

**My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,**

**I know that I haven't been here in a while, but I'm sure Fr. Rossi has more often than not started you off with a little chuckle. I kind of like to do that too. This story is a little on the edge, but it was sent to me by a classmate, a good, holy priest, and tickled my funny-bone, so here goes.**

**For several years a man was having an affair with a young Italian woman. One night she told him she was pregnant. Not wanting to ruin his reputation or his marriage, he said he would pay her a large sum of money if she would go home to Italy to secretly have the child. He told her if she stayed in Italy to raise the child, he would also provide child support until the child turned 18.**

**She agreed, but asked how he would know when the baby was born. To keep it discreet, he told her to simply mail him a postcard and write "SPAGETTI" on the back. He would then arrange for the child support payments to begin.**

**One day, about 9 months later, he came home to his confused wife. "Honey," she said, "you received a really strange postcard today." "Oh, just give it to me and I'll explain it later," he said. The wife handed the postcard to her husband who read the card, turned white, and fainted dead-away. On the card was written:**

**SPAGETTI! SPAGETTI! SPAGETTI! SPAGETTI! And SPAGETTI!**

**Three with meatballs, two without! Send extra sauce!**

**Terrible! But, oh so human! Just like this Resurrection account in the Gospel of St. John, who was obviously an eyewitness to the event.**

**It apparently took place a week or two after the Resurrection. The disciples heads were reeling. They didn't know what to think. They didn't know what to do. They were still fearful for their lives, even though the Lord had mysteriously come to them twice through a locked door and spoke "Peace" to them. Others came and told of meeting him on the road to Emmaus and how they had come to believe it was the Lord in the breaking of the bread. But, still they were confused, demoralized, frightened, having no idea what would happen next.**

**Peter had had it. He was going back to what he knew. What he had done all his life. He said, "I'm going fishing!" Six of the others, fishermen all, said, "We'll come with you." Basically, they were giving up. Not only were they disillusioned, they were ashamed. If the Lord really was alive, how could they ever face him? Peter had denied him three times; Thomas had doubted he was really alive; and when he had needed them most, the rest of the disciples had abandoned Jesus and ran to save themselves. How could they ever face him again?**

**Haven't you ever been there? Have you ever let someone down? Have you ever dreaded seeing them—not because they did anything wrong, but because you had failed them. You're so ashamed of yourself that you can't bear the thought of seeing them.**

**It happened to me just a couple of weeks ago. Thank God Nancy Fischer called to tell me that Hazel Shank wasn't doing well. As I drove to New Holland the next day to the nursing home where she has been for a number of years, I thought of all that Hazel meant to me, all that she had done for me and for our parish.**

**When I came here 23 years ago and the parish books and records were a total mess, it was Hazel who came to help me. After working all day at a job that paid her, she would come voluntarily to the Rectory, figure out what kind of money we had, and pay whatever bills she was able. And she would come week after week, for years. Then, when we had to start Bingo to increase our income so we could meet our expenses, again Hazel would come week and week, year after year, until she was no longer able.**

**As I continued my drive to New Holland, I thought of my own weeks and months that turned into years, of excuses I had made that prevented me from going to visit Hazel. Yes, I was busy! Sure, I had my own health issues to deal with. New Holland was so far away. Excuses, Excuses, nothing but excuses!**

**When I arrived and greeted her with a kiss, I felt like Judas Iscariot. She looked up and said, “Are you the priest who married us?” I said, “No, Hazel, that was before my time. I’m the priest that you played Bingo with.” She smiled and said, “Fr. Eschbach”.**

**After I absolved her; anointed her; and gave her Communion, I held her hand as we prayed. Then with some effort, Hazel raised my hand, held in hers, to her cheek, and simply and gently rubbed the back of my hand against the softness of her face, and she fell asleep. I kissed her goodbye and knew that I had with her what I call “A Jesus Moment”. All was forgiven! There was only love!**

**That's what Peter experienced after he jumped into the sea, ran to the Lord, ate breakfast with him, filled with shame, fearing the Lord's rebuke, and all the Lord says to him is, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" again and again and again. That was Simon Peter's "Jesus Moment" All was forgiven! There was only love!**

**My failure! My procrastination! Peter's denials! Peter's giving up! All our sins! All our human weaknesses! All is forgiven! There is only love! That's the joy of having a Risen Savior! His name is Jesus!**

**How do we respond to such gracious mercy, such gratuitous love. Jesus simply says, "Feed my lambs; tend my sheep; feed my sheep."**

**How Lord? How would you have us feed them? Isn't it obvious? With the same mercy with which you have been forgiven, forgive! With the same love with which you are loved, love! That's how you are to follow Me.**