

Homily for the 5th Sunday in Ordinary Time 2022 Year C

Saint Peter was a fisherman. He knew the ins and outs of his trade because his very livelihood depended upon it. He knew, for example, that it is best to fish at night because that is when the fish come to the surface to feed; during the daylight they stayed on the bottom of the lake.

So, when Jesus told Peter to cast his nets into the lake once more, his experience told him that it would be a complete waste of time. But something about Jesus struck a chord with him and he was prepared to trust Him, maybe even to humour Him, and against his better judgement he obeyed.

The huge catch that followed completely overwhelmed Peter. Suddenly he was aware that he was in the presence of someone very special, someone greater than himself. He became acutely aware of his own smallness, weakness, humanness, and sinfulness. He was embarrassed and so he said to Jesus, “Lord, leave me for I am a sinful man”.

Now what happened to Peter also happens to us many times throughout our lives. There are little moments when, through the grace of God, fragments of His transcendence, His majesty, His beauty, and His love shines into our souls, and for a split second we are transfixed by His greatness and our own littleness, His strength and our own weakness, His beauty and our own sinfulness.

It happens in so many different ways; in the quiet soft light of the dawn or a stunning sunset; the infinite vistas of space and the countless number of stars in the night sky; a piece of music that stirs an echo in our hearts; the presence of another person who is more beautiful, wiser, younger or more gifted than we are; sometimes even the death of a loved one. In those precious moments, we experience a deep sense of our own smallness, fragility and unworthiness.

Saint Peter despaired, and the experience overwhelmed him; his own spiritual poverty was almost too much for him to bear.

But that is not why God gives us those experiences. They are given to console us, not to overwhelm us; they are given to enlighten us, not to fill us with despair.

The experience of Isaiah in the first reading is very similar to Peter's in the Gospel. Both are awestruck in the presence of the Divine. By exposing a little bit of His Glory and Majesty God catches and holds their attention, but that awe and fear quickly changes into love. That love enables them to turn their lives completely upside down and say "yes" to the prophetic missionary role that God had prepared for them.

We too share that role by virtue of our baptism - the task of bearing Christ to others. In our very busy lives now and then God catches our attention, dazzles us or gently touches us with a sense of His presence. He courts us, to increase or restore our love for Him. For in the end, it is only love that can give us the strongest motivation to launch out into the deep, like Saint Peter. That call to launch out into the deep will come to all of us several times during our lives. The calls to take a new direction, change our lives, face the unknown or risk speaking out when words need to be said.

If we have grown to know and love He who gives that call, we will have the strength to generously answer it.