



FIRST SUNDAY OF LUKE

September 25

THE GOSPEL READING

Luke 5:1-11

[Four Fishermen Called as Disciples]

At that time, as Jesus was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, he saw two boats by the lake; but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. And when he had ceased speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." And when they had done this, they enclosed a great shoal of fish; and as their nets were breaking, they beckoned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink.

But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." For he was astonished, and all who were with him, at the catch of fish which they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men." And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.



GREEK ORTHODOX
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DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

THE SERMON

When the Lord Jesus starts His earthly ministry, after voluntarily going to the desert to defeat His spiritual enemies, He begins preaching in the region of Galilee. This is the present-day region of northern Israel, where the Sea of Galilee is, back then called Lake Gennesaret. The lake is thirteen miles long and eight miles wide, and where many of the events of the Gospel take place.

In the morning, the Lord Jesus stands by the shore and sees Peter, James, John, and Andrew, as well as their two boats. They are washing their nets after a night where they caught nothing. There are many people around, so Jesus gets into the boat of Peter and Andrew and asks Peter to go out a little from the shore so He can teach them. Jesus sits down, the customary position for teachers, and speaks the word of God to them. Jesus is the Incarnate Word of God (John 1:1), and when He speaks to people, He brings them the word of eternal life.

After the Lord Jesus teaches the multitude, He tells Peter to go back into the deep waters and let down the nets again for fishing. Peter responds, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." Peter is bewildered by the Lord's command, and we observe two important things.

Firstly, we see here a fundamental principle to our lives: Peter does not quite understand why the Lord commands him to fish again, but he obeys the Lord all the same. He has spent all night fishing and has caught nothing. He is an experienced fisherman and knows that, humanly speaking, the conditions that morning are not ideal for fishing. Secondly, we see that Peter's obedience – and our obedience – to the Lord will always bear lasting results. Peter spends all night toiling and does it with his own strength. But now, the morning dawns, with the Lord illuminating his life, and it is at the Lord's Word and with His help, that fish are caught in abundance.

The remarkable result of Peter's obedience to Jesus' loving command is that there are so many fish that he has to shout for James and John to help him. They fill both boats, almost to the point of sinking. A whole evening of empty toil has turned into incredible abundance in an instant, by the Lord's Word and through His love and grace.

The lasting result of Peter's obedience is that we learn about the Kingdom of God. The Lord teaches that the fish symbolize people, and the catch symbolizes the call to eternal life. The Lord says to Simon, "Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men." The word "men," here, means people. It points to the work of the Church to bring the Gospel to people of all tongues and nations, a great multitude who will enter the Kingdom (Revelation 7:9). As the boats filled with fish, the Church has been and will continue to fill with people. The Lord brings His people from across the world and throughout the ages to follow Him.

The Lord says through the Prophet Jeremiah, 600 years before Christ, "I will re-

store [the people of God]... behold, I will send many fishermen, and they will fish them" (Jeremiah 16:15-16). Saint Ambrose says, "What is so deep, as the knowledge of the Son of God! But what are the nets of the Apostles which are ordered to be let down, but the interweaving of words which . . . bring up those that are tossing about in the waves from the depths below to the regions above."

On the Church's celebration of the Feast of Pentecost, we sing the apolitikon (the dismissal hymn), which says, "Blessed are You, O Christ our God, who made fisherman all-wise, by sending down upon them the Holy Spirit, and through them, drawing all the world into Your net. O Loving One, glory be to You." Peter feels unworthy to be in the Lord's presence when this miracle occurs. A heart that God has touched is a heart that recognizes its failures, and trusts entirely in the love and grace of God. Jesus shows him and the three other disciples that everyone is special and that they can become fishermen of souls if they follow Him. They, too, can help save people.

Everyone who believes in Christ is called to be His disciple, and work on spreading the Gospel, which means the "good news." This is the work of the Church, which is the work of every member of Christ's Body, that is, us. God is love, and He wants everyone to be saved. He gives us daily opportunities to repent, follow Him and seek salvation.

Peter, James, John, and Andrew are astonished when they see this miracle, so they leave everything and follow Jesus. Similarly, the Lord calls us to leave all earthly things behind, that is, to shift our hearts from worldly things to Him, and make Him our priority. He calls us to follow Him with hope in our hearts, going on the path of love and salvation.

The Lord says to Peter, James, John, and Andrew not to fear. He tells us the same. We spend much time and energy on the things of this life as we seek to provide for our loved ones and ourselves. We apply our talents, training, experience, and hope as we work for good things. There is nothing wrong with this, and in fact, this is a virtue. However, we are called to seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these other things we strive for will be added to us (Matthew 6:33).

If we become doers of God's Word, and we trust Him enough to obey Him, even when we do not have a complete understanding of the circumstances, we know that He is with us. We know He gives us the abundant grace we need and desire, for He loves us. Following Him without reservation is both the prerequisite and the result of having our nets full so that we, too, may inherit eternal life.