

***“Catching and Keeping”***

To put it mildly, it is so good to see you. We are family, and I thank you for all of your contacts and messages. Marilyn and I really truly appreciate you all and we are very, very blessed. I know that none of our families have been untouched by this mess called Covid. Once it hits you – just trying to get up out of bed is a chore. We are very, very grateful to be back with our family that we love so much. Deacon Bob did a great job the last several weeks with a Deacon's mass – which is not necessarily normal to what he does, but he jumped in full bore. He did an outstanding job. Deb on the organ last week, we thank you. Don't go too far from the organ – I think you have a spot.

Being quarantined for the past few weeks – I had the opportunity to reflect back on some of the wonderful places that were the scenes of the Holy Gospel during those weeks. Whether it be Nazareth, where Jesus said, “Today in your hearing, these words are being fulfilled,” or the Wedding Feast of Cana, or the Sea of Galilee, or Capernaum. Today is certainly no exception, as the Gospel brings us to another one of my most favorite places on the face of this earth and that is the Lake of Gennesaret. That sea is also known as the Sea of Galilee, or Kinneret, which means ‘harp.’ Being able to look out at that beautiful sea, knowing that Jesus stood on the shoreline of this body of water is nothing short of inspiring. Having been there twice, I can only say to you, that if you ever have the opportunity to visit the Holy Land, please do so. It will speak to you. Make sure you bring your Bible with you – because it jumps off the pages. Marilyn and I have been to Bermuda several times, and to the Alps of Switzerland, but if you were to ask me what is the most beautiful place – this place that has several different names – tops them all. Let me tell you – that 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, with the exception of ruins that are left there – that area remains mostly unchanged to this day.

It was here that 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 amazed by what had just take place with the huge boatload of fish that after they brought their boats in - they left everything to follow Jesus. Believe it or not, there was going to be a great transformation in their lives – an eventual 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 invitation to service. It is no small thing to give up everything to

follow Jesus. To follow Jesus Christ is to set aside our own goals and pleasures and to grab a hold of the purposes for which God created each one of 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 "invited" the fishermen, their goal had been to be successful fishermen. In asking them to put aside this goal, Jesus 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 not just talking men, but to all mankind. Jesus did not simply command His disciples to become fishers of men but rather He promised to transform them – and He would teach them!

How does Fishing for Men Relate to Following Christ? 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.

It is this very effective method that Jesus uses to draw people to Himself - Light, and 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 His 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)

Let's face it - to follow Jesus is to answer His invitation 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, homes, careers, and business along with their partners. James and John "*left their father*" Zebedee, 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 leaving family connections. I know what both of these are like as we were transplanted from occupations and family – to serve Him in His church.

Fifth Sunday After Epiphany – February 6, 2022, Year C

A church in our community in Douglas was devastated, destroyed by fire just a few days ago; if you travel Rt 158 South, the Douglas Christian Fellowship Church of God, and their pastors Heath and Shannon Wingert, the church was destroyed on Wednesday night. Apparently a gas tank exploded, but everyone was able to get out safely. Thanks be to God that all of the congregation was able to escape. This morning at 10:30, while we are worshipping here, they are having a parking lot service, to seek God in their way forward. Keep them in prayer if you would please.

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 is a perfect example – 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? Maybe it is just to tell them what Jesus has done in your life; the miracle that you are sitting next to, and if you look around – you are all sitting near miracles – to be sure!

In order to achieve the goal in your 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? Both Deacon Bob and I have both reminded you what St. Francis of Assisi is credited with saying, “Preach the Gospel always, and if necessary – use words.” Do you hear what I am saying? It is not about how you dress or what you do, it is who you know – and who you are willing to share.
- 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 well, doesn't He? All of us can say that! And not just on Sunday.

Somehow, Jesus brought all of us to this little church at 523 East Ward Street, to worship with a family that loves each other, who welcomes each other. We are a part of each other's lives. The exciting wedding that is coming up in March. I met with the young couple on Tuesday, and I am so thrilled that Lee and Patrick are going to stand up here and commit their vows before almighty God in this beautiful church. It is going to be packed, but that is what family life is like. How awesome that is.

I ask you to do one other thing, always remember the words that Jesus said: *"Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men."*