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Archbishop Elpidophoros Homily on the First Sunday of Luke – 2024



His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros
Homily on the First Sunday of Luke
September 22, 2024
Saint John the Forerunner and Baptist Orthodox Cathedral
Brooklyn, New York

Beloved Clergy of the Cathedral,

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I am so very pleased to be with you again, this marvelous and dynamic community of the Slavic Orthodox Vicariate in America. You are an example of great faith, and there is in today's Gospel Reading a wonderful example of faith. I speak, of course, of Saint Peter, the Chief of the Apostles, and perhaps the most richly depicted Disciple in all Four Holy Gospels.

I believe that one of the reasons for this focus on Saint Peter in the Gospels, is that Saint Peter's human life kind of a snapshot of the spiritual path of every person. He was the brother of Saint Andrew, the first called Disciple and Founder of the See of

Constantinople. He was also one of the first to hear about Jesus, when his brother Andrew first told him about the extraordinary Rabbi from Galilee.[*] But … Peter was a fisherman, and he was not following the Lord like his brother. And yet, he must have known Jesus through Andrew, and since he was Galilean as well, he surely knew about the comings and goings of this amazing Teacher.

That is where the Gospel commences today, dear friends. Peter is just doing his daily job being a fisherman – not yet a fisher of men! He was washing his nets right by the Sea of Galilee … nets that had not caught a thing the night before. Jesus uses Peter's boat as a way to teach a large crowd. Perhaps the water amplified His voice as He preached. But it is fascinating that we have not one word of this teaching! Not a single word. All we know from this event is what transpired between Jesus and Peter.

We see how the Lord tests Peter's capacity for faith. When the teaching was concluded, Jesus asks Peter – after Peter has passed a fruitless night on the water – to give it another try. He lets the Lord know how he feels, but then he says something very revealing. Peter says:

"Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." [†]

It is as if Peter says to Jesus: 'Everything I see around me tells me that nothing will come of your request, but because I know your word is true, I'm going to try.'

My friends: Here is trust. Here is belief. Here is faith!

This is all God expects of us – that we try with an open mind and an open heart, even when everything we perceive tells us the opposite. It's not an easy way to live, but it is the way that makes the most sense. For even when the net is not filled, if we listen deeply and sincerely to the word of the Lord, we will find the truth of our lives made manifest.

For Peter and his partners, Iakovos and his younger brother John – all of whom would form the core of the Twelve Apostles – they received such a great catch that their nets began to break and their boats began to sink!

Peter was overcome by what could only be described as a miracle, and he suddenly felt shame, regret, guilt, and remorse for the life he had lived. He fell down before Jesus and said:

“Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” [‡]

Besides God Himself, who knows what turmoil was in Peter’s heart at that very moment? Much like those moments in our own lives when we are confronted with the truth of our existence.

Peter shows us his full humanity – the faith to give life a try, and an unrelenting self-knowledge in the face of success. For all of his faults – which are on full display in the Gospels – Peter is truly heroic.

And this is where the Lord hooks him, if you will. He tells him:

“Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men.” [§]

In the original Greek, the expression “catching” has a special meaning. The Greek word is It indicates ζωγρέω and it means you are giving catching something, but you are doing so in order to give it life!

And that is what our Lord wishes for all of us. That we should have life and have it abundantly. [**] That we should overcome our fears, our shame, our guilt, and go forward in the confidence of His mercy and love.

Through that promise of “catching men” and reeling them in to life, the Lord Jesus Christ brought Saint Peter, and his partners, Saints Iakovos and John, into His band of Disciples. They left the boats and nets and the fish behind … and followed Him.

Through their Holy Intercessions may we also lead lives worthy of following our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ, and arrive in the Kingdom of Heaven when our days on earth are fulfilled.

Amen.

Photos: GOARCH/Dimitrios Panagos

[*] John 1:40-42.

[†] Luke 5:5.

[‡] Luke 5:8.

[§] Luke 5:11.

[**] Cf. John 10:10.

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