

Sermon for Fifth Sunday after Trinity
St. Joseph Parish
Luke 5:1-11

July 20, 2025
Father Herb

The symbol of fishing has a rich heritage in antiquity. Graeco-Roman traditions are replete with this activity as being regularly exploited by everyday teachers who lured students to themselves and through their education of them, transformed their lives.

The gospel story of this morning has people so eager to hear the word of God from Jesus that they pressed upon Him. Seeking space to teach, he shifted his glance to two fishing ships anchored nearby on the lake. Now his glance also lands on Simon and the fishermen taking care of their nets along with him. Jesus goes out of his way onshore to reach them by the water's edge

Everything changes with the glance of Jesus, who now singles out Simon and his vessel. As our Lord steps into the bow, or pulpit of Peter's craft, Peter obeys Jesus' command to launch out into the lake a little ways. The ship of the church is literally christened, for Christ is present in the bow. We are present in the body of the ship, this nave. I am standing in the elevated, U-shaped platform fishermen stood within to search for fish and obstacles, the pulpit. Jesus taught from Peter's pulpit, and only because of His calling me to serve Him, that hallowed place is where I presume to stand.

After teaching the crowd, Jesus commands Simon to go further..”launch out into the deep”, and to let his fishing nets down into the deep dark places, where Simon's fishing experience tells him fish are never caught while it is day. Nevertheless, Simon obeys him for he begins to perceive our Lord's authority. “Yet at your word”, says the first disciple-to-be.

Beyond all rational explanation and a lifetime of fishing, Simon and his companions pull up such a marvelous catch of fish that their man-made nets begin to come apart. Simon is introduced to the supernatural..the divine power of the man who is now captain of his ship..and Master of his life.

The glance of the Lord organizes the church; the glance back of an obedient fisherman launches a confession. When the unworldly success of his improbable daytime fishing expedition dawns upon him, Simon throws himself down before Jesus. This is more than the common prostration. We call what Simon did ,“proskinesis”- the body posture of complete submission and profound respect. Simon lies at Jesus' feet..before the divine presence. His gesture pays homage to his God and also preserves his life. The Old

Testament teaches that man cannot look upon God and survive. Simon has encountered the “numinous”, that aspect of the holy God which, among other glories of His, uncovers the deep within human beings and can be dangerous for them if not met with fear and awe.

Indeed, Simon’s reaction corresponds to the course of the theophanies take in the old testament: One cannot see God without dying; one cannot touch the divine presence, as Uzzah did with the Ark of the Covenant and perished. Thus, Simon begs Jesus to depart from him.. All of that changes with our Savior, for we now kneel to take Him upon our hands and lips.

What surfaces in Simon’s confession, “Depart from me for I am a sinful man”, is his human limitation, and that is always the insight that is due our Savior. Just as appropriately, Jesus expands his name from Simon to Simon Peter. He becomes a new person who responds by calling Jesus, “Lord”. Jesus then confirms His choice of this first disciple with a commission in the form of God’s promise. In the literal Greek, He says, “From henceforth you will be catching people to bring them to life.” Simon Peter will be bringing people to the life God has long ago chosen them to live, just by hearing His word. In sum, this whole episode makes Peter’s call.

The “word of God” is used frequently in the church’s first history book, the book of the Acts of the Apostles. Therein it means the apostolic message, thus anchoring the **continuity** between Jesus’ teaching and that of his clergy. Preachers only dare to climb into the pulpit by the leading of the same Spirit which took hold of the apostles and which also gave us the gift of apostolic succession.

In this parish at Sunday Mass, while we do not proskiness, Father Craig and I kneel and pray that God’s word alone will be in our hearts and minds and upon our lips before we climb into Jesus’ place. When Father Craig and I kneel before the divine presence in the tabernacle before preaching, we do a similar thing to Peter’s proskiness before stepping into Jesus’ place in the pulpit.

A man’s call to the ordained ministry does not begin with a glance from Jesus, though we all have longed for that. Instead we receive many glances from those in the apostolic succession who look down into the deep to perceive what is in a man who begins first as an aspirant and then, postulant. To ordination, it is a stepwise process of discernment, akin to the priest Eli’s eventual awakening and discerning the truth after the third time he was awakened by the boy Samuel who was being called to be prophet of Israel.

A man called hopes to encounter the numinous presence of God all along the path to ordination: in worship, the daily office, study, self-examination, including the extended one of conscience, and in the uncanny blessings that follow from saying "yes" to the Spirit. We learn to obey a Holy Ghost who **compels** us despite our human limitations and our reluctance to stand at the altar under the glance of our crucified Master.

Jesus seems to have gone way out of his way to call us as he did Simon: from preparing taxes, protecting this nation, constructing homes, cooking feasts, or healing bodies and minds. But then, one's previous calling is often made a similitude of his place within the new vocation. As with Simon the fisherman, Jesus enters the sphere of this or that man's life and work; He enlists him for His kind of fishing. Sailing closer to being ordained priest, He draws the man into His sphere of action: celebrating at the altar his love poured out for us, preaching and teaching God's word.

A fisherman builds his net by hand: weaving a lattice work of interconnecting cords of rope and twine. As for the first disciples, to communicate God's word, God helps us construct our nets for you. These nets are made of scripture cords, and pastoring twine, theology and liturgy strands and so on, all being intertwined to make true and strong what holds you. By then we cannot **not do** what Jesus asks: To catch men and women to bring them to the Giver of everlasting life. Then can the net of cords go down into the deep.

Yet the most trustworthy cord for pulling up the net is woven by living a gift that is also a suitable habit..a habit of humility. Deacons, priests, and bishops are called to stand in His pulpit and before His Real Presence. While our reverence and awe, and joy and gratitude may wax and wane, Father Craig and I ceaselessly ask ourselves in these predicaments, "What am I doing here?" So please pray for us, that we remain His and your humble servants.. and can go on trying to catch you.