

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Matt 4:19

R/. Alleluia, alleluia.
Come after me
and I will make you fishers of men.
R/. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Luke 5:1-11; L75C

While the crowd was pressing
in on Jesus and listening
to the word of God,
he was standing by the
Lake of Gennesaret.
He saw two boats there
alongside the lake;
the fishermen had dis-
embarked and were
washing their nets.
Getting into one of the
boats, the one belonging
to Simon,
he asked him to put out a short dis-
tance from the shore.
Then he sat down and taught the
crowds from the boat.
After he had finished speaking, he said
to Simon,
“Put out into deep water and lower
your nets for a catch.”
Simon said in reply,
“Master, we have worked hard all
night and have caught nothing,
but at your command I will lower the
nets.”
When they had done this, they caught a
great number of fish
and their nets were tearing.
They signaled to their partners in the
other boat
to come to help them.
They came and filled both boats
so that the boats were in danger of
sinking.



Reflecting on the Gospel

Hometown monuments, markers, and memorials sometimes go by different names. For example, people who grew up in one era might recall an earlier name for a stadium or a building. In Chicago, the Sears Tower became the Willis Tower in 2009. Investors bought it several years later and were considering another name change. But many locals still refer to it as the Sears Tower. Many stadiums undergo name changes as well based on naming rights sold to the highest bidding corporation. These names are a reflection of our culture and

can be difficult for foreigners or others to follow. Just imagine some talking about the Willis Tower when others know it only as the Sears Tower. Are we speaking of the same thing? Where is the Willis Tower?

We see something like this happening in the Gospel of Luke today, when we hear about the Lake of Gennesaret, which is also known as the Sea of Tiberias and the Sea of Galilee! The New Testament uses three different names for the same body of water, which makes it challenging for those of us reading about this two thousand years later and more than an ocean away.

Such is the setting for the call of Simon as Luke tells it. This story is different from that told in Mark, Matthew, or John. Here Luke has a focus on Simon, without his brother Andrew. In fact, Luke mentions

Andrew only in the list of the twelve (Luke 6:12; Acts 1:13) where he calls him the brother of Simon. Otherwise we hear nothing of Andrew from Luke. Luke also tells us in this story that Simon was “Simon Peter,” prior to Jesus naming him “Peter.” And we also hear about James and John, the sons of Zebedee, partners of Simon. According to Luke, this was not Simon’s first encounter with Jesus. Immediately prior to the story in today’s gospel, Jesus healed Simon’s mother-in-law (Luke 4:38-39). So this provides more background to Simon’s appeal to Jesus, “Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.” Simon has encountered the power of Jesus in the healing of his mother-in-law and now in the miraculous catch of fish. Faced with this Simon is utterly aware of his own humanity and humility. Jesus responds with a line that has reverberated through the centuries, “Do not be afraid; / from now on you will be catching men.” What a difference this story is in the hands of the master storyteller Luke. From Mark (1:16-20) he inherited a story about Jesus’ call of Simon, Andrew, James, and John, all of whom immediately dropped their nets to follow him. Luke instead places the focus squarely on Simon *Peter* to the point that we lose Andrew and only hear of James and John in the closing verses. Furthermore, by preceding this story with the healing of the mother-in-law, Simon’s leaving everything to follow Jesus becomes more plausible. We are in the hands of a remarkable theologian and evangelist. We would do well to read his story carefully and with attention to detail.

Living the Paschal Mystery

So often today’s gospel story is read symbolically so that the tearing nets mean something and the great number of fish mean something else. The boat’s near sinking is sometimes interpreted symbolically too. But it can be more fruitful simply to read Luke’s story on its own terms, without fishing for meaning so to speak.

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Jesus provides more than enough. There is bounty with Jesus who surpasses every expectation. When experience teaches Simon that there is no hope, or no use in trying, Jesus encourages him nonetheless and provides excess. This dramatic scene captures something of the initial excitement, humility, and genuineness that often accompanies the early stages of true discipleship. It is then that we die to our own preconceived notions and our own experience, and open ourselves up to the munificence of the divine. That is when our cup overflows with the good things God wants to provide. In the face of such generosity, we can only be humble. Simon knows he did not earn this miraculous catch, but it was a free gift. May we, too, die to our own self-importance and grandiosity and recognize that the good things we have are a gift of God.

Focusing the Gospel

Key words and phrases: Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.

To the point: After witnessing the miraculous catch of fish Peter begs Jesus to leave him. Knowing his own sinfulness, Peter believes he is not worthy to be in the presence of the Lord of life. Jesus has other ideas, however. Throughout salvation history we witness God's pattern of choosing the small and weak, and yes, even sinful, to fulfill God's plan. Jesus responds to Peter's plea by reassuring him, "Do not be afraid." Jesus knows our sinfulness, loves us, and calls us to follow him anyway.

Connecting the Gospel

to the first and second readings: In the first and second readings, both the prophet Isaiah and the apostle Paul echo Peter's words of self-reproach. When Isaiah receives a heavenly vision of seraphim surrounding God's throne he cries out, "Woe is me, I am doomed!" Isaiah cites his "unclean lips" as a reason he cannot possibly be a prophet for the Lord of Hosts. In Paul's litany of the appearances of the risen Lord to the apostles he ends with Jesus' appearance to himself, but adds, "I am the least of the apostles, / not fit to be called an apostle, / because I persecuted the church of God." Just as with Peter, the failings of Isaiah and Paul do not dissuade God from calling them to be of service.

to experience: As human beings we all possess flaws and weaknesses. Rather than being a cause for shame, these flaws might be a way that God is speaking to us. The musician Leonard Cohen says that cracks allow light to get in.

Connecting the Responsorial Psalm

to the readings: In the gospel and the first reading Peter and Isaiah see the living God and respond in awe and fear. While Isaiah experiences a calm vision, Peter comes face to face with the Lord who can cause the very Sea of Galilee to flock to his net. Today's psalm is a hymn of grateful praise for the Lord of all. Oftentimes the most authentic prayer is one of order. Words can escape us upon witnessing the grandeur of God through or miraculous intervention. Even speechless, we can turn to the Lord in gratitude and simply be in the presence of God.

to psalmist preparation: Today's psalm is one of simple and exultant praise. Pope Francis tells us, "Praise is the 'breath' which gives us life, but it is intimacy with God, an intimacy that grows through daily praise" (a Catholic Fraternity, Oct. 31, 2014). How do you praise God in your dai

PROMPTS FOR FAITH-SHARING

In the first reading we hear of the call of the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah responds, "Here I am . . . send me!" Where in your life do you hear the call of God? What do you need in order to respond to this call as Isaiah did?

In the second reading, St. Paul reminds the Corinthians of the witness he has provided to them of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. In your own life, who has been a witness of faith for you? How are you a witness for others?

In the life of faith we are called to persistence. Where might Jesus be calling you to try one more time to put out your nets for a catch?

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time, February 10, 2019

Gospel (cont.)

Luke 5:1-11; L75C

When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at the knees of Jesus and said, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man."

For astonishment at the catch of fish they had made seized him and all those with him, and likewise James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners of Simon.

Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men."

When they brought their boats to the shore, they left everything and followed him.