

And Jesus said unto Simon, fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.

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We have all heard the fishing story of the one that got away. The fish was so big and it fought so hard that it snapped the line or broke the hook. Often it was a bad day of fishing; everything had gone wrong, a bad day's catch, and then they hooked the big one. The interesting truth is that the fish and the drama seem to grow with every retelling of the story, the rod breaks, the reel is stripped, the toughest fishing line is snapped in half, and the legend of the one that got away lives on.

But have you heard of a fishing story like St. Peter's? He fished all day and then Jesus comes by, a crowd gathers, and Jesus sits in the boat and teaches. Peter's bad fishing trip is on display. And Peter is so poor that instead of going to the bait and tackle store and buying a new net, he sits in the boat and patches his old net up. Finally, Jesus stops teaching and turns to Peter and says, *Peter, lets launch out and go fishing*. Peter had spent all night fishing, casting the nets out into the water over and over and they had caught nothing. But Peter follows Jesus' advice, and goes fishing. The professional fisherman takes the advice of the Carpenter from Nazareth. And what a catch, they catch so many fish that the net breaks, they have to call their friends to help them pull the net into the boat, and once they do so the fish are so heavy the boat begins to sink. Have you ever heard a fishing story like this?

St. Peter had never heard a fishing story like this either and he had never seen anything like this. Which is why he kneels in the boat and proclaims his sinfulness and unworthiness to Jesus. I suppose if we were there we would have knelt alongside Peter and done the same thing. But this is not just a fishing story, or a passage from the Gospel, this is a sign of things to come beginning with St. Peter's fishing trip that day and lasting until the end of the world. The meanings are not difficult to figure out. The boat that St. Peter and Jesus are in symbolizes the Church. The net is the evangelism of the Church through the spread of the Gospel and the fish are the potential converts or catechumens. The disciples must pull the broken net into the boat. The net is broken because those whom Christ intends to save represent the souls of all men and Christ intends for all to be saved. Through their apostolic ministry, we are brought into the boat that is the Church of God. The boat nearly sinks because of the great catch of fish, because of all the souls Jesus intends to save through His *fishers of men*.

But notice that the net breaks and still the fish are brought on board, we don't hear that any got away, or that they lost the catch. St. Bede, the 5th century monk and Doctor of the Church writes *the net is broken but the fish do not escape for the Lord preserves His own against the chaos of the world*. In our Lord's fishing stories the fish never get away. But once we have been caught in our Lord's net and brought aboard the ship of the church what do we do then? The fisherman, St. Peter, gives us instructions himself in today's Epistle. *Have compassion one for another, love one another, be courteous, refrain your tongues from speaking evil, do good, seek peace, remember to pray, if you suffer for righteousness sake be happy, and do not be afraid nor troubled, continue to follow Jesus and imitate Him*. The Epistle ends rather abruptly in the middle of the verse, the rest of that verse reads; *be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear*. How do we answer those friends and family who ask how can you still have hope in God and in His Church with everything going on in the world?

Why do fishermen have hope? Why do they believe that if they have the right equipment, the right boat, the right fishing spot, the right weather, that they will have a good day's fishing? Because they have experienced it. They know that even under perfect conditions they may not catch anything, and they remember the fishing trips when they should not have caught anything but did. Yet, we are not all fishermen, what is our reason for hope?

The Collect and Epistle have been appointed for this Sunday since the fall of Rome. *Grant, O Lord, we beseech thee, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by thy governance, that thy Church may joyfully serve thee in all godly quietness*. This was the prayer of the Church during the collapse of what seemed to be the civilized world as they knew it. Their world turned upside down and the Church left nearly defenseless. The boat seemed to be sinking and in danger of capsizing, the nets all broken. Rome indeed fell but the Church did not. Showing us again, as He did on that fishing trip with St. Peter, the Lord preserves His Church even in the midst of chaos, He does not lose any that come to Him.

Perhaps it seems that the boat that is the Church is indeed going to sink and with us all in it, perhaps the nets appear old, fragile and broken, but somehow God still catches plenty with them. He catches us in the nets of the Church, and begins working to transform us from the inside out with His gifts of hope, the Sacraments. He claims us for Himself, He washes us off through the waters of Baptism, He feeds

us with His own Body and Blood, He anoints us with the oil of the Holy Spirit, so that we may be transformed into the image of Our Blessed Lord. He pulls up out of the sinfulness of the world and makes us His very own. And this is our hope, that the gates of hell have yet to prevail against God's Church, and that God is transforming us into His image so that we too may be fishers of men. Amen.