

Friday of the Octave of Easter

April 29, 2011

Fr. Joe Bambenek

Our Lady of Guadalupe Church/National Shrine of St. Jude, Chicago, IL

Acts 4:1-12

Psalm 118

John 21:1-14

*Text in light blue font omitted from preached homily for brevity.*

*“Cast the net over the right side of the boat and you will find something.” So they cast it, and were not able to pull it in because of the number of fish.”*

As we sit in this lovely, church just a few blocks from Lake Michigan, we hear a story that occurs on a large body of water in today’s gospel; an event from which a handful of Jesus’ Apostles, and for that matter all of us, are to learn an important lesson: that Jesus is a fisherman who can be trusted; one who will give us far greater catches in our lives if we but listen to His voice not our own.

In today’s gospel reading we hear that this subset of the Apostles, led on an adventure by Peter, a fisherman by trade, had been laboring at their nets all night on the Sea of Tiberias to no avail. Then, as the morning dawned, Jesus our true light, entered the scene, and gave them some advice. Although He was not a fisherman by trade, they listened to Him; and they were rewarded with a greater catch than they could handle.

In our lives more generally, and in our lives as Christians, we can be tempted to think that we know what is best for our lives. But God wants us to turn to Him for guidance: guidance in all aspects of our lives, even in those areas in which we might not initially think Him to be an expert: whether they be big such as our career and things like to whom we should marry, or even more seemingly trivial. He especially desires that we follow His guidance on how each one of us is to be a fisher of men as Christians; of how we can live out the responsibility that each of us have as Christians to proclaim His Word in the world, so that He will yield a new and abundant catch of followers.

How do we do this? We are getting a good start on it by coming here to Mass on a Friday morning: by coming here to pray, to be in relationship with Him, to listen to His voice. By coming here to encounter Jesus in the Word of God proclaimed and preached. By coming here to encounter Jesus in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. By coming here to encounter Jesus present wherever two or more are gathered in His name. By coming to this particular church, this special shrine, to recognize the reality and power of the communion of saints that continues over the threshold of death, to recognize St. Jude and his closeness with God and his special gift of intercession with God. As we do all of this, we must first be sensitive to listening to hear God’s voice, to recognizing when it is the Lord speaking to us... even when He might speak to us and ask us to do something counter to our own desires, such as casting on the other side (although He will never ask us to do something counter to His Word).

But there is one more step, we must not only hear and recognize His voice, we must leave here, and leave whatever encounter we have with God for that matter, and live out in our lives the instructions that we hear. That can be an even bigger struggle than the first. For it is difficult to surrender our lives to His will. So often we are comfortable with our ways; for our ways might even be intrinsically good, or at least not sinful, yet they may not be God’s ways. We can

be comfortable with our judgments on how to do things. Yet, when we find it hard to surrender to God's promptings, we must ask ourselves, how much fruit has my way born in the lives of others; and in my life?

As mentioned at the start of Mass, my name is Fr. Joe Bambenek and I am a newly ordained priest of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis. **In fact I was ordained 11 months ago this morning.** One of the traditions of being a new priest is that during our first year of priesthood we are able to go back to places that have been important on our journey to the priesthood to celebrate a Mass of Thanksgiving. Which is why I am here this morning. As I grew in my Catholic faith, St. Jude was one of the first saints to whom I developed a devotion. Encouraged by a friend, as a college student, I began praying the St. Jude novenas of this shrine which I learned about in the mail as a very small benefactor of the shrine. This morning as I was driving here to the Shrine, on a morning when there was not a cloud in the sky. I thought back to September 11<sup>th</sup> (2001), another day when there was not a cloud in the Chicago sky, and I was on a business trip here. Not knowing what quite to do on that day when the world as we knew it changed, I decided that perhaps the best thing I could do was to pay a visit to this shrine dedicated to helping hopeless causes. Since then, I have stopped by the Shrine on a number of occasions as I have passed through the Windy City, several of which were road trip pilgrimages with then-fellow seminarians. So I come here today for the first time as an ordained priest to say thank you to the Shrine and to the parish which hosts it for being a place of refuge and hope for many, including myself on our day of national tragedy. I also come here to say thank you to St. Jude for the ways he has interceded in my life. Including, undoubtedly, the role of his intercession in opening my mind and heart to realize, or at least realize and live more than I used to, that the best and most fruitful way for me to be a Christian is to try and do it God's way, under His guidance, rather than by me doing what I think is best, for living out that lesson, that surrender, was a challenge for me on my very long journey to the priesthood, and it remains a daily challenge for me.

As we continue this celebration of the Eucharist, as we prepare to encounter and be fed by the same Jesus who encountered and fed the Apostles, and then leave this lovely church shrine to continue on with our day... whether it be a day of work, of retirement or of pilgrimage... may we leave here as people of resurrection hope and joy; may we leave as disciples who are fishermen of souls, disciples who trust that God knows better than we do how to fish. May we live out our lives so that we might be like the Apostles who heard and followed the voice of Jesus to great profit:

*“Cast the net over the right side of the boat and you will find something.” So they cast it, and were not able to pull it in because of the number of fish.*