

Views from the Pews: Living like a fish

As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. “Come, follow Me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” (Matt 4: 18-19).

Suspend, for a moment, any automatic objections to the gendered language of the original quote, and think about what it means to be among the people likened to the fish in the Church’s net.

Fish are hatched, live and die in water. For aquatic animals, water surrounds and upholds them all their lives. In water they swim, hunt, eat, mate, and recognise both friends and enemies. Fish never notice the water that is always around them and essential to their lives. When they eventually die, water gently disassembles their spent bodies and returns all its elements to their ancestral sources, the wider waters from which they came.

For us, the grace of God is the water in which we swim. We are born, live and die surrounded and upheld by the grace by which “we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17: 28). Grace gives us families and friendships, community fellowships, life-long partnerships, patience to parent small children and love to let them go as young adults, shared meals and resolution of disputes, and strength to bear sorrow and pain. But like fish, we never notice the grace that supports us from cradle to grave, and continues to do so whether we know of it or not. When we eventually end our lives, grace upholds the natural processes that return our bodies to the source from which they came. We will all experience God’s words to Adam, that we will “return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19).

Fish and people are all vertebrates, that is, animals with backbones. For uncounted aeons, we and all the faithful have found God’s grace reaching through our lives like the bones of our skeletons, and with the same effect, of holding us up in all circumstances. All through Lent we have thought about the humble, vulnerable foundations of our human lives. Now, as Easter dawns, we can rejoice at how grace transforms us into ransomed, healed, restored and forgiven children of God.

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