

Thankfully, I haven't had to go to the hospital in recent months, but over the previous few years, I've spent many hours in the waiting room at Scripps Memorial Hospital. I've noticed when I've been there, at whatever time of day I'm there, morning or afternoon, the television is always showing a program about building renovations. I don't know whether that's because the television there are permanently tuned to a channel, which is a renovation channel, or whether there are so many of those kinds of shows that whatever channel you're on or whatever time of day, the chances are you're going to be seeing a program about renovation and restoration.

I did a bit of research and I found these programs. They're all about restoration: A Very Brady Renovation, American Rehab, Beach Flip, Extreme Makeover, Fixer Upper, Good Bones, Home Tours, I Hate My Bath, Love It Or List It, Property Brothers. The list goes on and on.

It seems that we have an insatiable appetite for stories about restoration, which is good, because in today's gospel reading, we have a story about restoration, not of a building, but of a person. This gospel story today is about the restoration of Saint Peter. It comes right at the end of John's gospel. This is part of the final resurrection appearance of Jesus.

You may remember, if you were tuning into the Bishop last week, she was talking about how Jesus appears just before this to the disciples who were out fishing on a boat. And they follow his instructions and they catch an enormous amount of fish, and then Jesus cooks up breakfast on the beach for them. Then when they finished breakfast, Jesus confronts Peter. We don't know whether he takes him off to one side and talks to him or addresses him amongst the group of disciples that were there. My hunch is that he takes him to one side, because this, what's recorded here, is an intense conversation. It's a conversation which changes Peter's life dramatically. This is the conversation that restores Saint Peter.

As we read the story of Saint Peter in the New Testament, we see that this encounter on the beach was his life's turning point. He'd been a leader amongst Jesus's disciples, but you'll remember that on the night before Jesus died, Saint Peter, just as Jesus predicted, denied knowing Jesus three times before the cock crowed. Peter had witnessed the horror of the crucifixion and he'd experienced too the joy of the

resurrection, but he's talking here with Jesus on the beach, because after all that, all that he's experienced, he's gone back to what's familiar. We find Peter here, back fishing at the beach. He's gone back to what he knew. He's gone back to where he started. However, after his talk with Jesus on the beach, he was renewed and restored.

I think that this story can speak to us today, because in some ways, we're all in a time of renewal. We're getting ready to emerge and face a new normal, or as I've heard it called, the new abnormal. The pandemic has changed so many things. It's had, in many ways, a renewing effect. I've heard people say that even when they can resume their life as it was before the pandemic, they don't want to go back to doing exactly the same things. They don't want to necessarily to be doing the same things with the same routines.

There's an opportunity for things to be renewed, an opportunity for everything to be different, including ourselves. Saint Paul in the epistle that we had read to us from Romans used a phrase which I think can speak to us in our present moment. Saint Paul encourages his readers to walk in newness of life. Saint Peter is an example of someone who did exactly that. So, let's stay with his story, look at his restoration, and see how Saint Peter came to walk in newness of life.

The first thing to notice about the journey to newness in Peter's life was that it was painful. Three times, Jesus says to him, "Peter, do you love me?" As an Englishman, I'm particularly sensitive to the trauma in this conversation. We English like to play things down. We don't like to make a fuss. If somebody says, "I'm sorry," we say, "Don't worry about it. It was nothing." If we give somebody something and they say, "Thank you." We say, "Oh, don't worry. It was nothing."

Our greatest fear is one of embarrassment and awkwardness. We'll go to enormous lengths to avoid being embarrassed or to make someone feel awkward. So I feel Peter's pain here. Jesus says to him, "Do you love me?" Peter says, "Yes. You know that I love you." And then Jesus asks again, "Peter, do you love me?" Well, Peter's thinking, I know what he's thinking, Peter's thinking, "Yes, I've already said that. Can we move on? Talk about something else?" But Jesus pushes him again, asks for a third time, "Do you love me?"

The text says Peter felt hurt. Peter knew where Jesus was leading him. He was taking him back to his threefold denial. Peter was hurt because he now knew that Jesus knew that he denied it. And it was only when that realization dawned on Peter that he could understand, realize, and accept the extent of the love and forgiveness that Jesus was offering him.

The new life we have in Christ Jesus does not involve a denial of our weaknesses and our failings. It's about healing and transformation. The transformation of those weaknesses. Just think who's talking here. Peter's talking with the risen Lord Jesus, who still bears the scars of his crucifixion. Remember when Peter and the other disciples first met the risen Lord, we're told they recognized him by his wounds.

We walk in our new life carrying the wounds of what has gone before, but we are healed, renewed, transformed, restored. That's our resurrection hope, a hope not that we never experience pain or suffering, but that those wounds will be healed.

In this time of pandemic, we are hurting. People are not able to bury their loved ones. They're not able to say a final goodbye. Young people are missing proms, graduation, the salad days of a college summer, and these things cannot be replaced. They are lost. They are wounds that will stay with us, but they are wounds that can be healed.

The second thing I'd say about this newness of life is that this is something that we can't find on our own. I came across an ad recently for a gym. It was called the New You Gym, and the strap line was, "Reinvent yourself at the New You Gym." And beneath that strap line was a very fetching photo of a young woman in a bikini. And it said, this was the owner, winner of six bikini competitions. I'm not quite sure what a bikini competition is. I think having looked at the picture, it must be a competition to see who could make a bikini with the least amount of material.

Anyway, the New You Gym is not offering the same kind of new life that I'm talking about, because I'm not talking about reinvention. I'm not talking about making ourselves better or self-improvement, I'm talking about renewal and transformation.

This isn't something we do to ourselves. It's the work of God's Holy Spirit working within us. Look at that verse

from Romans again. Just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the father, so we too might walk in newness of life. And Saint Paul makes this point even clearer. Two chapters later in Romans, he writes this: "If the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his spirit that dwells in you." It's the indwelling spirit of the risen Christ who brings us that gift of new life.

Finally, Peter's new life had a purpose. Three times, Jesus asks Peter if he loves him. And three times, Jesus says to Peter, "Feed my sheep." By the third time, the penny dropped for Peter. He recognized that he was being restored and renewed for a purpose. He was given a new mission. As far as we know, from this point onward, Peter never fished again. He went on as a great missionary, a great leader in the early church. Peter was restored and his priorities were renewed.

Many of us have had the chance to reflect on our lives as we've been cooped up at home. We've suddenly had to drop everything. And many of us are wondering about what to pick up when we finally get out of our hibernation. Has quarantine brought us a new perspective on our priorities. Are we aware of the purpose of our new life in Christ Jesus?

So let's look to be inspired by Saint Peter in this time of quarantine. May we too be restored and renewed. May we, like Peter, learn to walk in newness of life. Amen.