

Homily for the Second Sunday after Pentecost
& Second Sunday of Matthew

Father Deacon Filip

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

Today, on the second Sunday of Pentecost, we listened to the Gospel reading from Saint Matthew. Although very short, it still has an important message.

Christ, our Saviour, called Peter, Andrew, James and John to leave everything behind and follow Him. They did not hesitate, ask questions, nor object, but just did what He asked of them.

Our Lord knew exactly what He wanted of them, but did they know? No.

They did not have a clear understanding of what Jesus wanted of them, because this was only the beginning of their ministry as disciples and apostles. They would only start to understand who Christ really was until after the Resurrection.

Let us not forget that they were simple hard working fishermen.

Nothing in their lives had prepared them for what was to come. Nothing had prepared them for this unusual Messiah, Christ. Nothing had prepared them for the sacrifices that would be expected from them, once they obeyed Christ's request to follow Him.

They did not need to understand right now. They just had to abandon their old lives and follow Him.

This was not an easy thing to do for those four fishermen. They were asked to give up the only life they had ever known. Give up the only job that, probably like their fathers and grandfathers, they had ever had. They were asked to give up their families and friends.

And they did, so they could follow Christ as he went around teaching, preaching and healing the sick. They did as they were told and became "fishermen of men".

From the moment they decided to follow Jesus Christ, their lives were changed forever. Often, they would not know where their next meal would come from or where they would sleep.

After Christ's resurrection, they were imprisoned and persecuted, tortured, and, eventually crucified, for sharing the Gospel, the Good News that Christ had come to give new life to all of us, a new identity to us fallen sons and daughters of Adam. In fact, just like Simon and Andrew, all of the disciples except John were martyred for following Christ.

In other words, in calling them to be "fishermen of men," Christ was not calling them to a life of comfort, of power, of earthly riches, but rather, a life of self-denial, of service, of dying to

one's self — even at the cost of their earthly lives. He called them to put Christ and His Church above all things.

Fishing for men was not what the disciples did beside their main job, it became their whole lives because the love of God compelled them, motivated them, to live life for Christ God and desire that life for others above all else.

What about us? What about our calling to follow Christ?

Our lives are very different from that of the fishermen who followed Christ in the first century. In fact it couldn't be more different. And just as well. We now live in a world with proper medical care, social care, human rights, and workers' rights and so on.

We have time for hobbies and holidays. We have all kinds of gadgets to make our lives easier. We have more and more free time. But let us not forget: Idle hands are the devil's workshop.

But our modern lives are the cause of other problems. We concentrate so much on worldly things that we forget about Christ. We are too busy trying to earn enough money to pay bills, put food on the table and have enough money left for holidays, hobbies, gadgets, the latest fashion and so on.

People have so many excuses nowadays on why they cannot follow Christ. But in reality, we have much less excuses than Christ's disciples.

Why? Because we have their example and that of so many faithful who have gone before us. We have all the saints from nearly 2,000 years of Christianity to which we can turn for spiritual help, guidance and inspiration.

We seem to content ourselves with the fact that, as Orthodox Christians, we have received the fullness of God's revelation in the ongoing life of the church by the Holy Spirit. We should not be just content, or even proud about this. What we should do is to humbly accept the great responsibility given to us.

We must remember that, just like the Jews of old, it is no great thing to be a recipient of God's requirements if we are actually not going to follow those requirements.

Especially in this period of the Fast of the Apostles, we need to try and become more like those fishermen who left everything behind to follow our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

As we heard, their understanding was not perfect, and sometimes they made mistakes. But Our Lord never abandoned or rejected them, even when they abandoned Him.

What is expected of us is to respond to His calling in the best way we can. And this will be different for every person. And our Lord knows that. But this fasting period is a great time to take a moment and reflect inwardly for each of us. A time to think about how we can follow our Lord and Saviour.

Today, on this second Sunday of Pentecost, we commemorate all the Saints of Russia, Romania and Britain. As many of you know, only a couple of months ago, the Russian Orthodox Church, under Patriarch Kirill, officially adopted a number of British and Irish saints from the first millennium into its calendar.

Although to some, Orthodoxy can appear as something exotic, a purely Eastern form of Christianity, it is in fact a universal faith, with deep roots in the British Isles, which was once part of a truly “ecumenical” Christian fellowship embracing both East and West.

Among those saints who are included are Saint Alban the First Martyr, Saint Patrick of Ireland, Saint David of Wales, Saint Ninian of Whithorn, Saint Cuthbert and Saint Aidan of Lindisfarne, Saint Brigid of Kildare, Saint Hilda of Whitby and... our beloved Saint Dunstan of Canterbury.

Many of the Russian, Romanian and British saints died as martyrs trying to follow in Christ’s steps. Especially striking is the fact that during the 74 years of communist rule in the former USSR and Eastern Bloc countries, more Christians were martyred than in the whole history of Christianity. Many of them became saints.

We can see that they showed the same example of selfless service and sacrifice that we see in the Apostles who followed Christ. They risked their lives and suffered hardship to spread the Gospel and the Orthodox faith.

They put the Kingdom of God and His righteousness first. These values, to put the things of the spirit first, are the values of the Saints of God.

They are exactly the opposite of the values of modern society, which puts anti-Gospel and anti-spiritual values first. By following the Gospel, we challenge all the crudity and barbarianism of the modern world.

And spiritual values prove that the only true revolution is the revolution that occurs in individual human lives and societies as a whole, when human hearts and souls put the spiritual first.

May the Saints of Russia, Romania and Britain pray to God for us, that we may come to partake of their values and their lives. May we repent and recommit ourselves to God and follow Christ.

And soon we will all be blessed with the righteousness of God and His Kingdom. To God be the glory, now and ever, and unto ages of ages.

Amen