



THE MISSION OF SAINT MARY MAGDALENE

Father Alan's Blog

For the Fifth Sunday After Trinity – July 4, 2021

“Then Jesus said to Simon, ‘Don’t be afraid; from now on you will catch men.’”

St. Luke 5:10 (NIV)

In September 1985, an American newspaper reported on a celebration that had recently taken place at a city-owned and operated swimming pool in New Orleans, Louisiana. The party was held to celebrate the first summer in memory without a drowning having taken place at the pool. In honour of the occasion, 200 people were gathered: including **100 certified lifeguards**. Even so, as the party was breaking up and the four lifeguards on duty began to clear the pool, they found a fully dressed, lifeless body in the deep end. The four lifeguards tried to revive the 31-year-old man, but it was too late: he had drowned – surrounded by lifeguards celebrating their successful season of lifesaving.



I really don't think it was an accident that at least seven of Jesus' original 12 apostles were fishermen. Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Thomas, and Nathaniel had (unbeknownst to them) spent their entire lives training to be “fishers of men.” In fact, up until the day

that Jesus of Nazareth walked into their lives they thought they were just catching fish. And yet, the Nazarene carpenter eventually managed to make faithful servants – and, even, **saints** – out of these fishermen, who would otherwise have died in the obscurity of a little fishing village on the shores of the Sea of Galilee called Capernaum, without anyone (except their relatives, friends, and neighbours, perhaps) ever being aware of their existence. And all it took to start the ball rolling was for Jesus to command them (in St. Matthew 4:19):

“Come, follow me... and I will make you fishers of men.”

And the Church has been in the “fishing business” ever since.



The story is told that Samuel L. Clements (or “Mark Twain”), the great American 19th century writer, humorist, entrepreneur, publisher, and lecturer loved to go fishing – but he hated to catch fish. The problem was that Mark Twain went fishing to relax and catching fish ruined his relaxation, as he had to take the fish off the hook and then do something with it. In addition, when he wanted to relax (by doing nothing), most people thought he was just being lazy. Conversely, Mr. Twain discovered that if he went fishing, people would see him sitting by the riverbank and would say something like:

“Look, he’s fishing – don’t bother him.”

So, Mark Twain came up with the perfect solution: he would take a fishing pole, and a line, and a bobber – but he wouldn’t put a hook on the end of the line. Then, he would cast the bobber out into the water and lay back on the riverbank. That way, Mr. Twain could relax all he wanted, and he wouldn’t be bothered by man – or fish.



We smile, but aren't we in Jesus Christ's "One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church," in general, and the worldwide Traditional Anglican Church (or TAC), in particular, sometimes just a little like Mark Twain? Because – way too often it seems to me, anyway – we tend to spend our precious time relaxing, **deliberately trying not to talk to other people**. In other words, we put an awful lot of effort into not being the "fishers of men" that our Lord Jesus commands us to be.

In contrast, many congregations (even some in parts of the TAC, surprisingly) are profoundly serious about being fishers of men – and they have grown **exponentially** as a result. TAC parishes and missions (especially those in Africa, Central and South America, Asia and Australia, and the Torres Strait, who truly understand that faith in Jesus Christ is vital both to their earthly survival and their eternal salvation) are literally compelled to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with all others. Furthermore, against all odds (some would say miraculously, even), the Christian Faith is growing in dangerous and atheistic countries by proverbial "leaps and bounds," all because faith-filled evangelists in these countries feel a genuine sense of urgency to lead people to Jesus Christ because, for many of these people, physical death may well be "just around the corner."

Unfortunately, here in North America (and in Canada, in particular), we have gone from fishing for men to "fish-watching." Now, that may be a nice past-time, but it is certainly NOT what our Lord Jesus calls us to do! The Rt. Rev. Sam Shoemaker, an Episcopalian bishop in the United States, summed up the situation as follows:

"In the Great Commission the Lord has called us to be – like Peter – Fishers of men. (However) We have turned the commission around so that we have become merely keepers of the aquarium. Occasionally I

take some fish out of your fishbowl and put them into mine, and you do the same with my bowl. But we're all tending the same fish."

Or here are a few other ways to look at it:

- ☞ **When was the last time any of us invited someone to come to church with us?**
- ☞ **When was the last time any of us introduced someone to Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord?**
- ☞ **When was the last time any of us asked someone to go "fishing for men" with us?**

For according to Bruce L. Shelley, author of the 1985 book, "Christian Theology in Plain Language:"

"It is easy to determine when something is aflame: it ignites other material. Any fire that does not spread will eventually go out. A church without evangelism is a contradiction in terms, just as a fire that does not burn is a contradiction."

Now, to be sure, not everyone is an evangelist – but we are, by our very nature, "fishermen," **because God made us that way!** So, just how might we start going about it, you may ask? Well, how's this for a "two-step kick-start:"

- ✝ **first, let's hold up (and give all the glory to) Jesus Christ for what He's done for (and through) each one of us; and**
- ✝ **second, let's focus less on ourselves (and on what we THINK we've achieved on our own) and attest to the fact that the same Jesus Christ Who calls us to "fish" is also The One Who will use us and enable us to gather new fish in His nets.**

As an incredibly wise person once said:

"Catch them and He will clean them."

So – with sincere apologies to Mark Twain – we, as Christians, are not called to “sit on the riverbank” and while away our time wondering about all manner of “temporal things” (like who has the best denomination, or the correct Church doctrine, or the latest liturgical innovations or, even, how the congregation can raise more money).

And like the lifeguards in New Orleans, Louisiana – we are not called to “pat ourselves on the back for a job well done” **before the real job is even finished**. Because the most important thing we must do, as true followers of Jesus Christ, is to “fish for men” – for people’s lives (specifically, their ETERNAL lives) depend on our consistent, obedient “doing” of that all-too-simple, Divinely-ordained task.

In verse 10b of the Gospel Lesson for today (from St. Luke 5:1-11), Jesus said to His disciples when He first called them:

“FEAR NOT...”

And then He promised:

“...from henceforth thou shalt catch men.”

We need to remember that Jesus still pleads with us to “fear not.” For He is always with us, and He will supply our every need. All we need do is to be faithful unto Him. Two thousand years ago the disciples left everything behind to follow and obey Jesus of Nazareth, EVERYTHING – their families, their way of life, their reputations, their personal safety, and so on. Likewise, we too are being asked to follow and obey the Lord Jesus. Because His Body, the Church is not (and has never been) a business or a social club; rather, it is (and has always been), first and foremost, a community of faith, **and it exists for service**.

Indeed, Jesus still fishes for men and He is asking us – all of us – to

participate in the catch. And not because He **needs** us to, but because (get this) He actually **wants** us to.

All of which begs the \$64,000 question:

☞ **Are we willing to forsake everything the world has to offer to follow Him?**



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