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By your word...

Lk 5:1-11

*'Now it happened that he was standing one day by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the crowd pressing round him listening to the word of God, when he caught sight of two boats at the water's edge. The fishermen had got out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats - it was Simon's - and asked him to put out a little from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking he said to Simon, 'Put out into deep water and pay out your nets for a catch.' Simon replied, 'Master, we worked hard all night long and caught nothing, but if you say so, I will pay out the nets.' And when they had done this they netted such a huge number of fish that their nets began to tear, so they signalled to their companions in the other boat to come and help them; when these came, they filled both boats to sinking point. When Simon Peter saw this he fell at the knees of Jesus saying, 'Leave me, Lord; I am a sinful man.' For he and all his companions were completely awestruck at the catch they had made; so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were Simon's partners. But Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid; from now on it is people you will be catching. Then, bringing their boats back to land they left everything and followed him.'*

Such was the astonishment and the shock of the disciples at the unexpected abundance of the catch that Peter did not feel worthy to be in Jesus' presence. And, indeed, we ourselves are not worthy by ourselves to live in communion with Jesus, the Son of God. At Holy Mass we confess it every day: "Lord, I am not worthy that you enter under my roof..." And it is true! If we contemplate the holiness of God and, at the same time, see our limitation and sinfulness, we can only arrive at the same result. It is good that we frequently remind ourselves of our unworthiness, lest we fall into pride or even boast of the gifts God may have given us. However, this reality is only one side of the page...

The other reality is that God loves us, and in His love He makes us worthy to receive Him. He looks at us with eyes of love, and in this look He wants to awaken us to be what we in fact are: children of God, created in His image. He wants to free us from all that binds and enslaves us, so that we can breathe freely and become aware of our dignity as persons and as Christians. If we always keep in mind that this dignity is a gift from God, we will not exalt ourselves.

Peter and his companions had witnessed God's power over nature, and they trembled. But Peter was also a collaborator in that miraculous catch, because, in faith, he renounced the logic of his human experience: *'Master, we worked hard all night long and caught nothing, but if you say so, I will pay out the nets.'* He could have concluded his objection by saying: "There is no point in casting the nets again, for there are no fish today!" But he took a step of faith and trust, leaving us an important teaching.

In the service of evangelization we can also experience moments when, like Peter, all the effort to fish seems to be in vain. In fact, the example of this biblical story can be applied very well to mission, for that is precisely what Peter and his companions were called to at the end of that event: to be "fishers of men".

Perhaps on repeated occasions we have tried to touch the hearts of certain people with the message of the gospel, or we have tried to warn them of evil ways. Perhaps we have prayed insistently without seeing results. Or we could also think of a religious order that is aging without a new generation of vocations. Perhaps the knees have grown calloused from so much praying; but no vocations come... In these circumstances we easily fall into resignation and the question arises, "Where have we failed?"

But resignation is a human feeling that comes from disappointment, and, having reached this state, we practically no longer count on God's intervention.

However, God has His time, and He invites us to do things "by His Word". In the Lord we can take courage again, trusting in Him more than in our own experience. Faith surpasses our human thoughts and feelings, and confers a much stronger security for our life.

"By His Word" let us go out again, let us do again what perhaps we have already done many times; and this time something may change. In the case of today's gospel, the result was a miraculous catch of fish; in the case of evangelization, it could be an unexpected breakthrough and a growth of the mission. Or it may happen that the person for whom we were praying suddenly turns away from evil ways; or, in the case of religious communities, vocations may unexpectedly arrive.

God has His times. It is up to us to do what has been entrusted to us. Peter was a fisherman until the moment when the Lord called him to become a "fisher of men". Let us try to be faithful in our walk and in the fulfillment of our tasks. The fruitfulness of all our efforts is in God's hands. As Mother Teresa of Calcutta said: "Let us try not to be an obstacle to the Holy Spirit".

Let us accept, then, the invitation of today's Gospel: "Lord, let us carry out our service with our eyes fixed on You alone, and help us not to be discouraged when we see so little fruit. We await Your Word, and then we will continue to be full of courage and let us allow ourselves to be led by You wherever You want us to be."