

## Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C - We are all Called to be Fishers of Men

February 9, 2025

In this Sunday's gospel reading, Luke has skillfully and prayerfully made use of the materials available to him to portray Jesus bringing the Good News of the 'word of God' to an eager crowd. He calls Peter and his associates to join him, becoming 'fishers of men'; and they leave everything to follow him. Luke's narrative is centred, of course, on the Lord; but the figure of Peter stands out in a remarkable way. It is Peter's boat that Jesus teaches from; Peter speaks up for the group; it is Peter who falls on his knees, overwhelmed by his sense of unworthiness. It is to Peter that Jesus said, "...I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you... strengthen your brothers." (Luke 22:32) We are left in no doubt that Luke reveres Peter. His warm portrayal invites us to share his reverence for the man to whom Jesus had given a new and symbolic name. Reference to Peter's human frailty helps us to discover our own spiritual poverty which opens our souls to receive what God is offering and awakens us to an awareness of his call. In the Acts of the Apostles – Luke's story of the early Church – Peter is leader and anchor-man. Luke is reflecting the importance Peter had for the first generation of Christians. In his portrayal, Luke is anticipating the outlook of the Fathers of the early Christian centuries, who not only saw Peter as the leader and spokesman of the apostolic Church, but also saw him as giving expression to all that the Church is called to be: in his faith and his response to the call of Jesus – sharing in Jesus' way of life, given completely to the spreading of the Good News of God. There is a rich symbolism to be found in this portrayal of the origins of the Church's response to the call of the Saviour: Peter is the first person in Luke's gospel to respond to the call of Jesus (as time and again, in the Acts of the Apostles, Peter will be the first to make decisive moves in the life of the emerging Church); it is from the boat of Peter that Christ's true teaching is heard; Christ's encouraging words, 'Put out into the deep for a catch', echo down through the ages, bringing encouragement to the Church in all its difficulties and setbacks; Peter's humility in the presence of what Christ has done is an eloquent reminder to all members of the Church, great and small, that the successes of the Church – as it responds to Christ's call – are all the Lord's doing. For all the human warmth with which it is portrayed, Peter's call is a mystery that has its origins in the eternal designs of God's love and freedom. We are reminded that we too have a place in those designs. As St. John XXIII said, "Every one of us has been called by the Lord. The important thing is to know how to answer his call." We are more likely to hear his call in our pain than in our plenty. When we discover the hand of God at work in our lives, the impossible becomes possible. The challenge facing all of us is to detect the voice of God in our lives and to have the courage and generosity to answer promptly. Just like the prophet Isaiah in the first reading, do we dare to say, 'Here am I; send me!' or like Paul, who by the grace of God, recognizes his call to work harder than any of the apostles to carry out his ministry in proclaiming the good news to all the gentiles so that they may come to believe?

The Gospel reading ends with two abandoned boats full of fish on the shore by the Sea of Galilee. The fishermen from those boats have encountered **the greatest treasure** of their lives: the person of Christ! For these men, the boats, fish, and former way of life meant nothing compared to **the treasure that was Jesus**. Perhaps a few chance passersby would have helped themselves to some of the fish from the boats and thought they were lucky and blessed. Perhaps another chance passerby helped himself to the abandoned boats themselves and thought he had found a great treasure. However, the real blessing and the real treasure **was a person**, not fish or a boat, and that person was walking away with a group of former-fisherman! A powerful Christian truth is this: **possessing Christ is worth more than the world itself!** For us, the real treasure in life is not a boat full of valuable fish (or a full bank account!). We should note that the readings today point to the fact that **God is calling us** as well, and the greatest treasure can be ours!

When asked "*How many ways are there to God?*", Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger Pope Benedict says: "As many as there are people. For even within the same faith each man's way is an entirely personal one." (Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, in *Salt of the Earth*)

Life is vocational. Christianity is not a series of dogmas and moral norms that a Christian must simply believe and live out. Christianity is faith and love, *a total following of a person*: the amazing person of Jesus Christ. Today, let us say yes to this call! Sometimes God has a plan for our lives, and we are reluctant to step out in faith. We are

not alone! In the Old Testament, it was frequent for those called by God to put up a bit of a challenge. Ultimately, God's plan won the day! Examples are as follow:

#### Moses

- **Reluctance:** When God called Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses was hesitant and made excuses. He claimed he was unable to speak and asked God to send someone else.
- **Outcome:** Despite his initial reluctance, Moses became one of the greatest leaders in biblical history, leading the Israelites through the Red Sea and receiving the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai.

#### Jonah

- **Resistance:** God commanded Jonah to go to the city of Nineveh and preach against its wickedness. Instead, Jonah tried to flee to Tarshish, boarding a ship to escape God's command.
- **Outcome:** After being swallowed by a great fish and spending three days in its belly, Jonah finally obeyed God and went to Nineveh, leading the whole city to repentance.

#### Gideon

- **Doubt:** When God called Gideon to save Israel from the Midianites, Gideon doubted his own abilities and asked for multiple signs to confirm God's will.
- **Outcome:** Gideon eventually trusted God and led a small army to a miraculous victory over the Midianites, demonstrating God's power and faithfulness.

#### Abraham and Sarah

- **Struggle:** Abraham questioned God's promise of a son due to his and Sarah's old age. He even tried to fulfill God's promise through Hagar, resulting in the birth of Ishmael.
- **Outcome:** Despite doubts, Abraham and Sarah eventually trusted God, and Sarah bore Isaac, fulfilling God's promise.

**Everything changed** in the lives of Peter, James, John, Matthew, and all the apostles because one day, at a certain point in their lives, they crossed paths with Jesus, and the most miraculous thing happened: They were "seen" by Jesus. Perhaps this is why so many Catholics love to enter into **quiet adoration chapels around** the world and sit before the Eucharist. There they are "seen" by God. A quote from the Song of Songs tells us that Jesus is looking at us "through the window"... My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Look, there he stands behind our wall, gazing in at the windows, looking through the lattice. (Song of Solomon 2:9). **The monstrance** that holds the Eucharistic host is behind a glass, and Jesus is truly "gazing in at the windows..." **Let Jesus see you.** He sees the essence of things. Christ never stays at what is simply on the surface. When he looks upon a person, he sees their past, present, and future, and he sees their heart and soul. Every Christian who truly has an encounter with Jesus is *seen* by him. This is what it means to encounter Christ. A life without this Divine Encounter is a life that is incomplete. This Sunday's Gospel asks us to realize that our lives are totally different because one day Jesus looked at us with love. Jesus wants us to go through life with our hand in his hand. There will be times when we are called to take a new direction and face the unknown, like Isaiah, Peter and Paul. Our response should be no less generous than these great men of our biblical history to meet the challenge of the vocation to which we are called.