

Fr. Simon Sez

This Sunday's passage in the Gospel of Luke (Lk 5:1-11) appears to tell a fishing story but actually tells a fishing story within a fishing story. St. Luke tells us about two different men who are fishing, Simon Peter and Jesus. They are fishing for two different reasons.

Simon Peter was out fishing all night but could not catch any fish. Jesus came on the scene preaching to the crowds. He was out fishing for disciples. He continued His task by telling Simon Peter, "Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch." Simon Peter hesitated but did it anyway. They caught a great number of fish, but when Simon Peter saw this miraculous number of fish, he fell to his knees. Simon Peter told Jesus, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." Simon Peter, James, and John left everything and followed Jesus.

Jesus caught His disciples by revealing the power of God through Himself. Their response was unworthiness. Jesus assured them that they did not need to be afraid. He forgave them of their sinfulness and commissioned them to "catch men." They responded generously by leaving everything and following Him.

Jesus is fishing for us. He has been revealing Himself to us through His Holy Word; through His sacred actions, the Sacraments; and through His apostles, their successors, and the faithful people, the Church. Once we realize Jesus' power working in our lives, we are humbled. Even though we are unworthy to be in His Presence, Jesus assures us that He makes us worthy by His forgiveness in the Sacraments of Baptism and Penance. He also commissions us in the Sacrament of Confirmation to be His witnesses in order to catch people for Him. We can only do this if we are first "caught" by Jesus, and we follow His directions on how to fish for people.

The question for us would be this: Are we willing to be "caught" by Jesus? Are we ready to leave everything behind to follow Him? If so, then we should take the bait, Eternal Life, which He gives of Himself in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. We will take the bait "hook, line, and sinker" if we realize His power in our lives, recognize our unworthiness before the Lord, and receive His forgiveness and healing. Once we are "caught" by the Lord, we can witness to others His saving power in our lives. So, do not be afraid -- go fish.

Into the Deep: Scott Hahn Reflects on the Fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time



Isaiah 6:1-8

Psalms 138:1-5, 7-8

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Luke 5:1-11

Simon Peter, the fisherman, is the first to be called personally by Jesus in Luke's Gospel.

His calling resembles Isaiah's commissioning in the First Reading: confronted with the holiness of the Lord, both Peter and Isaiah are overwhelmed by a sense of their own sinfulness and inadequacy. Yet each experiences the Lord's forgiveness and is sent to preach the good news of His mercy to the world.

No one is "fit to be called an apostle," Paul recognizes in today's Epistle. But by "the grace of God," even a persecutor of the Church—as Paul once was—can be lifted up for the Lord's service.

In the Old Testament, humanity was unfit for the divine—no man could stand in God's presence and live (see Exodus 33:20). But in Jesus, we're made able to speak with Him face-to-face, to taste His Word on our tongue.

Today's scene from Isaiah is recalled in every Mass. Before reading the Gospel, the priest silently asks God to cleanse his lips that he might worthily proclaim His Word.

God's Word comes to us as it came to Peter, Paul, Isaiah, and today's Psalmist—as a personal call to leave everything and follow Him, to surrender our weaknesses in order to be filled with His strength.

Simon put out into deep waters even though, as a professional fisherman, he knew it would be foolhardy to expect to catch anything. In humbling himself before the Lord's command, he was exalted—his nets filled to overflowing; later, as Paul tells us, he will become the first to see the risen Lord.

Jesus has made us worthy to receive Him in the company of angels in God's holy Temple. On our knees like Peter, with the humility of David in today's Psalm, we thank Him with all our hearts and join in the unending hymn that Isaiah heard around God's altar: "Holy, holy, holy . . ." (see also Revelation 4:8).