

Homily – February 9th, 2025 – 5th Sunday in Ordinary Time

I don't know if you guys know this, but my late mother wrote the entire Bible. That's not true, but when I read the Word of God, it often feels like it's absolutely



true. It's programmed into mothers all over the world and from the beginning of time to say, "If I told you once, I told you a thousand times."

Similarly, Scripture repeats itself in the hopes that if we

didn't get it the first 99 times, maybe a light will come on in our brains on the 100th time.

There is a repeated theme coming out of the mouth of people in today's Scripture readings. It's basically this: "I don't know why you're bothering with me, God. I'm not worthy. Pick someone else." And the response is always the same with God. It goes something like this: "You may not feel worthy, but I chose you even though you didn't choose me. There is important work to be done, so important that there is no time to argue about worthiness." Or, as the expression goes: "God doesn't choose the qualified, but qualifies those he chooses."

In the first reading, Isaiah says, "God, you don't want me. I curse and swear all day long. I've got unclean lips and I hang out with people of unclean lips." God, who is never stuck for an answer says, "No problem. I can solve that by putting a piece of hot, burning coal on your tongue. Your mother washed your tongue out with

soap; I use burning coal. Now, get out there, Isaiah, my Kingdom needs you. No more excuses.”

In the second reading, Paul says that the risen Lord appeared to more than 500 people and lastly appeared to him. Paul sees himself as unworthy because, after all, before his conversion he persecuted the Church of God. In other words, “Lord, pick one of those 500, not me. Surely, they would have much more credibility than me in proclaiming your Kingdom.” Paul started at the bottom and became the Church’s greatest missionary. He was God’s choice.

Finally, in the gospel, the same thing. Peter feels his unworthiness and says, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” I think Peter thought he was telling Jesus something Jesus didn’t already know--that he was a sinful man. We’re all sinful. And we all live by God’s choice, God’s grace. Every one of us is called. Jesus had no intention of leaving Peter and has no time for our objections either. The job of building the Kingdom of God is at hand.

During the Middle Ages, there were a bunch of “Lord Jesus and St. Peter” stories that became popular. He’s one that mimics the gospel we just heard and counters all the objections we have in our little minds of why God should choose someone else...anyone else.

Peter the Fisherman

It is known, by everyone who cares to know, that the Lord Jesus and St. Peter used to drop into the local tavern after a hard day of ministry to break bread and drink wine together.

On a certain rainy night, St. Peter turned to the Lord Jesus and grinned, "We're doing real good!"

"We?" said the Lord Jesus.

Peter was silent. "All right, you're doing real good," he finally said.

"Me?" said the Lord Jesus.

Peter pondered a second time. "All right. God's doing real good," he finally admitted.

But the Lord Jesus saw how reluctant St. Peter was to admit the source of all goodness. He laughed and hit the table with glee.

It was the laugh that got to St. Peter. He pushed his face toward Jesus and blurted out, "Look it! I was somebody before you came along. You didn't make me. I know now everybody says, 'There goes the Lord Jesus and his sidekick St. Peter. Jesus cures them and Peter picks them up.' But it wasn't always that way. People knew

me in my own right. I was respected and looked up to. They would say, 'There goes Peter, the greatest fisherman in all of Galilee.'"

"I heard that you were a very good fisherman, Peter," said the Lord Jesus who was always ready to praise.

"You're damn right I was. And tomorrow I'm going to prove it. We are going to go fishing, and you will see how the other fishermen respect me and look to my lead."

"I would love to go fishing, Peter. I have never been fishing," said the Lord Jesus who was always looking for new adventures. "But, what will we do with all the fish we are going to catch?"

"Well," Peter smiled the smile of the fox. "We'll eat a few, store the rest, wait till there is a shortage, then put them on the market at top dollar, and turn a big profit."

"Oh!" said the Lord Jesus, who had that puzzled and pained look in his face that Peter had often observed, as if something that had never crossed his mind just made a forced entry. Peter wondered how someone as obviously intelligent as Jesus could be so slow in some matters.

The next morning at dawn, the Lord Jesus and St. Peter were down at the shore readying their boat. And it was just as St. Peter had said. When the other fishermen saw St. Peter, they sidled over.

“Going out, Peter?” they asked.

“Yeah,” answered Peter, not looking up from the nets.

“Mind if we come along?”

“Why not?” shrugged Peter pretending to be bothered by them.

When they left, he glared over at the Lord Jesus and said, “See!”

St. Peter’s boat led the way. The Lord Jesus was in the prow hanging on tightly for he was deeply afraid of the water. Now St. Peter was a scientist of a fisherman. He tasted the water, scanned the sky, peered down into the lake, and gave the word in a whisper: “Over there.”

“Why isn’t anyone talking?” asked the Lord Jesus.

“Shhhh!” Peter shook his head.

The boats formed a wide circle around the area that Peter had pointed to. “Let down the nets,” Peter’s voice crept over the surface of the water.

“Why don’t they just toss them in?” asked the Lord Jesus, who had hopes of learning about fishing.

A second, "Shhhh!" came from Peter.

The fishermen let down their nets and began to pull them in. But something was wrong. The muscles of their arms did not tighten under the weight of fish. The nets rose quickly; the arms of the men were slack. All they caught was water.

The fishermen rowed their boats over to St. Peter. They were a chorus of anger. "The greatest fisherman in all of Galilee, my grandmother's bald head! You brought us all the way out here for nothing. We have wasted the best hours of the day and have not one fish to show for it. Stick to preaching, Peter!" And they rowed toward shore, shouting curses over their shoulder. The Lord Jesus said nothing.

St. Peter checked the nets. He put on a second parade, tasted the sea, scanned the sky, peering into the depths. At long last he looked at the Lord Jesus and said, "Over there!"

No sooner had he said, "Over there!" than the Lord Jesus was at the oars, rowing mightily, the muscles of his back straining with each pull.

And all day long under the searing sun the Lord Jesus and St. Peter rowed from place to place on the Sea of Galilee. And all day long under the searing sun the Lord Jesus and St. Peter let down their nets. And all day long under the searing sun the Lord Jesus and St. Peter hauled in their nets. And all day long under the searing sun the Lord Jesus and St. Peter caught nothing.

Evening fell, and an exhausted St. Peter raised the sail to make for shore. The weary Lord Jesus held on tightly in the prow.

It was then, as the boat glided toward shore, that it happened. All the fish in the Sea of Galilee came to the surface. They leapt on one side of the boat, and they leapt on the other side of the boat. They leapt behind the boat, and they leapt in front of the boat. They formed a cordon around the boat, escorting it toward shore in full fanfare.

Then in a mass suicide of fish, they began to leap into the boat. They landed on the lap of the laughing Lord Jesus. They smacked the astonished St. Peter in the face. When the boat arrived at shore, it was brimming, creaking, sinking under the weight of fish.

All the other fishermen were waiting. They gathered around Peter and smacked him on the back. "Peter, you scoundrel! You knew where the fish were all the time and never let on." They hit him on the shoulder, "Peter, you rogue. You put us on. You surely are the greatest fisherman in all of Galilee."

But St. Peter was uncharacteristically silent. He only said, "Give the fish to everyone. Tonight, no home in this village will go without food." After that, he said nothing.

But later at the tavern, with bread and wine between them, Peter looked across the table at Jesus and said, "Go away from me. You go away from me. I wanted

the fish to be over them not with them. I wanted the fish to rule them not feed them. You go away from me. I am a sinful man.”

But Jesus smiled, not the smile of the fox but the smile that swept over the waters at the dawn of time, the smile that moves the sun and the stars. And he had no intention of going away. There were other fish to catch.

Fr. Phil