

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

Gospel: Luke 5:1-11

Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat.

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink.

But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

REFLECTION 1: CATCHING MEN AND WOMEN

What a beautiful scenario opens up for us as we read today's Gospel! Even the melodic names given to the lake awakens the inner eye – the Sea of Galilee, the Sea of Tiberius, the Lake Genesaret. This expanse of water is 13 miles long and 8 miles wide. It lies in a dip in the earth's surface and is 680 feet below sea level. That fact gives it an almost tropical climate. Nowadays it is not very populous but in the days of Jesus it had 9 townships clustered around its shores, with about 15,000 souls.

Here we are confronted with a turning point in the career of Jesus. Now his church will be the lakeside and the open road, his pulpit, a boat. Jesus would go anywhere where people would listen to him. Isaiah, Paul, Simon James and John were not necessarily chosen because of their excellent qualifications. They were called to prophesy, to preach and to be fishers of people, the grace of God empowering each one of them. Unlike Mark, who placed their call at the beginning of his Gospel, Luke situates the narrative later in his account. We may suppose that Jesus had been actively preaching and healing for some time and his reputation had preceded him. So, when Jesus called them, Peter, James and John had an inkling of what lay ahead for them. The great catch of fish gives a dramatic visual representation of the future mission of the disciples. Under Jesus' direction, they would draw a great number of people into the net of salvation and the bark of Peter.

It is significant that Peter and company had to 'put out into the deep' in order to make such a catch. Just as those who fish must go to where the fish are, so should disciples be willing to leave secure and comfortable homes in order to bring the message of salvation to others where they live, work and play.

This message is the very word of God. So true was the word of God Jesus spoke, that the crowds recognised something unique – so they pressed close to him so as not to miss a word. Jesus meant what he said, and his life mirrored the integrity of the message.

After his death and resurrection, Jesus' disciples were challenged to hold that same integrity, so that the lives they lived did not contradict their preaching of the word of God. The Evangelist Luke says that

the disciples when called, left everything, an indication of the radical quality of discipleship to which Jesus called his own. They then followed him. Following Jesus means listening to his word and giving a committal to live like Jesus in the world – so they became an extension of the Holy One.

When Jesus had finished speaking he told Simon to pay out his nets into deep water. Such a large shoal of fish was gathered that they were obliged to call on their fellow fishermen to come to their aid. Such large quantities of fish were gathered, filling both ships to sinking point. What a catch and what a story, not even one fish got away!

As Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) put it: 'Christ has no body but yours, no hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes with which he looks with compassion on the world'.

REFLECTION 2:

HERE I AM; SEND ME

Tony de Mello, an Indian priest did a satellite program that was beamed to 76 universities throughout the world and involved over 3,000 students in dialogue. They grew up near Mumbai (originally Bombay). One day he came home from high school and asked his father if he could become a Catholic priest. His father said 'No, you are my only son and I want you to carry on the family name'. Then after being childless for 14 years Tony's mother became pregnant. When she was later rushed to the hospital for delivery Tony ran the 4-mile distance on foot. Arriving out of breath he asked his dad 'Is it a boy or girl?' 'You have a brother' said his dad. 'Great', said Tony, 'now I can be a priest'.

As we started out on our journey through Ordinary Time, we met Jesus beginning his public ministry and today we hear his call to his first disciples to follow and accompany him. In all three readings for this Sunday there's the story of a call; different people in different circumstances, with different social and religious status, yet all are touched by the divine initiative. Isaiah, perhaps daydreaming, was in the Jerusalem Temple when God called him. 'Whom shall I send?' asked the Almighty, 'and who will go for me?' Isaiah giving a free response accepting the dangerous role of a prophet of God, replied, 'Here I am, send me'. Paul was on the road to Damascus when, thrown off his mount, he heard a voice from heaven accusing him of persecuting Christ's members, while the fishermen by the lake of Galilee were tending their nets when Jesus called.

In our Gospel (Luke 5: 1-11) Jesus is standing by the lakeshore with a crowd pressing around him to hear the word of God. Significantly, Peter and his two companions are not part of this crowd, they are looking after their nets after an unprofitable night's fishing. Jesus himself becomes fisherman, as he climbs into Simon's boat and rows out a short way from the shore to continue teaching the crowd. After that Jesus addresses his words to Simon only, telling him to launch out into the deep waters and to lower the nets for a catch (*duc in altum*). He responds to Jesus as 'Master' telling him that on the previous night they had no luck with the fishing. Then in response to Jesus' direction he casts the nets into the water. Then a great reversal of fortune when the empty nets become full to breaking point. Peter's personal encounter with Jesus leads to the call of James and John to help out with the catch. Emptiness had become fullness and Peter falls down at Jesus' feet now calling him 'Lord', the post-resurrection title that Luke inserts into this early episode, that those who hear this narrative will recognise the presence of the Risen One. This was a 'holy interruption' to the lives of Peter, James and John. Jesus calls them into new depths to become 'catchers of people', men and women who will net others for the kingdom. The first disciples whom Jesus called were those who had to leave something behind, a dispossession, and this will mean suffering, but in the company of Jesus and with faith in him there is no need to fear.

Isaiah, Paul and Peter all recognise and confess their sinfulness and weakness and empty themselves of power and control. As Christians we follow suit when we allow God room to enter into our depths. As the Psalmist put it; 'God answers us out of his steadfast love and in faithfulness, increases the strength of our souls. (Ps. 138)