

Appearance to the Seven Disciples

John 21: 1-14

At that time, Jesus revealed himself to his disciples at the Sea of Tiberias. He revealed himself in this way. Together were Simon Peter, Thomas called Didymus, Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, Zebedee's sons, and two others of his disciples. 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. When it was already dawn, Jesus was standing on the shore; but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, have you caught anything to eat?" They answered him, "No." 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. 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. 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. When they climbed out on shore, they saw a charcoal fire with fish on it and bread. 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. Even though there were so many, the net was not torn. 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. Jesus came over and took the bread and gave it to them, and in like manner the fish. This was now the third time Jesus was revealed to his disciples after being raised from the dead.

Background: The disciples return to Galilee to avoid the persecution of the Jews. The Lord is not with them regularly. They have yet to receive the "Great Commission," by the Holy Spirit. They have nothing to do; so, they return to their trade as fishermen. The disciples follow Peter. They fish all night and catch nothing. This echoes the words at the Last Supper, "without me you can do nothing." Jesus miraculously helps the disciples catch a large number of fish. The exact number is given -- 153 to be precise. Why is the precise number mentioned in the account? This question has fascinated exegetes and scholars for centuries. Many answers have been given, including those of the early Church Fathers, such as there were 153 known species of fish, or there were 153 known nations of the earth at that time; perhaps signifying the whole world. The hidden meaning of number 153, is key to this parable.

The Appearance to the Seven Disciples: History records an important link between the Essenes of Mt. Carmel, the ancestors of the Virgin Mary, and the Pythagoreans. Pythagoras and his disciples established religious communities throughout the Greek world. The Pythagoreans were Essene in lifestyle. They spent the day in philosophical study and religious observance. One hundred fifty-three was considered a sacred number amongst the Pythagoreans due to its use in the mathematical ratio called "the measure of the fish," which produces the mystical symbol of a fish-like shape. In an ancient Greek story, Pythagoras stands on the shore and miraculously helps some fishermen catch a large number of fish. The exact number, not mentioned in the story, is assumed to be 153. This parable may be a good example of Christian reinterpretation -- a way of "recasting" Christianity to the Greek world.