

Date: October 9, 2021

Subject: 16th Sunday After Pentecost

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Autumn is in full bloom here. What amazing beauty God gifts us with in His creation of our world.

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.

When we read or hear this and all Gospel passages, we should look more deeply into Christ's mysterious words because hidden there are important messages that can benefit us greatly in our quest for salvation. Let us look at four such examples.

THE NEED TO ALWAYS PRAY.

And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing.

By their profession, the apostles were fishermen. The Savior came to them at a time when they had spent a whole night at their work and caught nothing. Depending solely on their own knowledge and experience, without praying ahead of time, their efforts proved to be in vain. The Savior uses this failure to teach a very important lesson on the importance of prayer. The Savior tells Peter to make another attempt. This attempt, because it, unlike previous efforts, had God's involvement in it, produced a catch bigger than they ever had before.

Most of the time, we too, depend on our own strengths, knowledge, and experience when beginning any task. We forget that everything we have, up to and including the very air that we breath, is a gift from the Lord. At times, through God's mercy, we succeed in some measure. But often, even these successes are short-lived and incomplete. But if we do all of our tasks, even the most minor ones, together with God's participation, we are assured that the results will be what is most needful and appropriate for us in our present life, and especially for our salvation.

OBEDIENCE

Nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.

Peter was an experienced fisherman. He knew that best success when fishing is achieved when the work is done at night. Daytime fishing was the least appropriate time. But hearing the Lord's teaching, he was so profoundly touched, that he submitted in **OBEDIENCE** to the Savior's instruction. For this, he was rewarded with success beyond anything that he could have expected.

Obedience is an essential, but a difficult, virtue. Without it, however, we cannot be saved. God's teachings are often not understood or accepted by worldly people. Because of this, they often will deride and mock them. Therefore, we must firmly believe in the Savior to be able to obey Him despite the ridicule, mocking, and even persecution that a faithful person must endure at times for his obedience.

But God always rewards obedience to Him. It could be a small reward. Or it could be a very large one. We see vivid proof of this in the decision made by the apostles. When Jesus calls them to work for Him in His Mission, *they forsook all, and followed him*. They then remained faithful to Him even when they had to face great suffering, persecution, and even death. They were rewarded for their obedience with great sanctity, becoming the means by which Christ's teachings overcame the world. The Church that they built will be eternal, a Church through which we are able to strive successfully for our Salvation.

HUMILITY.

Peter's obedience to the Savior also reveals this vital virtue which guarantees salvation to those who possess it. He submits to the Savior's instruction, not yet being aware of who Jesus really was. He submits, despite knowing that chances for success were minimal. He and the others fished in vain during the most appropriate time. Now Jesus was telling him to fish at the worst time. He humbled himself and submitted to the Savior's seemingly foolish instruction.

A truly humble person realizes and accepts his human weaknesses. He places no hope in his own self to be able to become God-like, everyone's goal in earthly life. He accepts that, without God, he is nothing and is doomed. Scripture confirms that truth, that without Grace, we are doomed eternally.

FEAR OF GOD.

When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.

Another very important spiritual lesson is given to us by Apostle Peter. He teaches us how to correctly fear God. We see in the Gospel another instance when people out of fear, asked the Savior to leave. We also see an instance when the Samaritans denied the Savior passage through their village. Those two instances, however, are very different from what happened with Apostle Peter. The Gadarenes feared not so much the Savior as the threat that they perceived that He posed to their immoral source of revenue, the raising of pigs. The Samaritans rejected Jesus not so much out of fear of the Savior, but for political reasons.

Peter, on the other hand, did not fear the Savior as a threat to himself. Instead, the Savior's miracle made such a profound impression on his soul that he, realizing who Jesus was, understood that he, a sinful man, was unworthy to be in His presence. But Jesus, seeing Peter's and his partners' humility, acknowledged that they were now spiritually ready and called them to begin their apostolic service in His divine Mission.

Fear of God is something that is often misunderstood by people. Divine revelation states that God is a loving and merciful God. But many people see Him as a stern God, who is always ready to punish sinners. They imagine Him to be constantly watching people with a thunderbolt in His hand, ready to instantly hurl it at sinners whenever they transgress, even in a small way, against His commandments.

The manner in which Jesus reacted to Peter's exclamation reveals, however, the true way that God treats sinners. Out of mercy, He does everything possible to bring the sinner to a realization of his true spiritual condition. If the sinner shows repentance, He blesses him with His love and mercy. This is the way that Jesus treated Peter. He did not leave him, upon hearing his exclamation, but brings him even closer to Himself by calling him to be His apostle.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it should be of great comfort and encouragement to us to see the love and mercy that God has for people. Yes, he does require a lot from us. As He warns; *The Kingdom of God is taken by force*. But, if we submit to Him and follow His commandments, we are gifted with a gift that surpasses any gift that we can possibly receive. He gifts us with a most blessed eternity together with Him in His divine Kingdom.

With Much Love in Christ,
Archpriest Serge Kotar