

**Reflection on the Gospel-Vigil of the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul  
(John 21:15-19)\***

-Veronica Lawson RSM

My favourite place of worship is the church in Buninyong dedicated to Saints Peter and Paul where our local community gathers each Sunday. So it is our feast this weekend. As it is the fifth Sunday of the month, we'll all be there at 10.30 on Sunday morning. While the gospel story is a little vignette from John 21 about Peter, we honour Paul as well. We might also acknowledge our forbears in faith whose gospel witness receives less attention in our sacred texts than that of the designated leaders.

Simon Peter has a higher profile in this final chapter of John's gospel than in the first twenty chapters. It is as though the author responsible for the final edition of John's gospel wants to bring Peter to prominence in line with the traditions found in the other gospels. In the previous chapter (John 20), it is not at all clear that Peter has come to resurrection faith, while there is no such doubt about Mary of Magdala. She is the one who receives the first resurrection appearance in this gospel. She is also commissioned to proclaim the news of the resurrection to the other disciples. In John 21, the focus is clearly on Peter, his role as leader, and his need to repair his relationship with Jesus.

Peter has announced his intention to go fishing and several of the other disciples join him. They catch nothing. At dawn they see the figure of Jesus on the shore but do not immediately recognise him. They follow his instructions and find themselves overwhelmed with their catch. At his invitation they breakfast on bread and fish. This provides the setting for the rehabilitation of Peter and his three-fold profession of love of Jesus in the wake of his three-fold denial. Sheep and shepherding are important symbols in the passage. Earlier in the gospel, Jesus has identified himself as the 'good shepherd' and the gate to the sheepfold. The lambs and the sheep are his and Jesus is entrusting them to Peter's care.

As we reflect on this gospel reading, we might simply listen to Jesus' question and take it to ourselves: 'Do you love me?' We can all say with Peter: 'You know that I love you.' Peter's example reminds us that discipleship, even gospel leadership, is possible despite the failures of the past. There is a catch of course: faithful discipleship is a risky business that brings suffering, even death. Peter and Paul are both witness to this. Neither is a perfect model for morality. Both provide helpful mirrors for identity.

\*As the Sunday morning gospel reading is also the selection for August 24, the 21<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, the reflection is on the reading for the Vigil.