

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time C - The Kind of Fishers God Calls Us to Be February 06, 2022.

Happy New Year to all who observe the Lunar Calendar. Today is the sixth day of the First month. Tomorrow, the seventh day is everyone's birthday in the Chinese tradition. According to the legend, the Goddess, after creating animals, created humans on the seventh day. This year is year of the Tiger. People born in the Year of the Tiger (2010, 1998, 1986, 1974, 1962, 1950, etc.) are characterized as having strong ethics and follow their passions. One of the New Year greeting we Chinese say is: “年年有魚”. **“There are fish every year”**, a homonym **which represents a rich life, with excess wealth and food every year**. Therefore, in traditional Chinese culture, a whole fish is always served at New Year Eve dinner.

Despite all the diesel-powered boats, radar, detailed and accurate charts of the sea, satellite-assisted navigation, etc, fishing is still pretty much the same kind of activity it was in Jesus 'time. Fishing is about setting out on the water, leaving the safety of the dry land, but it's also about hoping and praying for a good catch. Fishing is hard work: maintaining a boat, studying charts, baiting hooks, and repairing nets, just for a start. But in fishing, whether there are fish or not, whether the sailboat is moved by a breeze or capsized by a storm is totally out of the fishers' control.

This Sunday's gospel passage (Luke 5:1-11) gives us a clear message. It's a metaphor as much about James and John and Simon Peter and Andrew, as about us. **As fishers, we just have to trust in God, who provides everything we need, and we will find the power and the strength to go and catch people, to make disciples of all nations, and to build up the church.** And if this gospel passage is about us and our efforts to build up Christ's body the church – is this who God wants us to be? Is this who we want to be? Do we really want to lay out bait for people – not enough to sustain them, but just enough to get them painfully caught on a hook? Is it our vocation to pull them in, kicking and screaming – and to beat them into submission? Are we to terrify them by wielding our weapons until they believe like trying to catch big whale with harpoon? And are we to revel in this catch? – tallying the number of fish we've managed to drag in, and put on ice, and then thanking God for this manifest blessing? Christians who want to build mega church may think that is the right way but may not be so for most ordinary Christians.

The movie **The Perfect Storm**, based on a novel by the same name was set in October 1991 about a commercial fishing boat *Andrea Gail* returning to port in Gloucester, Massachusetts, with a poor catch. Boat owner Bob Brown ridicules and taunts Captain Billy Tyne over his recent "cold streak". Desperate to redeem himself, Captain Tyne convinces the *Andrea Gail* crew to join him for one more late-season fishing expedition. The crew heads out past their usual fishing grounds on the Grand Banks of Newfoundland, leaving a developing tropical storm behind them. Initially unsuccessful, they head to the Flemish Cap, where their luck greatly improves. But at the height of their fishing, the ice machine breaks down; the only way to sell their catch before it spoils is hurry back to shore. However, between *Andrea Gail* and Gloucester is a confluence of two powerful weather fronts and a hurricane, which the *Andrea Gail* crew underestimates. The movie ends with the amazing and defiant actions of one captain and a brave crew, who seek swift passage home with an abundant catch of swordfish – more than they could ask or imagine – but instead confront a storm of unbelievable proportion. Intent on offering their abundant harvest to the people on land, the crew give their lives to the majesty of the sea instead, never returning from their valiant journey. The story is about facing amazing challenges, and about the unfairness of life. It's a poignant depiction of the human drama – of love and loss, of work and struggle, of success and challenge.

Storms are blessings in disguise. Recall the Storm on the Sea of Galilee in Mark? *“A violent squall came up and waves were breaking over the boat, so that it was already filling up. Jesus was in the stern, asleep on a cushion. They woke him and said to him, Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” He woke up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, Quiet! Be still!” The wind ceased and there was great calm. Then he asked them. **Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?**”* (Mark 4:34-40) Like the disciples, we fishers of men are facing a lot of challenges and storms. But remember all storms are sanctioned by God's mighty, merciful and mysterious Providence. They are blessings in disguise. **“Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you encounter various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. And let perseverance be perfect, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”** (James 1: 2-4). Storm times are exam times. Where do we place our trust? Who is the first person we call upon to help? Like Peter, when we recognize our own sinfulness the power of Christ becomes available to enrich us. The whole of Sacred Scripture teaches one lesson: Love God with all your heart and put Him first in everything. Because Jesus Himself has promised that: **“Fear is useless; what is needed is trust.”** (Luke 8: 50). When we face challenges in our lives, we have to learn to detect the voice of God, to have the courage and generosity to answer promptly, to take new direction even when the future is unknown, just like the disciples. As we open our hearts and minds to the word of God with confident trust, we experience the power of faith to rule and calm the furious storms that arise in our lives.

When we are called to become fishers of men, we have to thank God for the opportunity. We believe and proclaim that our dependence is on God alone. And we recognize that our life's journey is not always one of hopeful expectation; that sometimes we come across struggles and even insurmountable odds. We hear the gospel passage and consider the frightening implications of those words: **“From now on you will be catching people.”** The pain that we may suffer or that may be inflicted at our hands, the tremendous risk ahead of us, the hard work that is ours – and ours alone – to do: we must face these challenges. And yet we are never alone! When we discover our spiritual poverty, our souls are open to receive what God is offering and awakens us to an awareness of his call, his presence in our lives. When we remember that we rely on God and God alone for the many good things we know in this life – indeed for life itself, we pledge to work hard, to do the best we can – not because it will gain for us any reward, but in thanksgiving for our many blessings.

*Brothers and sisters in Christ, we need to keep in mind that Christ has the ultimate victory. He allows difficulties so that we can grow in abandoning ourselves to him. When life hurts and it makes no sense, we need to deepen our faith in the One who has calmed the storm and conquered sin and death. He will write the final chapter in our life. He will bring us to safe harbour. We can bolster our faith in him today by keeping our eyes on his promises and his presence. We can renew our confidence that he will not let our prayers go unanswered but will respond in his time with a power and efficacy beyond what we expect. In continuing to sail this boat in the midst of the storm, we are giving him the total control over our destiny. We can be in no safer hands. **Lord, we know that when you allow difficulties in our life you are trying to strengthen our faith and make us see that we need to turn to you. Help us take advantage of these difficulties so we might abandon ourselves totally to you. we want to learn to trust you as the Lord of our life. Bring us to safe harbour with abundant catch. Amen***