



10 February 2019, 9.15 a.m. | 5th Sunday Year C

Isaiah 6:1-8 | Psalm 138:1-3, 4-5, 7-8 | 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 |

Luke 5:1-11

JESUS IN THE BOAT OF THE CHURCH / LAY LEADERSHIP

Introduction

My dear sisters and brothers, we celebrate today a thanksgiving day for the members of the various groups that serve in the pastoral care of the parish, beginning with the parish pastoral council members who came in the entrance procession, and besides them, there are other members of many different organisations of the parish. Without their collaboration, our work in the parish would be futile. And so, we meet together to thank them for their service to the local church, and we pray that God bless them so that they may continue in their work and be strengthened to serve the church in different ways.

Homily

My dear sisters and brothers, I'd like to begin with two explanations that are necessary to understand the message of the gospel of today. One is about the Sea of Galilee and the other is about the boat of Peter. These are both very symbolic and significant in order to understand today's gospel.

The Sea of Galilee is called a 'sea', not because it is an open sea, but because it is such a huge lake that it is referred to as a sea. It is very strategic geographical experience to understand its background. It is something very phenomenal – it is the lowest lake in the world, seven hundred feet below sea level. It is also huge – the distance from the north to the south of this lake is twelve miles. At its deepest point, it is about two hundred feet deep. From this, we get an understanding of the vastness of the Sea of Galilee. It is surrounded by hills, including the well-known Golan Heights. From these hills and from the valleys between them, the wind blows strong and cool. But over the Sea of Galilee is a sheet of very warm air. And when the cool breeze blows in from the hills, especially from the East, it collides with the warm air over the lake, causing great and sudden storms. Even the fishermen are cautious when they go fishing because they are afraid of these violent storms. This is the geographical setting of the Sea of Galilee.

The people of Israel—the Semitic people—are the people of the land, and they always feared the waters. In the scriptures, right from the Old Testament, and later, in the New Testament, the waters are often associated with danger and destruction. Beginning with the Book of Genesis, in which we read the story of Noah, it is the waters that destroy the earth – that cause, in a certain sense, the end of the world at that time. Psalm 74 speaks about the monsters that emerge from the waters. The Book of Revelation, Chapter 13, speaks about the beasts, the evil spirits, which come from the sea. And so the waters were not a very comfortable place for the disciples to be in.

Now we look at the boat of Peter into which Jesus steps. It is also very symbolic and significant. During the time of persecution, the early Christians used clandestine symbols to identify themselves, such as a fish and a boat. The mast of a boat formed a cross, which symbolised the Church. The early Church was referred to as the boat of Jesus – a boat which Jesus entered and was present. And so, while the waters are considered dangerous and evil, the boat, that is the Church, is a place of safety and security.

The gospel of today begins with the people enjoying Jesus' preaching. At a certain moment, after he has finished teaching, he gets into one of the two boats that were there by the Sea of Galilee. I'm sure Jesus did not pick a boat at random. He got into Peter's boat. In the eleven verses that comprise today's gospel, Peter's name is mentioned six times. This tells us that Peter is being chosen as a leader in the Church.

Today, we celebrate Associations' Day, when we have identified about 250 leaders in the parish. I think all of us, priests and lay leaders, tend to feel inadequate at times. The gospel ends with Peter himself saying to Jesus: I am a sinner. I don't have the courage to stand in front of you because you are so holy. And yet, Jesus chooses him to be a leader of the Church. I'm sure all our lay leaders also at some point feel that they are not good

enough, and maybe God could choose someone else. God chooses **you**, just as Jesus chose to enter the boat of Peter.

Another important point that we notice is that Jesus enters the boat. He could have chosen a strategic position on land, but he chooses a boat – to tell us that he has made a choice to be part of the Church, part of the life of the Church, and part of the lives of the members of the Church – forever. ‘I will be with you till the end of time’. Jesus has assured his presence to the Church. As members of the Church, we too experience the safety assured by Christ’s presence in the boat. This assurance is also given to all our lay leaders and association members. We are not part of a club, but of the Church, in which Jesus has entered and is always present.

Jesus tells Peter to take the boat and go into the deep – to take a risk of going into dangerous waters. This is what Jesus also asks of the Church: not to be timid, not to be afraid or cowardly, but to take a risk and go into dangerous territories. We have seen how the Sea of Galilee experiences sudden storms. As lay leaders and members of the Church, we too are called into the storms of life, and not to remain in shallow waters. We are called to be courageous and go beyond our comfort zones. I know that in one of our Small Christian Communities, the members chose to go out into the streets and help the poor and the beggars on the footpaths, rather than make a regular visit to an orphanage or aged home. Yes, the Church is called to constantly go into deep and dangerous waters.

The gospel says that Peter says to Jesus, ‘We have toiled the whole night and have caught nothing’. Jesus replies, ‘Put out your nets again’. They caught nothing because they were doing it by themselves. Now Jesus says: Do it with me, with my instructions. And they are productive – they catch such a huge haul of fish that they cannot pull the nets into the boat. So they look around and ask the other fishermen, other collaborators, to come and help them with their catch of fish.

This is also what we experience in the Church. Lay collaborators are people who are ready to work in a team. Sometimes we meet a Christian who says, ‘I don’t like to interfere with the church. I come for the sacraments and I go back peacefully and live my own life. I like my private Christianity’. Jesus invites **collaborative Christians**. Our lay leaders are called to be such collaborative Christians. They need to work with people who are not always cooperative, but they have the strength to continue. Jesus says: When you toil with me, I will make your work fruitful. And so, if any of you lay leaders are getting tired and thinking of giving up, know that the Lord says to you: Don’t give up. I am there with you and your toils will always bear fruit.

Let us, with this beautiful message of today’s gospel, continue to work in the Church, to work for the Church and to work with each other in the Church so that God’s kingdom may come on earth – a kingdom of peace, love and joy. Amen.

The Lord’s Prayer

I’d like to invite the Parish Council members to the altar, and to join hands as we pray the Lord’s Prayer. They represent all the lay leaders who are collaborators in the work of our parish of St. Pius the Tenth. All of us are called to some form of leadership, either in our homes, at our workplaces, or in other aspects of our lives, and so together we pray to our Heavenly Father: Our Father...



Fr Cleophas Fernandes
Parish Priest, St. Pius X Church