

**Homily for the Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year C
Saint John the Evangelist Church
Carrollton, Illinois
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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is good for us to be here as we celebrate the renovation of Saint John the Evangelist Church. The renovation of a church should serve as a reminder to us that the Church is not just a building, but is the Body of Christ. As Saint Paul wrote, “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit?” (1 Corinthians 6:19). As such, we should take this opportunity to cleanse the temples of our own souls to make sure that we provide a suitable resting place for our Lord who comes to us in this Eucharist. We do this by seeking to conform our lives to the life of Christ.

One such person who truly understood this call to conform his life to that of Christ was a great model for many of us, our late Holy Father, Pope Saint John Paul the Great. Even from the very outset of his ministry that would stretch over the course of some twenty-seven years, it was evident that our Holy Father truly understood what it meant to be a successor to the apostles and a disciple of our Lord.

During the Mass for the inauguration of his pontificate, Pope John Paul II set the tone that would be at the center of his entire pontificate when he said:

Brothers and sisters, do not be afraid to welcome Christ and accept his power. Help the Pope and all those who wish to serve Christ and with Christ's power to serve the human person and the whole of mankind. Do not be afraid. Open wide the doors for Christ. To his saving power open the boundaries of States, economic and political systems, the vast fields of culture, civilization and development. Do not be afraid. Christ knows "what is in man." He alone knows it.¹

These words, "do not be afraid," echoed throughout the life of Pope Saint John Paul the Great are the same words that our Lord spoke to Saint Peter in today's Gospel passage.

Just a few moments ago, we heard Saint Luke's account of our Lord calling Peter and his fellow fishermen to follow Him. In this passage we hear that Simon Peter, James and John had fished all night, their usual way of trying to make a living. But it had not been a good night, for they had caught nothing. Perhaps this happened from time to time, or maybe it was unusual, but in either case, they must have been disappointed.

However, at the beginning of the Gospel passage we hear that

While the crowd was pressing in on Jesus and listening to the word of God, He was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret. He saw two boats there alongside the lake; the fishermen had disembarked and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, He asked him to put out a short distance from the shore. Then He sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. After He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, "Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch." Simon said in reply, "Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing, but at your command I will lower the nets."²

At that time, fishermen fished at night for two primary reasons. First, the days were scorching, and nights were cooler, so the stamina of fisherman lasted longer at night. Second, during the day the fish could see the nets and avoid them. But, at night, darkness gave an advantage to the fishermen. So, when our Lord asked Simon to put back out into deep water and lower the nets in the morning sun, he most likely thought it to be a waste of time. However, our Lord asked him to do so, and Simon did as He asked.

When they did so, Saint Luke tells us that:

They caught a great number of fish and their nets were tearing. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come to help them. They came and filled both boats so that the boats were in danger of sinking.³

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, when we hear this story, it is easy to get caught up in the excitement of what is happening. On first glance, it might even seem like the focus of this Gospel passage is the miraculous catch of fish, however, the greater miracle is Peter's response: *He fell at the knees of Jesus and said, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man."*⁴

As we reflect on these words of the Gospel, we, too, are challenged to respond as Peter did. However, the problem is that perhaps we don't want this to happen; or perhaps we don't know how to let it happen. Perhaps we fail to recognize the love that our Lord has for each one of us. Perhaps we don't know how to respond to that love with a wholehearted gift of ourselves to our Lord. It seems that, at times, we want to follow Christ, but at a comfortable distance. If we can understand this, then it is a lot easier to understand how today's Gospel passage is not only about Jesus calling

Simon Peter, but also about Jesus calling us to follow Him as His disciples in the midst of the world today.

At the conclusion of our Gospel passage today, when our Lord tells the disciples, *do not be afraid*, He immediately adds the words, *from now on you will be fishers of men*. It is not a coincidence that Jesus said these two sentences together. For our Lord knew the persecution that the disciples would endure because of their vocation. He also knew that the opposition they would face because of Him would at times be frightening.

Even today, being a follower of Christ is not easy and at times it means to be led into some very frightening situations. But to be a follower of Jesus also means coming before Him in humility, and like Simon Peter, kneeling down and saying, Lord, *I am a sinful man*, and then begging Him for the grace to take steps forward in our spiritual lives, no matter where He leads.

So, as we prepare to approach our Eucharistic Lord in Holy Communion. Let us take a moment to reflect on the words of our Lord from our Gospel today, as well as those of Pope Saint John Paul the Great, *Do not be afraid*. In turn let us open wide the doors of our hearts to Christ

so that we might be transformed and live each day of our lives as His intentional disciples.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Saint John Paul II, *Homily of His Holiness John Paul II for the Inauguration of His Pontificate*, 22 October 1978.

² Luke 5: 1-5

³ Luke 5: 6&7

⁴ Luke 5:8