

5th Sunday (C)

6th February 2022

'In Simple Trust ... Beside the Syrian Sea'

Is 6: the call of Isaiah in the Temple: *I am a man of unclean lips* Ps 137: *On the day I called, you answered, you increased the strength of my soul* 1Cor 15: *I hardly deserve the name 'apostle'* Lk 5: *'Leave me, Lord; I am a sinful man'*

In a few minutes' time we'll sing that lovely hymn, "Dear Lord & Father of Mankind," whose 2nd verse starts, "In simple trust, like theirs who heard, beside the Syrian Sea, the gracious calling of the Lord ..." This verse relates precisely to the events we've heard of in Luke, ch. 5 this morning, and revolves around that idea of "simple trust".

St Luke began Our Lord's ministry at Nazareth (as we heard over the previous 2 Sundays), before any of the apostles were with Him. Having been rejected at Nazareth by His own people, He returns to Lake Galilee, to Capernaum and other little lakeside towns nearby — Bethsaida, Magdala, Tabgha — and the initial thrust of His public ministry is there. St Luke in fact presents us with an *extended* account of the call of the first apostles. Matthew & Mark give us in their Gospels a fairly concise report on Jesus's calling Simon & Andrew, James & John, but Luke fills out that episode. There's the mention of Our Lord's

choosing Simon's boat to preach from, by the lakeside, so people could hear Him better along the shore; and then how He asks him to put out into deeper water for a catch, even though Peter and his companions have had no luck at all fishing the whole previous night.

In fact, what we notice here is that Our Lord is asking Simon Peter to trust Him in a simpler thing, before asking Him a far-more testing thing. He asks him to trust Him in this small matter of catching fish, when in fact He wants to ask him something afterwards that will require a far greater trust in Jesus. So, Peter quickly learns that He *can* place His whole life at Jesus's disposal. When he is fishing — a task he has been brought up with, and should know the ins and outs of — Our Lord helps him to realise that even in that, he is *nothing* without God's help. He sees the miraculous haul of fish, perhaps a greater catch than he had ever had, and knows that Jesus has the divine about Him. Peter might, at that moment, simply have thought about himself: seeing all that Jesus has done for him, he might still have ignored Jesus and just gone to

market with the others to cash in on the massive catch and set himself up for a more leisurely time ahead for him and his family. But Peter sees the greater significance of what has just happened: He put his trust in Jesus; he did what was asked, and such abundance was granted — He placed his faith in Jesus, not in his own personal reading of the situation, and such wonders were worked.

But before Our Lord can ask anything else of him, his immediate reaction is his unworthiness — just like Isaiah's was, centuries before (as we heard in the 1st Reading) when he was called to be a prophet. Peter states straight off that he is a sinful man, not worthy to be in the company of Jesus, whose miracle has proven His divine origins. He can't believe that Our Lord would want any more to do with him, if only he knew what a sinner he was. But Our Lord is not fazed by that. He neither condemns Peter, nor does he brush aside or belittle Peter's claims to have sinned. What he says for now is, "Do not be afraid." These are words that echo countless times through the Scripture — both OT & NT — when man encounters God

in His glory and holiness. "Do not be afraid." Our Lord has remedies for Peter's sinfulness. The abundance which He has shown in the fishing nets is also a measure of His abundance of compassion and forgiveness. Peter need not be afraid of walking closely with Jesus. His sins do not preclude him from being with Jesus, and in fact it is only in Jesus, by staying with Jesus, that the forgiveness of sins can be found at all.

Now we are at the point when Jesus can ask him the greater question, and call him to exercise the even greater trust, that this was all leading up to: will you come and follow Me? The miraculous haul of fish was just a small thing — but it was a sign — when the real thing that Jesus seeks is that Peter, and the other three, Andrew, James and John, come and be His followers, His disciples.

How is it that they have the instant courage to follow Him? How is it that they can leave their families, their fishing, their nets, their livelihoods, and immediately follow Jesus? It's surely because (i) they have seen the abundance of blessings that flow from Jesus's hand; (ii)

they know that they can trust Him in all things, way beyond any trust they can have in their own judgment; and (iii) they have had that reassurance that their weaknesses, their sins, their failures, do not exclude them — in fact, like all sinners, they are in desperate *need* of Jesus as their divine forgiver and saviour. All these overwhelming realisations come to them in that encounter with Jesus, and they can see nothing more likely than that in the company of Jesus they will experience even greater blessings and evidence of the abundant outpouring of His love for humanity. The sign of so many fish is a pointer to the fact that, with Jesus, and only with Him, the catch of people into the ‘barque of Peter’ — the holy Church — will be even greater.

This is our lesson from the response of those first apostles on Lake Galilee: to start with a “simple trust,” a simple profession of faith in Jesus by which we let Him be ‘in control.’ Have we made that act of trust? Have we made that simple, life-changing statement that we trust in the Lord? I mean, *really* trust in Him? Have we actually

said to the Lord, heart-to-heart that we trust Him to bring our lives to fruition; have we handed over the guidance of our life to the direction of His Holy Spirit, and to nothing else, selfish or self-made? The overwhelming evidence, from the apostles, and generations of saints ever since, and from our practising peers around us, is that we can have that sort of trust in the Lord: that He will bring us many abundant graces, by our faithfully staying close to Him, and above all that we will have our sins forgiven and our lives made fruitful for others. We also, every one of us, need to make that act of “simple trust” — if you haven’t done so, if you find it hard to do so, then pray for the grace to do so. The blessings, the freedom, the peace, that flow from letting Jesus be in control of your life, will be overwhelming, and will make your life so very very different.

“In simple trust, like theirs who heard, beside the Syrian Sea, the gracious calling of the Lord, let us, like them, without a word, rise up and follow Thee, rise up and follow Thee.”