

***“Goin’ Fishing”***

Today's Gospel brings us to another one of my most favorite places on the face of this earth and that is the Lake of Gennesaret. Being able to look out at the sea, knowing that Jesus stood on the shoreline of this body of water. If you were to ask me what is the most beautiful place I would have to say this one. It has several different names - it is known as the Sea or Lake of Tiberius, Sea or Lake Kinneret, which means violin or a harp shape, or the more common name of the Sea of Galilee. It is beyond imagination. When I hear readings like this I am instantly transported there. I can remember twice visiting the town of Capernaum – a seaside fishing village where this Gospel took place. Believe it or not – that area remains mostly unchanged to this day.

Jesus meets Simon – who we later come to know as Peter. These fishermen are making their livelihood from catching fish. This is also found in Matthew 4 and Mark 1, We learn that Andrew, Simon's brother is there and so are his partners James and John, the sons of Zebedee. Jesus tells them that from now on they will be catching men!" They were so taken by what had just take place with the boatload of fish that after they brought their boats in - they left everything to follow Jesus. Believe it or not, there would be a great transformation in their lives – a transformation from fishermen to shepherds. There is a great difference between catching – and keeping – and that is the difference between a fisherman and a shepherd. That transformation would take the better part of three years to happen.

Both Matthew and Mark tell us that Jesus said, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." This is a personal call or invitation to service. It is no small thing to give up everything to follow Jesus. To follow Christ is to set aside our own goals and pleasures and to grasp onto the purposes for which God created us:

- to know Him in a personal way and to make disciples of others (disciple means follower) by teaching them all of Christ's commands. All those who truly follow Christ must exchange their affections, goals and priorities for His.

When Jesus "called" the fishermen, their goal was to be successful fishermen. In asking them to put aside or forsake this goal, He commanded them to follow Him and He would make them "catching men from now on;" He would "make them fishers for men's souls." Remember that Jesus is talking to not just men, but to all mankind. Jesus did not simply command His disciples to become fishers of men but rather He promised to transform them!

How does Fishing for Men Relate to Following Christ? We see a fisherman as someone with a fishing pole casting out a lure into the waters of a stream or a lake, or even the ocean. However, that was not the case when Jesus called His disciples. They caught fish with nets and by experience they found that their best fishing took place at night. We know that this is true by looking at verse 5 of today's Gospel, Luke 5:5, when Jesus told Peter to cast his nets on the other side of the boat he said, "*Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught*

*anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.*" How did they fish at night? They used a very powerful and effective method, light. Fish were attracted to light.

Jesus uses this same very effective method to draw people to Himself. John tells us that Jesus said, *"I am the light of the world, He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness but have the light of life."* (John 8:12) Just as fish are attracted to the disciples light, God wants people to be drawn to His light shining through everyone who is a believer of Christ. The light of every believer is the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in our lives. Paul stated in his second letter to the Corinthians, *"For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; we are not the light we merely reflect the light of Jesus."* (2 Corinthians 4:6-7)

To follow Jesus is a call that required complete and immediate detachment from everything else. Peter and Andrew *"left their nets"* suggesting that they walked away from their livelihoods, they walked away from their jobs, careers and business along with their partners. James and John *"left their father"* suggesting that following Christ takes precedence over even maintaining close proximity to our family, and their business with Peter and Andrew. The requirements for following Jesus are not the same for everyone. For some it means leaving their present occupations to follow him. For others it means a willingness to leave family connections and being close to family. I know what both of these are like as we were transplanted from occupations and family – to serve Him in His church. For everyone it is a willingness to exchange their affections, goals and priorities for his.

Please don't misunderstand me. The worst thing in life may not be that we fail. The greatest failures occur when we succeed in areas that are not God's will for our lives and are not true to the clear teaching of Scripture. Success that keep us from pursuing God's real plan for our lives - that is the failure. The worst thing in life is not failing, but succeeding in a worldly pursuit having left Christ out of our lives. Think about that!

So what is the single most important thing we can do as Christians? When we know that someone is dying – one of the first questions that should run through our minds is "Are they saved?" This should be a priority, and should remind us that what really matters in life is what we are most concerned about at death – whether or not people know Jesus Christ. That should be a priority in our lives, and we can reflect that light of Christ in everything that we think do and say. When someone is dying - nothing else really matters, does it? I want to suggest to you that - that question should be on our hearts long before our friends and loved ones are preparing to leave this world – it should be a priority in our lives to make sure they know and love Jesus. That does not mean that you have to stand and preach to them – love them, show them the light of Christ in your life. You all did that last Friday and Saturday, in the way that you reached out. You hear the letter from Rowan's family. This morning after our time of 'peace' you will all hear about what happened to our deacons on their way to church – a home

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on 158 burned down. They stopped to make sure that everything was ok. They will tell you what they found. They reflected the light of Christ; the light of this community, and His love.

There have been times in the life of every Christian when they recognized that the greatest thing they could do with this life was introduce someone else to Christ. Our beloved St. Andrew – that is what he did. He went and told his brother Peter about the neatest Guy that he found out about, that he met. He and John were present at the baptism of Christ in the River Jordan and they went back to the Galilee to find Peter to tell him. Have you ever really stopped to realize that Jesus wants you to be someone whose heart is moved to reach out to the lost people around you? In order to achieve this goal in life would you be willing to -

- Lay aside your personal ambition and plans in order to fully follow Christ? I am not saying that you need to become a deacon, or priest, or walk around with a collar – because that is only a small percentage of Christians.
- Would you be willing to better reflect the light of Christ to those around you in your words and your actions? What is it that St. Francis of Assisi is credited with saying? “Preach the Gospel always, and if necessary – use words.” Do you hear what I am saying?
- Look for and take opportunities to share with others – not just who Jesus is, but what Jesus has done for you in your life. He cleans you up pretty nice, hasn't He? All of us can say that!

Somehow, Jesus brought you to this little church on East Ward Street, to worship with a family that loves each other, who welcomes each other.

Always remember the words that Jesus said: *"Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men."*