

5th Sunday (C)

9th February 2025

'Nicene Creed IV: Life of Jesus (CCC 511–70)'

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 relates precisely to the events we've just heard in Luke, ch. 5, revolving around that idea of "simple trust". St Luke began Our Lord's ministry at Nazareth, before any of the apostles were with Him (2 Sundays ago). Having been rejected at Nazareth by His own townspeople, 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 now presents us with an *extended* account of the call of the first apostles: unlike Matthew's & Mark's fairly concise report of Jesus's calling Simon & Andrew, James & John, Luke fills out that episode. There's mention of Our Lord's choosing Simon's boat to preach from, by the lakeside, so people could hear Him better along the shore; then how He asks Peter to put out into deeper water for a catch, even though he and his companions have had no luck at all fishing the previous night. We notice 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: his call to be not just a disciple, but in due course, an apostle, a foundation stone of the Church. Peter quickly learns that He *can* place His whole life at Jesus's disposal. 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.

In these early weeks of 2025 — the 17th centenary year of the Council of Nicaea in 325AD — we're tracing our way through that Council's definitive text, the *Nicene Creed*, which we recite each Sunday and solemnity. We began last week the articles in the Creed about God the Son, considering His eternal place in the Godhead, equal in dignity and divinity with the Father; then recognising that He remained fully God even when He assumed flesh to become fully man in the historical Jesus.

This week we're going to consider the next logical element in the Creed, which is, as it were, an *unwritten article* of the Creed. Our theme for today is the *life of*

Jesus, those years that fill a gaping hole in the Creed. The Creed jumps from “*He ... was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man*” to “*for our sake He was crucified under Pontius Pilate.*” Today we want to fill in that gap ... just as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, when treating the content of the faith taught in the Creed doesn’t skip those many years between the Nativity and the Passion — just the opposite: it devotes some 60 paras. to the earthly life of Jesus. Almost all the Gospel narratives that we know and love treats these episodes — they don’t jump from the Bethlehem stable to the Garden of Gethsemane, do they? No, they dwell at length on His earthly ministry. That includes the wonderful mysteries of the infancy of Jesus; His hidden life in the family home at Nazareth; and His public ministry of maybe 3 years’ preaching and journeying around the towns and villages of Israel, up and down the length of the Holy Land from Galilee to Samaria, to Judaea, and sometimes beyond. Ultimately He will enter triumphantly into Jerusalem and begin those days of giving up His life for us in the sacrifice

of the Cross — we shall consider those saving mysteries next week, when we pick again the actual text of the Nicene Creed. But, today, we shall dwell in the ‘gap,’ and examine the life of Jesus.

It’s interesting to note that Pope St John Paul II also chose to ‘fill in the gap’ when he added to the Rosary the *Mysteries of Light* which allow us to meditate on those long years of Jesus’s ministry — from His Baptism, to Cana, to the Preaching of the Kingdom, to the Transfiguration, and the Institution of the Eucharist on the brink of the Passion — these key episodes that express His divine person relating to those around Him. Here’s an instructive para. from the *Catechism* that addresses this all-encompassing nature of Jesus’s life on earth:

517 Christ's whole life is a mystery of redemption. Redemption comes to us above all through the blood of His cross, but this mystery is at work throughout Christ's entire life:

- already in His Incarnation through which by becoming poor He enriches us with His poverty;
- in His hidden life which by His submission atones for our disobedience;
- in His word which purifies its hearers;

— in His healings and exorcisms by which “He took our infirmities and bore our diseases”;

— and in His Resurrection by which He justifies us.

Perhaps the greatest mystery, in a way, is that He spent the first 30 yrs in relative obscurity; 30 hidden years in the family home with His Mother, Mary, and legal guardian, Joseph. But by this wonderful example, He *sanctified the life of the home* — He made it clear that we can live a holy life, a life heading towards heaven, by living well an ordinary daily domestic life of love for God and neighbour.

Once Jesus had come out into the open, beginning with His Baptism at the Jordan, His life was very different. He entered into a busy 3 yrs marked by great crowds of believers, alongside the opposition of the authorities. His actions and teaching spoke eloquently and repeatedly of His being divine. Gradually the apostles and others came to see that the only way to interpret Him — to understand His miracles, and His words — was to see Him truly as *the Son of the Living God*: this was a gradual realisation for them, but a clear conclusion. Events such as the Transfiguration, when He let His glory be glimpsed on the

mountain, only reinforced their belief. The whole mystery of the person and teaching of Jesus only makes sense if He is indeed God Himself, God the Son come to earth, taking on our human flesh so as to teach us and save us, guide us into His Church, the community of believers where we can find our true home and the grace of His sacraments.

So, a key part of those 3 yrs’ ministry was Jesus’s forming the early Church. He set about this, as we heard in today’s Gospel passage, at the very beginning of His ministry. Starting with His 12 male apostles and the wider group of disciples, *both women and men* — a radical departure from the norms of that time for a rabbi’s companions — Jesus established His ‘new people,’ a ‘new Israel’ built around a new ‘12 sons.’ Taking them aside often, so as to deepen their understanding; helping them to pray, and to see His inner life as Son of God; building them up into a people of mission, ready to spread the Good News, and to suffer for it if necessary: these were the *intentional*, not random, actions of Jesus so that His life and His grace — His transforming power as Lord — would

reach out into the years and centuries to come, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. *This is the Catholic Church*, founded by, and held in truth by, God Himself. It is not an accidental by-product of Jesus's earthly activities; nor, worse, is it merely some later human invention unwilled by the Saviour. If we try to extract the Church herself from our experience of Catholic faith and belief, we would find that we have basically none left — not because God cannot act outside His visible Church (of course He can if He so wishes); but because His normal mode of action is to draw new followers into the faith through the social medium of normal human relations of sharing what is important, life-giving and generating of happiness. We came to faith through personal interactions with others in the Church (parents, friends, colleagues) or through the printed word of bibles (or online Mike-Schutz videos!): all expressions of the Church's missionary outreach. It's this essential *community* feature of Christian faith that explains, above all, the precious years of Jesus's travels with companions.

Many of us here at Newman House (77, to be

precise) have spent the past week following the discipline of the *Week of Guided Prayer*, which will often have meant taking a text for prayer which is a Gospel encounter with Jesus. One of the most significant for me this week was to consider the scribe coming to ask Jesus, “Which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” (Mk 12). I felt in that interaction, specifically in the slight ‘gap’ between Our Lord's response and the scribe's gentle re-iteration back to Jesus of the truth of what He had said, a sense of the close bond, gentle and loving, of Master and newly convinced disciple. It's in these very Gospel accounts of Jesus's personal encounters that we find the *life of Jesus* ‘come to life’ in ours, especially through meditative prayer. Maybe, likewise, it's in this ‘gap’ in the middle of the Creed's text — the gap which encompasses almost all of His earthly life between Crib and Cross — that we find we can encounter the mystery of the Lord's gentle love. The doctrines of the Creed are indeed the scaffold of faith, but the heart of the Creed is the encounter with the living Jesus who reached out to people, and reaches out — *heart to heart* — to us.