

5th Sunday (C)

10th February 2019

'An Abundance to Trust In'

Is 6: the call of Isaiah in the Temple: *I am a man of unclean lips* Ps 137: *On the day I called, you answered, you increased the strength of my soul* 1Cor 15: *I hardly deserve the name 'apostle'* Lk 5: *'Leave me, Lord; I am a sinful man'*

St Luke presents us with an extended account of the call of the first apostles. Matthew & Mark give us a fairly concise report on Jesus's calling Simon & Andrew, James & John, but Luke fills out that episode. There's the mention of Our Lord's choosing Simon's boat to preach from, by the lakeside, so people could hear Him better along the shore; and then how He asks him to put out into deeper water for a catch, even though Peter and his companions have had no luck at all fishing the whole previous night.

In fact, what we notice here is that Our Lord is asking Simon Peter to trust Him in a simpler thing, before asking Him a far-more testing thing. He asks him to trust Him in this small matter of catching fish, when in fact He wants to ask him something afterwards that will require a far greater trust in Jesus. So, Peter learns that He can place His whole life at Jesus's disposal. When he is fishing — a task he has been brought up with, and should know the ins

and outs of — Our Lord helps him to realise that even in that, he is nothing without God's help. He sees the miraculous haul of fish, perhaps a greater catch than he had ever had, and knows that Jesus has the divine about Him. Peter might, at that moment, simply have thought about himself: seeing all that Jesus has done for him, he might still have ignored Jesus and just gone to market with the others to cash in on the massive catch and set himself up for a more leisurely time ahead for him and his family. But Peter sees the greater significance of what has just happened. He put his trust in Jesus: he did what was asked, and such abundance was granted. He place his faith in Jesus, and not in his own personal reading of the situation, and such wonders were worked.

But before Our Lord can ask anything else of him, his immediate reaction is his unworthiness. He states straight off that he is a sinful man, not worthy to be in the company of Jesus, whose miracle has proven His divine origins. He can't believe that Our Lord would want any more to do with him, if only he knew what a sinner he was. But Our Lord is

not fazed by that. He neither condemns Peter, nor does he brush aside or belittle Peter's claims to have sinned. What he says for now is, "Do not be afraid." These are words that echo countless times through the Scripture — both OT & NT — when man encounters God in His glory and holiness. "Do not be afraid." Our Lord has remedies for Peter's sinfulness. The abundance which He has shown in the fishing nets is also a measure of His abundance of compassion and forgiveness. Peter need not be afraid of walking closely with Jesus. His sins do not preclude him from being with Jesus, and in fact it is only in Jesus, by staying with Jesus, that the forgiveness of sins can be found.

Now we are at the point when Jesus can ask him the greater question, and call him to exercise the even greater trust, that this was all leading up to: will you come and follow Me? The miraculous haul of fish was just a small thing — but it was a sign — when the real thing that Jesus seeks is that Peter, and the other three, Andrew, James and John, come and be His followers, His disciples.

How is it that they have the instant courage to follow

Him? How is it that they can leave their families, their fishing, their nets, their livelihoods, and immediately follow Jesus? It's surely because (i) they have seen the abundance of blessings that flow from Jesus's hand; (ii) they can trust Him in all things, way beyond any trust that they can have in their own judgment; and (iii) they have had that reassurance that their weaknesses, their sins, their failures, do not exclude them — in fact, like all sinners, they are in desperate need of Jesus as their divine forgiver and saviour. All these overwhelming realisations come to them in that encounter with Jesus, and they can see nothing more likely than that in the company of Jesus they will experience even greater blessings and evidence of the abundant outpouring of His love for humanity. The sign of so many fish is a pointer to the fact that, with Jesus, and only with Him, the catch of people into the 'barque of Peter' — the holy Church — will be even greater. Let's have that same trust in the Lord, that He will bring us many abundant graces, by our staying close to Him, and above all that we will have our sins forgiven and our lives made fruitful for others.