

2019 5TH SUNDAY

St. Peter was the skipper of a fishing boat. He was a big, burly, blustery man. Out there on the stormy waters of the Lake would have been no place for weaklings. They were rough and ready men. And Peter was very much one of them.

When Jesus approached Peter while Peter was mending his nets and asked for the loan of his boat to give Him a better platform for His preaching, surprisingly, Peter agreed. And even more surprisingly when at the end of His talk to the crowd, Jesus told Peter to put his nets down for a catch of fish, Peter likewise agreed, all the time knowing that what Jesus was asking of him was stupid. You don't fish during daylight hours. The fish can see the net and just swim around it. You fish at night time when the net is hidden by darkness. However Peter did what Jesus asked, outrageous as it seemed, and his nets were filled to bursting.

Peter, the down-to earth fisherman, knew that such catches just didn't happen. He had just witnessed a miracle performed by a man close to God.

Jesus then approached Peter and said to him: 'I want you to join my group of disciples.'

Peter's response was: "I can't be a part of your group. I'm a sinful man." And he was telling the truth.

But Jesus wanted Peter on his team. Peter may well have had lots of faults but Jesus had noticed that people listened to Peter and obeyed him. He had genuine leadership qualities. Jesus knew that in the days to come He would need a robust leader like Peter to carry on His work. Jesus was only too happy to be patient with Peter. He would forgive him when spoke out of turn- which he did frequently. Because Jesus knew that Peter would slowly but surely grow into his role of being the strong, humble leader the early Church would need.

And so Jesus said to him: "Do not be afraid, Peter. Step out boldly. From now on your fishing days on Lake Galilee are ended. But in the days to come you will go out into the whole world and catch men and women and bring them into the Kingdom of my Father."

To his eternal credit Peter there and then said 'Yes' and left everything to follow Jesus.

Isaiah in our 1st Reading parallels St. Peter's call. While praying in the Temple, he was lifted in spirit to the courts of heaven and beheld God.

He was terrified and cried out: “I am lost. I am a wretched man; a man of unclean lips. I am utterly unworthy of beholding the King, the Lord of hosts.” A seraph touched Isaiah’s lips with a live coal, symbolically burning away all of Isaiah’s sins. Isaiah then heard God say: “Whom shall I send? Who will be our messenger?” And Isaiah had the courage to reply: “Here I am, Lord. Send me.”

Peter and Isaiah were both sinful men. But both after initial hesitation embraced the huge tasks God was calling them to. Both were men of faith.

The qualification for working for God is not personal talent or even blazing sanctity. What is needed is the faith to believe that when God calls us to work for Him, no matter the danger or complexity, God will give us all the necessary graces we need.

I remember as if it was yesterday the evening of my first day at the seminary. We were all nervous. Few of us knew whether we were doing the right thing. We were taken to a prayer room by staff members and together with them prayed for God’s blessing on what we were beginning. We finished our first day by singing the great Hymn, echoing Isaiah’s response in today’s Reading: “Here I Am Lord. Is it I Lord? I will hold Your people in my heart.” I think it was the most important Hymn I had ever sung.

I knew from that moment that all would well. God would be walking with me and His graces would assist me.

And so it is for all of you, dear people. Each one of you has been called by God to a vocation in life. And at times it is desperately hard.

But don’t be afraid. Be brave. For no matter what weaknesses you may have, no matter how sinful you perceive yourself to be, you are precious to God. When you say to God “Here I am- ready to do Your will” and then step out in faith you know that God will empower you.

This doesn’t mean that life will be cruisey. St Peter’s life after his call to be an apostle brought several times of terrible distress. Think of Good Friday. But there were also times of wonderful triumph. God made Peter a truly inspirational leader in the early days of the Church. He converted 3000 with his preaching on Pentecost Sunday. He guided the Church through its traumatic separation from Judaism. His faith was indomitable.

And so it must be for all of us. Like St Peter and Isaiah we must remain faithful to what God has called us to be, trusting in our sure knowledge that God will always empower us and bless us. Because he loves us.

