

THEY LEFT EVERYTHING AND FOLLOWED HIM - Biblical commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

Luke 5,1-11

While the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennes'aret. And he saw two boats by the lake; but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. And when he had ceased speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." And when they had done this, they enclosed a great shoal of fish; and as their nets were breaking, they beckoned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the catch of fish which they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zeb'edee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men."

And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

According to the prophet Ezekiel, an abundant catch was a sign of the divine benediction. In chapter 47 he imagines these fishermen that had an abundant catch and this is for the water that comes from the temple in Jerusalem. Well, the evangelist Luke in his gospel in chapter 5 presents us with an abundant catch not for the water that came from the temple, but for the word of Jesus.

Let's read what Luke writes for us. "*While the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God,*" - so Jesus manifests God's word. Here there is a sudden strange change of scene, because we had left Jesus in Judea. The evangelist had ended chapter 4 with "*And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea.*" (Luke 4, 44) "*...Jesus was standing by the lake of Gennes'aret..* So we are immediately projected into Galilee..... "*And he saw two boats by the lake; but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets.*" Many times in this gospel, we find this allusion to fishermen, quoting from the prophet Ezekiel with the abundant catch.

“Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon’s,” Jesus already knows Simon because he had cured his mother-in-law, *“... he asked him to put out a little from the land And he sat down.. “* the position of the teacher *“.. and taught the people from the boat”.*

“And when he had ceased speaking, he said to Simon,....” Here it is strange because Jesus is from the country, inland, who dares to give lessons of fishing to a fisherman who has spent all his life doing the job. He says to Simon: *“Put out into the deep.. “* (the deepest part) *“..and let down your nets for a catch.”* Well Simon accepts. *“And Simon answered, “Master, (Literally “head,” he has a hierarchical relationship with Jesus), “.. we toiled all night,,”* so despite the favourable time for fishing ... the time does not refer to the day because the favourable time is the night.... *“... and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets.”*

Remember that the evangelist had presented the word as “the word of God”. So Simone trusts him, and accepts this challenge.

“And when they had done this, they enclosed a great shoal of fish;” The evangelist does not want to tell us only an episode of news, but a theological reflection, The word here is translated with “great” meaning literally “multitude” and indicates the primitive Christian community. Therefore, following the word of the Lord, an invitation to cast the nets towards the immigrants, the excluded, it is there that the catch will be abundant. *“..and as their nets were breaking, they beckoned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink.”*

Luke the evangelist is the one that has written that nothing is impossible for God. Therefore, after a fruitless night, to go fishing in the daytime is impossible. Yet, on welcoming God’s word that which was impossible becomes reality. *“But when Simon Peter saw it,.. “* And here the evangelist add Simon’s negative name to indicate his stubbornness and toughness like a stone “Pietra” Peter. *“...he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Depart from me,.. “* (literally “get out “, he almost feels possessed by him) *“..of me for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”*

Here Simon is in contradiction with Jesus, who had said to have come to call the fishermen, he actually almost refuses him.

“For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the catch of fish (the evangelist emphasis this) which they had taken; and so were James and John, sons of Zeb’edee, who were partners with Simon.” Here is the novelty brought by Jesus *“And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid;”* Jesus is not interested if they are fishermen or not, that which regards his relationship with God, his past. He is interested in his relationship with mankind, the future.

“And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; henceforth ...” therefore he looks to the future not that which is the present - *“..you will be catching men.”*

Peter had said, “depart from me”, leave me because I am a fisherman, emphasizing the relationship with God. Jesus invites him to a relationship with the people. *“..catching men.”* The evangelist is literally saying “catch the living”. What does this mean? We know that catching a fish means to take it out of its

vital habitat to go toward death. Catching a man that is in the water, to the contrary, means to take him from that which can bring death and take him to a vital habitat.

So, Jesus' invitation to Simon is this: take man from the habitat of death where he is t at risk to drown and die.

"And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him." The beginning of a community around Jesus, not a community of shepherds, Jesus does not invite to be shepherds, but a community of men, that communicate life towards those in need.