

## **"The workers the Lord wants"**

Jesus has begun to draw followers, whom he will inform, and eventually transform, so they can continue his mission when he returns to his Father. Today's gospel presents a beautiful and simple picture. There is something special about a lakeside, and the presence of the odd fishing boat makes it even more attractive. By now, Jesus had begun to attract crowds, who gathered to listen to his message; and this was in the days before megaphones or public address systems! The nearest thing to a pulpit he could find was a boat, and by pulling out a bit from the shore, his voice would carry much better on the water, and give his space from the pressing crowds.

The next scenario is both simple and central. Peter was disappointed, without even one fish to show for his work, and so the scene was set for a miracle. As usual with Jesus, the outcome was abundant, "pressed down and flowing over" as with the wine at Cana, or the baskets of loaves and fish left over after everyone had been fed. Then Peter was his impulsive self and asked Jesus to leave him, because he was a sinful man. That must surely have brought a smile to the face of Christ, because it was precisely to draw such sinful people to himself that he had come. So Jesus ignored Peter's remark, and instead invited Peter and his friends to join him full-time in the mission he was undertaking. There was something magnetic about Jesus, and, immediately, they abandoned ship, and set off down the road with him.

Christianity is more about attracting others to share a vision of life than about forcing it upon them. Throughout history, we read about founders of religious communities and orders. These were people with a vision, dynamic, filled with zeal, and had a powerful sense of mission. Their enthusiasm was highly contagious! Such people always attract attention, and this leads to attracting followers. In our own time we have seen aberrations in the form of cults, based on mind control, that led hundreds to their deaths through suicide pacts. It is the duty of leaders to lead, but they should also know where they're going. Like Moses headed for the Promised Land, Jesus was totally open and definite in the direction of his life. He came to do the Father's will, and he was led by the Spirit. Thank God for the many wonderful leaders and founders with which the Lord has provided us down the centuries. Thank God, for the many such people who are alive and active among us today.

Jesus is more often shown as teaching rather than preaching. The art of teaching is to bring the learners from they already know to is yet unknown to them. Jesus speaks of fish, of sheep, of vines, of trees, of water, etc., of things well within the lived experience of his listeners. The Acts opens by telling us that Jesus came to do and to teach. A cynic once described classrooms as places where information is transferred from the teacher's notebook to the student's notebook, without passing through the heads of either! Jesus spoke and taught from the heart, and what comes from the speaker's heart always reaches the listener's heart.

The person and message of Jesus were so united that his words were inspiring and lifegiving.

Was Peter wrong to judge himself unworthy to stay with Jesus? He had not yet grasped that Jesus came to call sinners. What he should have said was, "Lord, stay with me, because I am a sinful man." Sometimes our church has not been good in welcoming sinners. Sometimes we so emphasized hell-fire and condemnation, that sinners felt they could not share the Eucharistic

table. The message often came across as “Depart from here, for you are a sinful person.” Thankfully, under Pope Francis’ leadership, we are reminded of the mind and the message of the Jesus who came to seek out sinners and bring them safely home. If he had a hundred sheep, and one went astray, he would leave the ninety-nine to go after the one that is lost. This message is central to the Year of Mercy proclaimed by the Holy Father.

Instead of asking the Lord to “DEPART FROM ME”, Peter’s prayer to Jesus could have been, “Lord, please STAY with me, BECAUSE I am a sinner. Don’t ever leave me, because, apart from you, I’m lost.” Indeed, the whole message of Jesus is to reassure sinners that he is always there for them. Peter was well aware of his brokenness, and several later episodes confirmed that fact. It is significant that Jesus made Peter head of the apostles. The principle of evangelizing is that one sinner tells another the good news, just as with Alcoholics Anonymous, where one recovering alcoholic helps another to sobriety. Many of us could come up with some instance in our lives, when, like Peter, we have tried hard and caught nothing. This could be anything from an addiction, to resentment, an inability to forgive, to a scar of mind or memory, which has never healed. This has the potential for a miracle, if I am willing to hand it over. Let go, and let God. There is nothing impossible with God.