



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year C

Duc in altum

Readings: Isaiah 6:1-8, Ps 137, 1 Corinthians 15:1-11, Luke 5:1-11

At the turn of the Millennium Saint John-Paul II delivered an exhortation based on today's Gospel: '*Duc in altum*', launch out into the deep. Jesus was commanding his weary and unsuccessful disciples to go fishing, to go back where they had so recently and spectacularly failed. It will become a metaphor for mission. Where the disciples have so recently and spectacularly failed in their own strength and wisdom, Christ commands them to return, under His authority, and try again.

Saint John-Paul II knew that, although he was addressing the universal Church, the Europe in which he lived and which had once been the heart of Christendom, was long turned from its faith, its churches shrivelled, its best efforts defeated. Many had turned their back on the fishing expedition, the mission, altogether and found hermeneutical excuses for avoiding the fundamental task of the Church, that is to bring men and women to Jesus.

So '*Duc in altum*' is a challenge. The same Lord commands, through His successive Vicars on earth, this next generation of disciples to put out into the deep. Weary we may be. Obedient we must be. Hopeful and faithful

we return to the task. Nothing will be achieved in our own strength and cleverness.

All three readings today point to the inadequacy of man and the sovereignty of God.

The Epistle on the certainty of the Resurrection in Christ comes from a man who was humiliated on the Damascus Road, cast to the floor before the blinding light of Christ, led by the hand, shown his foolish arrogance and restored by God's compassion and grace to become what the old missal calls, 'The Teacher of the World', the greatest evangelist in history. Paul, the little Apostle, the least, after his encounter, lives no longer in the certainty of his own religious rectitude but in the revealed and abundant mercy of God. He walks into strange cities and confronts the world with the Gospel of Jesus.

In the Old Testament we see one of the great epiphanies. The prophet Isaiah is confronted in the Temple by the glory of God. It is an overwhelming vision of the power and majesty of the Almighty and Isaiah, fearing for his life, acknowledges his own unworthiness and is cleansed by the purifying fire of the altar of revelation and called to be a messenger to God's people. We still sing the song he heard the angels sing every time we offer Mass. (Sanctus)

In the Gospel Peter too is driven to his knees by what he encounters in Christ Jesus. It is then that he is finally called.

In all these accounts the great servants of God, the heroes of the Faith, begin their ministry, humbled, penitent, aware of their own utter

inadequacy and unworthiness and their complete dependence on the power of God. It is where every fruitful servant of God begins. It is a truth he must never forget.

It is the message of the prophet Zechariah, 'Not by power, not by might but by my Spirit says the Lord of Hosts'.

This truth does not just apply to the great heroes and heroines of the Faith. It is just as true for me and you today as it was then and as it will be for the generations that follow us.

Our temptation is to say that we did try a bit of fishing but we caught nothing and it doesn't matter what the Lord says we're not going to go out there again and make a fools of ourselves. God knows the heart of our decadent culture is hardened. He knew that the hearts of the Egyptians were hardened when He sent Moses to liberate the People of God. God knows there is a widespread rejection of the Gospel in our land – sometimes, shamefully, even in our churches. He knew the habits of Imperial Rome when He sent Paul into its midst and establish the Catholic Church in the very heart of the darkness. God knows that the people of Bodmin and Truro and St. Austell and Penzance and Falmouth and Liskeard and Newquay and Launceston and Camborne are largely indifferent to His Word, to His Love, to His longing for their salvation, to the Sacrifice of His only-begotten Son to take away the sins of the world and reconcile mortal man with his eternal destiny. He knows most have never heard it.

That is why He is sending you and me.

He knows we are unworthy and inadequate before we say a word. But that is not an excuse. Once we realise that the work is God's we need have no

fear of failure. Once we begin with a glimpse of His glory and our need for His purifying love, our hearts will be in the right place to serve Him.

Once we kneel before Jesus and listen to His call and are obedient to it, we need fear nothing and nobody. True, we may endure a little ridicule but Isaiah was sawn asunder by an apostate king. Peter was crucified on Vatican Hill, Paul was beheaded at Tre Fontane. A little ridicule or personal embarrassment hardly qualifies as martyrdom.

Kneel before His glory. Repent of your sins. Commit your life to Him. So the words of Jesus and of our beloved St. John Paul II ring out still: '*Duc in altum*' - launch out into the deep.

He will make you fishers of men.

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