

## Homily: Third Sunday in Ordinary Time 2021

Yesterday I came across a news story about a dog whose owner was hospitalised with Covid. The dog followed its owner to the hospital and sat outside the entrance, waiting for its master to return. Hospital staff called relatives, who took the dog back home; but he escaped, and returned to the hospital, once again sitting outside and resuming his vigil. For six days this loyal animal waited for his owner; the hospital staff began to feed him; they took him to a window where he could see the patient, to try to reassure him. Mercifully, the man recovered and the dog's wait was not in vain. His faithfulness was rewarded, and they were reunited. It's a true story and it's also a very appealing story, because it speaks of something we all need – faithful friends: friends who will not abandon us when life is difficult. It's the kind of faithfulness the Lord asks of each of us: to follow Him wherever He leads, even if it's not where we want to go. Today we hear of the call of the first friends of Jesus – friends who, in truth, were not always faithful to Him, but who stayed close enough that they were eventually able to share in the joy of the resurrection.

As Jesus walks along the sea shore, He sees two men who will be the first to be called to be His faithful friends; but first, they must become His disciples, His students. These brothers, Peter and Andrew, are fishermen; they are casting their nets out into the lake, hoping to make a large catch. But, as is so often the case in life, although it looks like they are the ones doing something useful, the Lord is one who is really at work. This is the moment in which the Lord is, for the first time, casting *His* net, not to snare fish, but to call those who will be the first to follow Him – the first of countless men and women who will hear His call in the centuries which follow. Peter will be the first leader of the Church, but before He takes on this role, He will show moments of brilliance and moments of great weakness. He is a man who is blessed, but also a sinner: He stands to represent the Church, greatly blessed by God but also a home for sinners, a family in which we seek holiness but recognise our failings before God, and trust in His mercy.

Going on further, Jesus sees two more brothers, James and John, both of whom will also have their moments of greatness and moments of failure in the years ahead. They too are fishermen and are in their boat, but they are not casting their nets; they are mending them. The Lord will need to do this too. At times, His followers will go astray; they will fall out with each other; they will be scattered when He, the Shepherd, is struck down. So the time will come when Jesus will need to mend the nets of the Church, restoring to unity His followers who have drifted from Him and from one another. In these days of prayer for Christian unity, the image of 'mending the nets' may help us to visualise the work of the Holy Spirit calling us to deeper union in the Lord.

And the work of casting and mending belongs to the Church today; it belongs to all of us. We can ask ourselves: Do I cast the nets out for the Lord, living and speaking in a way that helps others to see the truth and beauty of our faith? Do I try to mend the nets of the Church, when there is division or disagreement? Do I try to heal broken relationships in my own life, or the lives of those around me, so that there may be deeper love and union in God's family?

Today's Gospel presents us with a simple and striking image: four fishermen, casting and mending their nets by the waters of the Sea of Galilee, called to follow Jesus. We too have been called by Jesus to be His disciples. By the waters of baptism, we were called to do exactly what the Lord commands in the Gospel today: firstly, to "repent and believe the Good News"; and secondly, to follow Him. In our baptismal promises, we rejected evil and expressed our belief in the Gospel, and each time we renew these promises, we once again repent and declare that we believe the Good News. And then we are called to follow – at the font we began a journey, walking with Christ. Repent, believe, follow: this is our Christian life.

I've often thought that the image of being caught in a net is not a very attractive one – at least not if you're a fish. But if you're a tightrope walker, nets are altogether more attractive. If the net is there to catch you not when you're swimming, but when you're falling, it's a very welcome thing indeed. Jesus does not want to ensnare us, or take anything from us. Instead, He calls us into the safety net of salvation, a net which saves us from death, which saves us not from *a* fall, but *the* Fall: the Fall of humanity from grace. It's a net which He Himself constantly casts and mends, with our help; a net which will haul us to the safe shore of eternal life.

Fr Andrew

