

2-7-2010 Cycle C
5th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Homily by Father Larry Covington

I am not a fisherman. All I know about fish is that I prefer mine fried with lots of tartar sauce.

I am aware that fishing stories are supposed to be flattering to the fisherman. Fishermen are supposed to talk about the monster fish they hooked but that got away, or they are supposed to talk about the bait they used to make the fish just jump on your hook.

The bible gives us a different kind of fishing story today. This story is about fishermen coming up empty after fishing all night.

It's a story about a carpenter, who commandeers a boat, preaches a sermon, and tells the fishermen where the fish are.

After hundreds of pounds of fish are caught, a fisherman, Simon, immediately resigns from fishing and starts fishing for people.

In searching for an angle in this story it hit me that it is teaching on why some people don't catch fish.

Some people don't catch fish because they refuse to go into deep water Jesus told Simon, "Put into deep water and lower your nets."

Everybody knows the schools of big fish are in the deep water.

And the first rule of fishing is you've got to go where the fish are.

But we shouldn't limit this only to fish because Jesus was teaching a spiritual principal. We could substitute fish for abundance or wisdom or love, healing or peace. All those things we want in abundance. Some people don't catch these things because they simply refuse to go deep.

Deep water is where the increase is. Deep water takes faith. Deep water is a risk. Focus of mind and heart is what is needed. Deep water is a risk. Focus of mind and heart is what is needed. The visibility in deep water can be next to nothing. You've got to trust the words and directions of others who have passed through deep water to make it there. If you have noticed Jesus is always inviting people to the deep end of things. In contrast shallow water is pleasant. That's where the minnows swim. Our feet touch the bottom so we feel in control. You can see all the way to the bottom in shallow water.

Staying in shallow water is such a temptation. Shallow water doesn't cost much; it doesn't take a whole lot of courage. But Simon knew the minnows couldn't feed him. They couldn't fill him. The minnows weren't the desire of his heart. The deep water of faith is where those things we say we want are swimming around. The shallow is where we begin the adventure, not where we finish. In other words deep water is where we have to go to get what God has for us.

Some people don't catch fish because they don't expect to catch fish. When Jesus tells Simon, "Put out into deep water." he doesn't stop there. He says, "Lower your nets for a catch." Prepare for a catch. What an encouragement! This is word for those of us who go to Mass and attend worship regularly. Week after week we go to the deep water of worship, but do we go prepared for a catch? Do we go, believing that a blessing is just waiting for us? Or do we go to appease a spouse, fulfill an obligation, or just be seen? Expectations count with God. We find it all over the Scriptures.

Expectation is the first born child of faith, “the substance of things hoped for.” No expectation, just real faith. When we say we believe in God, we are not saying I am agreeing with some abstract idea; we’re saying we expect the things that God has promised to us. We’re saying that I’m a partner with the giver of every good gift. And among those gifts God has promised us are fruitfulness and fish and forever.

I know how Jesus keeps pushing Simon’s boundaries. “Leave the shore, Simon. GO into the deep, Simon.” These are easy in comparison to “Expect a blessing,” Jesus was calling Simon to risk being disappointed in God.

I heard a story once about an old minister who every time he preached someone would give their life to Jesus. But when his young assistant would preach, no one would come forward to give their life to the Lord. After a year of this, the young minister went to him for some clarity and some coaching. The wise old preacher asked his young protégé, “When you preach, what do you expect to happen?” The young preacher thought about it and said, “I

expect to tell the good news. I expect to be eloquent and to edify the people.”

He said, “You are doing those things. But when I preach, I expect to win people to Jesus Christ, that’s all. Us expecting and preparing to be blessed must make God’s heart smile in some wide and extraordinary way. God probably says to himself, “They got it; I am trustworthy.”

Some people don’t catch fish because they won’t go into deep water, and some people don’t catch fish because they don’t expect to. But some people don’t catch fish because they know more about fish than God.

Simon almost makes this mistake. He tells Jesus in an exasperated tone, “Now look, we’ve been fishing all night. We *know* fish. The fish don’t run in the daytime. By the way aren’t you a carpenter who moonlights as a preacher? Hmm?

Some people think they know more about fish than God. It happens to all of us sometimes. It’s not that we actually think we know more than God; it’s just that we behave that way. We hear

God's instructions, you know: Forgive a whole lot. Bless those who curse you. Give abundantly. Visit the sick, the jails; forget your life and you will have a ball. Remember the Sabbath Day; it's for worship and rest and not for catching up on work.

But we ignore God's invitation to abundance. We say to God by our actions: *I know more about marriage, more about healing, more about forgiveness, more about children, more about work and money than you do, God.*

Simon, for just a split second, almost forgot that God is God.

Modern culture doesn't really have any use for the word humility; it goes back to the Enlightenment when Western culture told itself that it could know everything. Funny isn't it?

Our information highway is repeating that humor all over again.

Simon, at that crucial intersection we all come to over and over again in life, decided that he didn't know everything; that his present emptiness and frustration had made him ready to learn.

Now there's a good definition of humility, a readiness to learn.

People say that the net full of fish is the miracle of this story, but I

disagree...as you would expect me to. The real miracle of this story is that Simon decided that God was God and that he would begin to live that way immediately. Just look at what Simon says before the miracle begins to happen, "But if you say so..." My frustration is real, Lord. My pain is real. My emptiness is real. My despair is real, all real, Lord, and yet. And, yet, you are God and I am not.

That's when our miracle will begin to happen, that's when we will start catching fish, when we decide that God is God, when our lips and our lives agree that God's foolishness is wiser than any human wisdom. Simon's net is just a consequence of that fact, of that revelation. What a freedom Simon got that day, what a joy...that "God is the maker of heaven and earth..." and that all by himself. God alone put the sword in the swordfish, the sail on the sailfish; he made whales big and porpoises playful; it was he alone who made eels electrical and all just because he is God. And if he is God enough to do all that, what can he do with you, when you are ready to catch fish?

Shall we pray?

Set us free, from the bondage of our sins and give us the liberty of the abundant life which you have made known to us in your Son, our savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever, Amen.