

Saturday evening: Closing Mass for Diocesan Confirmation Retreat at Gull Lake Ministries----  
106 Candidates, Gr. 7-10

**February 10, 2019 Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

You all have had a long, and I hope enriching, retreat day here together, and now we conclude this day in the best way possible, through the Celebration of Holy Mass for this 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time. I was so thrilled to hear your responses earlier to what you thought were some of the highlights of this day of prayer, including being able to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the time of Eucharistic Adoration that you experienced, and having the chance to be with more than 100 other young people just like you. That's great, and with all that in mind, we give thanks to God for all the graces you've received in this celebration of Jesus' Presence here with us in the Word of God we've just heard, and the Eucharist that very soon we will all receive.

Today's Gospel is a really beautiful account of the very early days of Jesus' ministry, before He had any followers at all. This Gospel passage is from the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of St. Luke's Gospel, and Jesus had only just begun His public ministry. He was traveling around by Himself, teaching God's Word, and He was just beginning to attract attention. He had what we might call "admirers", people who would be attracted to what He was saying/teaching, but that was the extent of it. No one had yet become a "disciple". And what is a disciple? It is a person who chooses to follow Jesus---who chooses to allow Jesus' Word to influence his/her life and cause him/her to live according to Jesus' teaching.

Let's think for a moment about swimming. I'm sure many of you enjoy swimming. Before you could be a swimmer, you had to learn, and you probably began way back in your young lives in the "baby pool". And then, when you got a bit older, perhaps you could move out of the baby pool, but only if you were wearing "swimmies", right? As you gained confidence, and skills, you no longer needed to rely on the "swimmies" and you could swim on your own in the deeper end of the pool, right?

Let's think for a moment about another activity---I'm sure many of you enjoy fishing. Once you learn to fish, you can move away from casting your lines from the shore line; you can go after the big fish, which of course live in the deeper waters.

Now, let's think again about today's Gospel passage. Jesus is teaching the crowds, and Simon (Peter) is minding his own business; literally, he was taking care of drying his nets after a long night of unsuccessful fishing, and he was longing to just go home and get some rest. As Jesus continued to teach, the crowd began to grow. And so Jesus just got into Simon/Peter's boat, and asked him to take Him a short distance off the shore so He could have a better vantage point to teach and the growing crowd could see Him better. Peter reluctantly agreed to do so.

But then, when Jesus finished teaching, instead of going back in, Jesus asked Peter: *"Put out into the deep water and lower your nets for a catch."* Imagine that: a young carpenter telling a seasoned fisherman how to fish!? Simon/Peter tried to reason with Him.....*"we have worked hard all night (when the fish are actually 'biting' and have caught nothing)----but (even though this is silly since it's in the heat of the day) at Your command I will lower the nets."* Of course, we know what happened! They caught such a huge number of fish that Peter had to call his partners, James and John, and they filled up both boats with fish to the point that the

boats were nearly sinking. And that's when Simon/Peter realized that Jesus was indeed someone very special---very holy, and so he said: "*Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!*" And that of course, reminds us of what we heard in today's first Reading, when Isaiah, after seeing the Angels of the Lord and being touched by God's Word, said: "*Woe is me, I am doomed! I am a man of unclean lips living among a people of unclean lips, yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.*"

For some reason, when we realize we are in the Presence of God, we come to realize how unworthy we are. And yet, God wants us to not move away from us; He wants us to draw closer to Him, because God loves us unconditionally. And that is why Jesus said to Peter: "*Do not be afraid! From now on, (you won't be a fisherman), you will be a fisher of men/people.*"

And the Gospel passage concludes by St. Luke telling us that when they returned to the shore, Simon/Peter, Andrew, James and John: "*They left everything and followed Him*".

Jesus now had more than "admirers"; He had His first "followers", that is, "disciples".

So, here you all are preparing to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation sometime in the near future. Perhaps it would be good to ask yourselves a couple questions in light of this Gospel passage: how does this Gospel apply to where you all are in your lives? Are you still in the "baby pool" of your faith life? Are you still "fishing from the shore line"? Are you ready to respond to Jesus' invitation to "*put out into deeper waters*"? Your Confirmation preparations is a lot like the swimming instructions to move away from the baby pool, and to put aside the "swimmies", so you can tread water, and be a swimmer in spite of the dangers. The dangers in the "deep end of the pool", in the world in which we all live, are real. But we hear Jesus say to us what He said to Peter: "Do not be afraid!"

Just like we heard about Isaiah in today's First Reading, like him, and as is the case at any time of human history, we live in a world that is full of sin and where there is a tendency to ignore the ways of God. And so, just like Isaiah, we too have to make choices about whether we will live according to God's ways or follow the ways of the rest of the world. Isaiah decided to follow God, and even more; he wanted to be God's instrument, and so when God asked: "*Who will go for us; Who can I send?*", Isaiah pleaded: "*Here I am----send me!*"

In a similar way in today's Second Reading, we heard St. Paul talk about his own conversion, instantly turning from being a vicious persecutor of the faith to one of the greatest preachers and promoters of the faith in our tradition. And he spent his entire life sharing that experience and encouraging others to do the same. He handed on what he had received in all the articles of our Creed that we will profess together in just a few moments; that: Jesus died for our sins, Jesus rose from the dead, Jesus lives, and Jesus calls us to follow Him. And that is why St. Paul was able to say in all humility: "*By the grace of God, I am what I am.*"

Your Confirmation preparation is getting you ready to live the rest of your lives in "the deep end of the pool". That's where there certainly are dangers; but that's also where the "big fish" live, and where are the wonderful opportunities to serve God and be faithful disciples of Jesus are.

Just like God had a plan for Isaiah, and St. Paul, and Peter, Andrew, James and John, God has a plan for each and every one of you. Your basic vocation in life is to follow Jesus and to live lives of holiness. That is what being baptized into Christ is all about. After you receive the sacrament of confirmation, that basic vocation is raised up a notch or two from being a follower, to being a disciple, to being one who gives witness to others of who you are, what you believe,

and what you stand for. That's not an easy thing to do in the "deep end of the pool", in the midst of all the dangers and challenges that you will certainly face. That's why we need the power of the Holy Spirit, and all the Gifts of the Holy Spirit which He will bring to you, and which will help you to keep from drowning in the deep end of the pool. And that power of the Holy Spirit will help you at this time in your life, and throughout the remainder of your life as well.

Whatever your chosen vocation will be, what Jesus ultimately calls you, and all of us, to be is a saint. Remember, Jesus continually says to you: "*Do not be afraid!*" Don't worry about whether you catch a boat load of fish; just concentrate on living joyful, faithful and holy lives in this world, and eventually, living forever with God in Heaven. Amen!