



This is the fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time, and we continue reading the Gospel of Luke, who two weeks ago told us that he intends to write the account of Jesus' events in order. Today presents us with an event in the life of Jesus that follows in order: Jesus' childhood, his revelations, his pastoral activity and then the calling of the first disciples. Perhaps he wanted to change the order of the writing of Mark and Matthew: they begin with the calling of the disciples and then comes the pastoral activity. For Luke, first is the activity of Jesus and then the calling.

Today's Gospel passage recounts the miraculous catch of fish by Jesus' first disciples. The successful catch is the result of Peter placing his trust in the words of Jesus, to "let down the nets," even after a futile night of fishing, and trusting that great things will happen. And they do. Despite everything, including Peter's long experience as a good fisherman, he nonetheless does what the Master instructs, and the outcome is huge success. An initially hopeless prospect is strikingly contrasted with the amazing catch.

Is this Gospel text primary about catching fish? In fact, it is more about the transformation that comes in surrendering totally to Jesus, as did Peter. What Jesus wished to emphasize to Peter and his companions, is that they will be "fishers of men," which is symbolized by the enormous amount of fish they catch under Jesus' command.

The really important miracle that takes place in the story of the abundant catch of fish, is the change that takes place in Peter through his obedience to Jesus, who is Lord of all and Head of the Church.

Failure is a fact of life, it happens to all of us, it happened to Peter. We try to do something, but fall short of the goal. The experience comes in all shapes and sizes, some failures are much more serious. Failure occurred in the life of Simon Peter. In the first instance, it was a lack of fish. It was disappointing, but not tragic, and with a little help from Jesus, things turned out ok.

His other failure, however, was different. It was much deeper and more serious. Peter took an honest look at himself and he was overwhelmed by what he saw. Falling down on his knees, he says to Jesus, leave me, Lord, I am a sinful man. As we read it, it sounds rather calm and clinical, but it is charged with emotion and pathos. Peter is a big, strong fisherman, on his knees, deeply troubled.

Perhaps for the first time in his life, Peter had faced the dark side of his own soul and he was ashamed of what he saw. In his eyes, he was a failure. Jesus makes no reference to Peter's turmoil, he simply says, follow Me.

It was the same way with Isaiah in the first reading. He goes to the temple to pray, much as we would go to a church, and in the temple, he has what we would call a religious experience. He has a vision of God or senses God's presence, and God's call. Instinctively he did what Peter did, and perhaps what you and I would do in the presence of God, in the presence of holiness. His own sinfulness becomes apparent and he cries out, I am a man of unclean lips. Almost the same thing Peter says in the Gospel: Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man.

What is significant in both readings is that the Lord did not depart but instead called both of them. What does all of this say to us? What is the message? Could it be that we are often too hard on ourselves? So often we make God in our image and likeness, we think He judges like us. And when we do that He becomes a very small God. Our God is bigger than our sins, then all our transgressions, we have only to turn to Him in sorrow and repentance, and like the father in the Prodigal son, He rushes at us, puts a robe around us, and the family ring back on our finger. He brushes aside our guilt, our feelings of unworthiness, our feelings of failure, and says to us what He said to Peter: come, follow Me.

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