

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, one God, Amen.

Beloved brothers and sisters, of the divine Luke? The emissary of God's Good News, the trusted companion of St Paul the Apostle to the Nations, the disciple who makes alive to us the history of God's encounter with us and his incarnation as man as well as of the Church's life in the new reality granted unto us. We have, in Church, read the beloved disciple John's words to us from Pascha until Pentecost, then the great teacher of the Faith Matthew's account in the weeks since: now the Church, in her great love for the Faithful, sets before us, on the Sundays following the Great Feast of the Cross, the Gospel of Luke. It is St Luke who so keenly sets before us the great love and compassion of the Saviour for all humanity. Details only he records, such as the parables of the Good Samaritan or the Prodigal Son, show a loving God who cares for all and looks keenly for our return to the Father's House. Yet not only stories and parables, actions too, for it is St Luke who tells us of other miracles such as the Raising of the Son of the Widow of Nain: from which we know that God loves us and has compassion upon us. It is St Luke who records for us his journey with St Cleopas to Emmaus as they encountered the risen Lord yet he leaves himself nameless so that each of us can place ourselves on that road, to journey with Christ as "beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them," expounds to us, "in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself," and then reveals himself to us in the breaking of bread, in Communion.

St Luke looks to bring all, Jews and Gentiles, into belief in Christ. We may be more familiar with St Matthew's genealogy – listing of the ancestors – of Christ which we read on the Sunday before Christmas but St Luke, in his genealogy, shows Christ as the descendant of Adam and therefore all humanity may be part of the Lord's saving Death and Resurrection.

So we turn, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, to today's Gospel and we are drawn to a familiar theme: fishing. Fish, we are lead to believe, was an important food at the time. At the Feeding of the Five Thousand it was bread and fish which were brought forward to feed the multitude and in the Sermon on the Mount the Lord asks, "Or what man is there among you who, if his son ... asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent?" Fresh or cured, fish were an important source of protein. It was well known how to fish: go out in the night and lower the nets – in the night time so that the fish would not be able to swim out of the way – and then raise the nets and sell the fish at the shore. The day would be spent cleaning the nets, fixing any breaks and resting, preparing for the next night of work.

The Lord comes to Lake Gennesaret – also called Lake Tiberias or, more

commonly, the Sea of Galilee – and sees two boats by the lake. This is almost at the beginning of Christ’s ministry in Galilee: he has been baptised by the Forerunner and seen his cousin locked in prison by Herod Antipas. He has been tempted by the Devil and been found victor yet rejected in his own town, Nazareth. The Lord sets his home in Capernaum on the sea, preaches throughout Galilee and heals the sick, now he comes to the shore.

The multitudes have come to learn, to hear the Word of God, and the Lord steps into one of the two boats and asks Simon, who was to be called Peter, to put out a little from the land. “Put out a little,” for the full glory of his teaching was not to be revealed to the crowds, “Do not give what is holy to the dogs;” says the Lord elsewhere in Scripture, “nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.” We hear this from St Basil the Great, who states,

[T]he Apostles and Fathers who laid down laws for the Church from the beginning thus guarded the awful dignity of the mysteries in secrecy and silence, for what is bruited abroad random among the common folk is no mystery at all. This is the reason for our tradition of unwritten precepts and practices, that the knowledge of our dogmas may not become neglected and condemned by the multitude through familiarity. “Dogma” and “Kerugma” [“Preachings”] are two distinct things; the former is observed in silence; the latter is proclaimed to all the world. This, too, is what we pray before receiving the Holy Gifts, “for I will not speak of thy mysteries to thine enemies.” “Put out a little,” says Christ, “and I will give the crowds a little of the teachings they desire.”

So the Lord gives the Preachings to the multitude. He then stopped speaking and, apparently, the crowds had had their fill of entertainment and dispersed. They had their milk and gave up on the possibility of food.

How often do you, dear brothers and sisters, do the same as this crowd? How often do I do so? Do we come before the Lord – in Church, before icons, in our hearts – and just want some entertainment? Or a dose of “religion”? Or to hear a calming message? Or to ask for a “nice” life? Is the Gospel simply compartments of our lives?

Simon the Fisherman, together with his brother Andrew, had been working all night. They worked with James and John, the sons of Zebedee but nicknamed by Christ the Sons of Thunder, and were probably tired and had nothing to show for their night’s work since, we are told, they “toiled all night and took nothing!” No

food for themselves nor excess to sell at the market. Simon knew the Lord, he had healed Simon's mother-in-law, and felt moved by the preaching: Simon was ready for more. The Lord said to him, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch."

We know the futility of what was being asked: one does not catch fish in the daytime. Simon's work had already been interrupted; he could have been preparing for the coming night yet was asked to put out into the lake. But Simon was ready for the deep teachings, one which would not be a compartment of his life but encompass his entirety. "Master," he said, "we toiled all night and took nothing! But at Thy word I will let down the nets."

Are you, am I, prepared for the Lord's call to put out into the deep? Are we prepared to forsake all we have for the love of God? Are we prepared to enter the mysteries of the Christian life?

Despite this futility, immediately "they enclosed a great shoal of fish," to the amazement of all. All the deep teachings, the inner life of prayer, were revealed once the Word of God was not only listened to out of curiosity but acted upon. Simon's net caught the fish and Christ's net caught Simon's heart. Note too, the subtlety of St Luke's words for, as soon as the Lord had captured his heart he is referred to, for the first time, as "Simon Peter." He is changed not by an outward command of the Lord but an inward acceptance of Christ. "Depart from me," says the prince of the Apostles, "for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

An encounter with God, but we see the same with the saints who are his conduits, brings about a dual experience. We feel both joy at being in the presence of God yet also shame at our own sinfulness: such was the experience of the great saint of our times, St Silouan the Athonite, whose feast we will celebrate tomorrow. A Russian by birth and living on the Holy Mountain, yet we feel a particular affinity for him in this country through the legacy of Archimandrite Sophrony of blessed memory who enabled his teachings to come to the whole Church.

St Peter is reassured by the Lord, "Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men." Christ does not dismiss this dual experience, joy and shame, but says that St Peter does not need to fear because of it. This message was given to St Silouan too in the famous word, "Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not." And this word to the great saint of the last century is a word we have for us: how many of those living around us have found themselves in an artificial hell? A hell of loneliness, a hell of addiction, a hell of worth measured in "likes," a hell of eating disorders and depression, a hell of the chase of money. We are here, we are in the

midst of these “hells,” and we are called to pray for all. “These things I have spoken to you,” says the Lord elsewhere in the Gospel, “that in Me you may have peace. In the world, you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” We do not fear, we need not lose hope, like the Apostle Peter and St Silouan we can put our trust in the Lord.

And so, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, hear the call of the Lord and put out into the deep and let down our nets for a catch. Let the Word of God fill our nets so that we may become vessels of him. Make the Gospel, make Christ, central in your lives; run eagerly to meet him. Be the presence of prayer in our society which is in need.

That he may meet us and bring us to the depths of understanding of his Father with whom he is glorified together with the all-holy and good and life-giving Spirit.

Amen.

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<sup>23</sup> John 16:33.