

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

The account of the great catch is not a parable. It is a true account of an event by which the Incarnate Lord taught mere men a Divine lesson, and then Called them into the service of His Kingdom, the Kingdom of God, the Holy Church on earth. The two are inseparably connected, the sign and the Call. He gave the sign of the great catch in love, in mercy, that Peter, James and John learn about the best efforts of men, and the power of God.

The Lord had been preaching in the synagogues of Galilee. A multitude began to follow Him to hear the Word of God. So it was after preaching publicly that He gave the men the miraculous catch, a sign that verified that His preaching was indeed the Word of God, a Divine Miracle that served to prove that the Word He spoke was Divine.

When the Lord saw the men, they were washing their nets, empty nets, nets that testified to their weakness and powerlessness. They had toiled all night and caught nothing, an embarrassing circumstance for professional fishermen. They were defeated. The Lord had seen the failures of men before. He saw the pitiful leaf with which man tried to cover himself. It wasn't covering enough.

He looked down upon the plain of Shinar, and saw the men erecting the Tower of Babel, a sinful effort to make a name for themselves, an effort to reach heaven by their own powers. They never made it. After delivering Israel from Egyptian bondage, the Lord saw their rebellion in the desert. It didn't work. After giving them the Promised Land, the Lord saw their sin and their failure to follow His Word. The land was taken from them. So what the Incarnate Lord saw when He beheld weary fishermen and empty nets was nothing new.

But so it is with the best efforts of fallen men. Perhaps you've experienced the same. Perhaps you've tried hard, given it your all, but come away with empty nets. It's a horrible feeling – helplessness, powerlessness, weakness, even despair. All men have known failure. It is a sign of man's frailty, frailty due to fallenness. As the Prophet Isaiah writes, "we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away."

But thanks be to God, through Jeremiah God makes you a Promise: "...the Lord will not cast off forever. Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies. For He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." The Lord allowed the men to fish all night to no avail. He grieved the children of men that they know their own powerlessness. And then He had compassion on the men. He is a God of mercy.

He would turn their great shame into a miraculous catch. So it is with God. With God, nothing is impossible. The God who traced out the equator, the God that drew the boundaries of the oceans, the God that placed the mountains and gave the rivers their course, the God that hung the stars and commanded the sun and moon to illumine His creation, the same God stood before those Galilean fishermen veiled in Human Flesh.

He spoke a Word, a Word that was contrary to their experience, a Word that wouldn't have made

sense to any fishermen. And yet they followed His Word. So did the sea. So did the fish. The empty nets were filled. And more than full nets, the catch filled both boats to the point of sinking. It was only then, after His Word was proven to be the Word of God, after His power over all creation was manifest, that He called the men to a different kind of fishing, a different kind of catch. Fishermen pull live fish out to their death. They would now save dying men by the life-giving Gospel, filling not Galilean boats, but the Ark of the Holy Church.

But the miracle was instructive. They would be made fishers of men in the same way they achieved the great catch: by God's power, by miraculous intervention. For their human efforts to catch men would yield no greater result than their human efforts to catch fish, which yielded a long night of work and empty nets. For it is not by man's efforts that God's Church is filled.

God fills His own church. Be He does it through men. God works through means. If men endeavor to fill the church by their own schemes and programs, they will have no more success than did those empty-netted Galilean fishermen. But as the men God chooses and ordains do as the Lord directs, as the faithful live out their lives according to His Word, the Net of the Holy Gospel will catch a miraculous number, a perfect number of souls, bringing the full number of the elect into the eternal safety and life of the Holy Church.

So it is with you. Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is His faithfulness. For it is His Faithful Son, the Incarnate God, the Lord Christ, that fulfills Jeremiah's prophetic description: "Let him sit alone and keep silent, because God has laid it on him; let him put his mouth in the dust—there may yet be hope. Let him give his cheek to the one who strikes him, and be full of reproach." And strike Him they did. And crucify Him they did. And therein lies your hope.

The Blood He shed He shed for the remission of all your sins. The death He died satisfied the ancient curse. His three days in the tomb fulfilled the perfect Sabbath rest. And His resurrection to new life won everlasting life for you by winning your justification. His best efforts wrought your eternal salvation.

He did for you as He did for the fishermen – what they could never have done, He miraculously did, freely giving the bounty to them. So too the salvation you could never have earned He earned, and He freely gives forgiveness, salvation and life to you, by catching you in the Net of the Gospel, the Prophetic and Apostolic Scriptures. So you, O Christian, are the miraculous catch, the catch only possible by God working through men.

So it is you who pray "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I hope in Him!" And so it is of you that St. Peter writes, of you miraculously pulled out of death and into life through the sea of the font, you pulled out of darkness into light and into the Nave of the Holy Church, for "The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers."

And this day the Lord whose eyes are upon you answers your prayers. You pray "Forgive us our trespasses", and He bids you "Take and eat, take and drink." By His Holy Sacrament He makes your faith strong, that your will be in accord with His will, and that of your best efforts the Lord will say "Well done, good and faithful servant", for you are covered in the Blood of Christ.

St. Luke 5:1-11

The Fifth Sunday after Trinity / Sixth Sunday after Pentecost, 2020 A. ✠ D.

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