter but the beloved disciple who lay on the breast of the Lord and was permitted to inquire after the name of the betrayer. It was not Peter who stood by the Cross and received the mother of Jesus as son, but the beloved disciple. It is not Peter who comes first to the tomb and who first believes in the risen Lord, but the beloved disciple. And in 2:17 it is not Peter who first recognizes the Lord, but the beloved disciple. **We have to say: in view of the way in which Peter is depicted in the Fourth Gospel, it really became necessary that he should be appreciated at least once.**”

⁴Bergant, D., & Karris, R. J. (1989). *The Collegeville Bible commentary: Based on the New American Bible with revised New Testament*. Previously published in 36 separate booklets. (1018). Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press.

Francis Moloney (1998: 546-7) writes: “Whatever scholarship may decide about the origins of John 21 as some form of addition to an original Gospel, this collection of post-resurrection stories was important to the Christians who first wrote and passed down the Gospel to later generations. For this reason alone, it must be regarded as an ‘epilogue’, something that belongs to the Gospel as we now have it, and not just an ‘addendum’ or ‘postscript’ added as an afterthought.

This story may well be the same as that recounted in Luke 5:4–10. Luke purposely limits Christ’s resurrection activities to the area of Jerusalem, so he placed this Galilee story in chapter 5 of his Gospel for its rich homiletic advantage. Called to be fishers of men and women, the disciples can catch nothing without the assistance of the Lord. **And indeed, Peter’s confession in Luke 5:8, “Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man,” makes more sense if this was originally a post-resurrection story following Peter’s denials.** ⁵

The Sea of Tiberias (v. 1) is a Johannine locale (6:22–23), and the fishing companions are, in general, already known to us, with the exception of “Zebedee’s sons,” who here make their only appearance in the Fourth Gospel. Among the “two other disciples,” seemingly, is the Beloved Disciple, who appears unexpectedly in verse 7. **The lack of success during the night, followed by enormous success with the daylight presence of Jesus (vv. 3–6), is a practical application of John’s frequent comments about night and day, light and darkness.** The disciples’ failure to recognize Jesus reminds us of a similar failure on the part of Mary (20:14), and we are hardly surprised when the Beloved Disciple is the first to recognize the Lord (v. 7). ⁶

Jesus, after all, has given his followers a strange and striking commission in chapter 20. They are to work for him. They are to be filled with God’s breath and be sent into the world as Jesus had been. **But if they try to do it their own way, they will fail. They will toil all night and take nothing. The only way is for them to admit defeat, to listen afresh to Jesus’ voice, and to do what he says.** Then there is no knowing what they will achieve.... Stand in your mind’s eye with the disciples in the boat. What projects have

⁵Bergant, D., & Karris, R. J. (1989). *The Collegeville Bible commentary: Based on the New American Bible with revised New Testament*. Previously published in 36 separate booklets. (1017). Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press.

⁶Bergant, D., & Karris, R. J. (1989). *The Collegeville Bible commentary: Based on the New American Bible with revised New Testament*. Previously published in 36 separate booklets. (1017). Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press.

you been labouring over, and getting nowhere? Watch for the dawn. Watch for the figure on the shore. Listen for his voice. And then do whatever he tells you.⁷

JESUS APPEARS TO HIS DISCIPLES AT THE SHORE (VV1-14)

Ernst Haenchen (1984:222) writes: “In the end the presence of the disciples on the sea after a fruitless night’s fishing does not need to be explained theologically or psychologically. It is an essential part of the setting for the appearance that follows, but it also indicates that John 21 and its formation in the community were independent of 20: 1-31.”

The level of the lake has dropped now, but you can still sense what a lovely place it is. So much water is now taken out of the Sea of Galilee, and the River Jordan which feeds it and then flows from it, that even in the fifteen years since I first stood on this spot the water has receded, leaving a hundred yards or so of reeds and pebbles between the old shoreline and the new. But you can still get a sense, in the little place called Tabgha, just west of Capernaum, of what it must have been like that morning.... It was, and still is when the tourists aren’t there, a quiet place, on the north shore of the sea. It’s quite a distance from the major town of Tiberias. It is still enough to hear the water lapping at your feet. The colour of the sky, reflected in the lake, gives you double the effect of the spectacular sunrise, the great fiery ball coming up over the Golan Heights. The day dawns full of new beauty and possibility. That is part of what John is telling us in this story (notice how, once more, he draws our attention to dawn, in verse 4, as he points to the risen Jesus).⁸

Why had they gone fishing? It’s a puzzle, and I suspect it was a puzzle for them too. Like half the things Peter proposed in the gospel, it was probably a case of the right motivation and the wrong judgment. **He wanted to get on with life. To do the next thing.** This was the world they knew. It would feel strange, going back to it, but they had families who needed looking after, who must have been bemused to have them back again after all their adventures, **and he might well have been suggesting that they**

⁷ Tom Wright, *John for Everyone, Part 2: Chapters 11-21* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 157-58.

⁸ Tom Wright, *John for Everyone, Part 2: Chapters 11-21* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 156.

should settle down and do something sensible for a change. Like earning some money. Like catching some fish.⁹

Ernst Haenchen (1984:223) writes: “Since, according to v11, there were only 153 fish, they must have been unusually large and heavy.”

Francis Moloney (1998: 549) writes: “At a time that links this episode with Mary Magdalene’s unbelieving visit to the empty tomb in the darkness of the very early morning (20:1), Jesus stands on the beach ‘just as the day was breaking’ (v4). Another traditional resurrection motif emerges: he is not recognized by those who had been with him during the ministry.... As they go about their everyday affairs as if the risen Lord had never broken into their lives, like Mary Magdalene they are understandably unable to recognize him.... The obedient response of the disciples to Jesus’ command bears fruit.”

Ernst Haenchen (1984:223) writes: “In chapter 21, the Beloved Disciple shares his conviction with Peter: ‘It is the Lord,’ but he remains glued to the spot and does not seem to have communicated his conviction to the other disciples. By contrast, the remark of the beloved disciple to Peter elicits an unusual reaction: Peter puts on his clothes and girds himself about ... and throws himself into the sea—no doubt to get as quickly as possible to the shore and to Jesus.”

Verse 12 - Ernst Haenchen (1984:225) writes: “**Not a single word is spoken by any of the disciples in this scene—other than the word spoken by the beloved disciple to Peter.** Jesus’ invitation in v12 has the effect of an ingredient in a cultic scene, during which only the divinity speaks.”

Remember the two passages that bring us to this point. In chapter 13, Peter insists, loudly and emphatically, that he at least will remain loyal to Jesus. He’s not going to let him down. He wants to follow him wherever he goes: to prison, to death, wherever. In fact, he is prepared to lay down his own life on Jesus’ behalf (13:36–37). **Then, in chapter 18, we watch helplessly as Peter tries and fails. He follows, but when he gets there it all goes horribly wrong. Then, instead of getting out quickly before worse occurs, he stays and gets it wrong again. And again. Three times he denies that he’s one of Jesus’ followers (*one of?* He’s supposed to be their Number One).** And the cock crows.... **And it all happens beside a charcoal fire.** Think back to the smell of that fire, wafting through the chilly April air. Think of Peter going out in shame, angry with himself, knowing that Jesus knew. Knowing that the ‘beloved disciple’ knew. Knowing that God knew. And hearing the next day what had happened to Jesus. Not even the resurrection itself could wave a magic wand and get rid of that memory. Nothing could,

⁹ Tom Wright, *John for Everyone, Part 2: Chapters 11-21* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 156.

except revisiting it and bathing it in God's own healing.... **The charcoal fire is the start of it, and it seems from the conversation in the next section that Jesus planned it that way.** But for the moment there are—well, I was going to say there are other fish to fry. That's the point. They have caught a massive net full: 153 fish in all, more by some way than the nets would normally hold. Enough for breakfast for the whole village. ¹⁰

Francis Moloney (1998: 549-50) writes: “In the recognition of Jesus and response to the miracle the two disciples who played such an important role at the empty tomb, Peter and the Beloved Disciple (cf. 20:3-10), assume important roles. It is the Beloved Disciple who recognizes the risen Jesus, telling Peter (and not the other disciples?): ‘It is the Lord’ (cf. 20:8). Again, paralleling events reported in John 20, the response of these same two disciples at the empty tomb is recalled (cf. 20:4-8): **the Beloved Disciple is the one who confesses his faith in Jesus as the risen Lord while Peter responds to the indications of the Beloved Disciple** just as he had ‘followed’ him in 20:6, and adjusts his scant clothing, and leaps into the water.”

Verse 12 - Francis Moloney (1998: 551) writes: “Guided by the faith of the Beloved Disciple and the actions of Simon Peter, the disciples no longer dare to ask for the identity of Jesus. They now recognize that the risen Lord is present (v12).... Within an overall message of a universal community gathered as a result of the initiative of the risen Christ and under the leadership of Simon Peter the Eucharistic hints do nothing more than indicate the presence of one of the central acts of worship of the Johannine community.”

Verse 9 - The charcoal fire (v. 9) serves a double purpose. It sets the scene for Jesus' servant role as he becomes giver of bread (and fish) to the disciples, **and also it serves as a stage prop for Peter's profession of love, recalling the previous charcoal fire (18:18), next to which Peter had denied the Lord.** ¹¹

Verse 14 - Ernst Haenchen (1984:225) writes: “Verse 14 emphasizes once more, by way of conclusion, that this is the third time that the risen Jesus had revealed himself to the disciples.... The character of v14 indicates that it is the conclusion of a scene. The author of chapter 21 has probably taken it over as such, since a dialogue between Jesus and Peter is reported in the balance of the story.”

¹⁰ Tom Wright, *John for Everyone, Part 2: Chapters 11-21* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 158-59.

¹¹ Bergant, D., & Karris, R. J. (1989). *The Collegeville Bible commentary: Based on the New American Bible with revised New Testament*. Previously published in 36 separate booklets. (1018). Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press.

But then there comes an interesting little exchange. Jesus is already cooking fish and bread on his charcoal fire. **He doesn't need their catch.** He is well capable of looking after himself (though what 'needs' his risen body now has is past our comprehension). John, describing this scene, isn't wasting words. He isn't filling in time. John never pads out stories. He is telling us something, something about working under Jesus' direction, something about the relation of our work to his.¹²

We must always be ready to be surprised by God. They were, that spring morning, the third time they saw him after his resurrection (did John choose, in adding this chapter, to tell a third story in order to complete a kind of perfection, as with his seven signs?). They were surprised by the huge catch. (Does John see a symbolic value in the 153 fish? Possibly. It may, by a complex piece of mathematics, stand for the completeness of the 'catch' that the apostles will make when they take the gospel into the world. That doesn't mean that there weren't 153 fish, only that by now virtually everything John says may bear different levels of meaning.) They were surprised by Jesus himself. And they were surprised, we may suppose, at themselves. Who were they? What were they doing? What was to happen next? When God ceases to surprise us, that may be the moment we have ceased to do business with him.¹³

¹² Tom Wright, *John for Everyone, Part 2: Chapters 11-21* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 159.

¹³ Tom Wright, *John for Everyone, Part 2: Chapters 11-21* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 161.

Me non
Domine!

prætermisso,
W. Holman Hunt

