

Date: October 10, 2020

Subject: 18th Sunday after the Pentecost

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Greetings once again from the autumn wonderland where I now reside.

LUKE 5: 1-11

And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret,

And saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets.

And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship.

Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.

And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.

And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake.

And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink.

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 draught of the fishes which they had taken:

And so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.

And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him.

The very first words of this Gospel passage should give us pause. Upon reading them, we should stop and seriously think about how significant and important they are to each one of us personally. We read about people **pressing upon the Savior**, in order to not miss a single word that He was saying. And this is not the only mention of such devotion in the Gospel. In fact, there are repeated instances of people listening to Him for the entire day or even days, and without eating. Two such instances are when he fed the five thousand with five loaves of bread, or the time He fed the four thousand with seven loaves after they had remained with Him for three days.

The reason I said that we should stop to think is that this should move us to examine ourselves. How deep is our devotion to the words of the Savior? How much time and effort do we devote to the reading and study of these salvific Words? Do we come anywhere near the devotion that the simple Hebrew people had? An honest answer would probably be, not very much.

Why then are we so lax in the activity which is vital for us in order to achieve what the Savior described to Martha as *the one thing that is needed* for our salvation? We certainly cannot justify ourselves, seeing how earnest Jesus is in trying to get everyone to hear Him. *He entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And He sat down, and taught the people out of the ship.* Unable to reach everyone while standing on the shore, He moves into a place from which all will be able to hear Him. This is how much the Savior desires and tries to get our attention.

Are we lax because His Word is hard to find or obtain? An honest answer is no. It is readily available in printed form and can be bought in most book stores. There is very easy access to it on the internet. It has also been recorded on compact discs. There exist no difficulties that could prevent someone from obtaining it.

Could it be because we are overwhelmed by the great amount of material that we need to go through? Where do we start, and how do we organize our reading or listening? Again, we cannot claim this because, for starters, the Church organizes it for us with readings presented in small sections day by day throughout the year. Many churches offer Bible study meetings that we can find and attend. Sermons are given during Sundays and holidays on the Gospel reading on that day. These three sources alone can help us overcome these difficulties.

Some people claim that they started reading but found the material too difficult to understand or even worse, too boring. These claims again are not valid. There are many church-approved Scriptural commentaries readily available that will explain in laymen terms what the Scriptures are teaching. And considering how vital this information is, it being boring does not justify dropping our effort. In fact, it may be boring at first but as we persevere, God, seeing our sincerity, will strengthen us with His Grace. The reading then will become much easier to understand and even very interesting.

What we have to admit is that our conscience, if we listen to it, will not allow us to make these claims and will convince us to accept one crucial fact. The above are only excuses and not the reason why we are so lax. Neither is our being too busy with the needs of our daily life to find time for this activity. If we try that excuse, our Savior will remind us that God already resolved that difficulty by organizing our time for us. He gives us six days a week to tend to all of these needs. And He asks us to give Him only one day a week to devote our time and thoughts to Him and His word. In other words, He allows us to expend six of the seven days on what should be secondary in importance and asks for only one day for us to devote to Him and to what should be the most important concern to us.

Well then, what is the true reason that we are so lax? It is because our hearts have grown cold. Therefore, we ignore the first of the Ten Commandments given by God all the way back in the Old Testament: *Thou shalt have no other gods before me.* Without realizing it, we may be abandoning the True God and replacing Him with another god, our earthly life.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, the Savior very much wants to save us. But He cannot do it without our consent and effort. This requires us to study the Scriptures and then live according to them. As He confirms: *blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.*

To *keep it*, which means to live according to His teachings, can only be done if we know what they are. Therefore, we must make an effort to read and study them continually, because each time that we read them, we will understand them better and better. Therefore, let us not delay, but immediately make this our first and foremost duty in our daily life. Our salvation depends on it.

With Much Love in Christ,
Archpriest Serge Kotar`