



**Thursday of Week 22 of Ordinary Time
Australasian Catholic Press Association Conference**

Homily

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Most of us would be aware that the Gospels operate on a number of different levels. In fact, it must be this way if the Gospels are to have any relevance for different times and places as the generations follow on one from the other.

Any legitimate reading of the gospel must, of course, be based on the text itself and on the intention, as far as we can understand it, of the gospel writer in telling the story in the way that he does. Gospels, after all, are the divinely inspired word of God, and we must take them seriously in their original context.

This does not prevent us from then beginning to reflect on how the message of Jesus, which the gospel writer is trying to convey in telling the stories in the way that he does, might make sense in our own context and might offer us some insight into the realities which we encounter in our own time and place.

All this is as true of tonight's gospel passage as it is of any other. We have just listened to the call of Simon Peter and it is helpful to remember, I think, that this is the first time since Jesus began his ministry that he has invited someone else to share that ministry with him. The story thus marks a significant early development in the pattern which Jesus will follow as his ministry unfolds. Jesus, we might say, is not and does not want to be a "lone ranger". Almost from the very outset he has wanted to share his ministry with others. Indeed, as the journey of Jesus's ministry, further unfolds, we will find him spending more and more time gathering his close disciples around him and initiating them into the pattern and the practice of his ministry.

Although it is not in tonight's gospel a very well known example of this is when Jesus feeds the five thousand. Although it is he who works the miracle of providing enough food for this vast crowd, he does not distribute the food himself. Rather he entrusts this task to his disciples. Tonight, I would invite you to see yourselves as people whom Jesus is drawing into his own ministry of teaching and preaching and healing. It is his word you are called to speak. It is his truth you are called to proclaim. It is his way you are called to follow. But it is you whom he has called



to do all these things, just as he called Peter and then the rest of the twelve apostles, and then the larger group of disciples.

For Peter the call came gradually. At first he was invited to allow Jesus to step into his boat and preach from there. Then, almost as a gesture of gratitude, Jesus encourages him to throw his net over the side. Peter is doubtful, even sceptical, but there is something about Jesus which impels Peter to do what Jesus suggests. When, against all expectations, Peter and his companions land such a large catch of fish it begins to dawn on Peter that there is something very, very special about this man. Peter realises that he is in the presence of a man of God, and he begins to see his own life, in all its brokenness, in the light of the goodness of Jesus. He falls on his knees before Jesus and says, "Leave me, Lord, for I am a sinful person".

As we all know from our familiarity with the gospel story, this is not a case of false humility on Peter's part. He is indeed, and will continue to be, a sinful man, so much so that when Jesus needs him most, at the time of his arrest and torture, Peter's courage fails, and he denies that he even knows Jesus.

Jesus does not dispute Peter's acknowledgement of his sinfulness. He simply says to him, "Don't be afraid for from now on it is not fish but people you will catch". And so begins the incredible journey, with all its successes and failures, of Peter's discipleship of Jesus.

There are some things we might reflect on in this particular gospel story, from the point of view of the coming together of the Australian Catholic Press Association.

I have already mentioned the first, and perhaps most important aspect of this story for us. As Jesus does in tonight's story, and as he does so often throughout the gospel accounts, Jesus is constantly calling people and inviting them to share in his ministry of preaching, of teaching and of healing. It is in the end, what we might call a ministry of unveiling. Both by what he says, and by what he does, Jesus unveils the mystery of God for us. When he speaks, we hear the words of God; when he forgives, we experience the mercy of God; when he heals the sick and the broken-hearted, we recognise the tender compassion of God. And when we are called, as all of you are, to be sharers in the ministry of Jesus, in your case through your work in Catholic media, it is the words and mercy and tender compassion of God, which your work, our work, is meant to unveil.

We are called, of course, to undertake this sharing in the ministry of Jesus within the community of the Church. I am sure that there is no one here who is unaware of the many challenges the Church faces in our present day. Our failures have damaged the lives of many people and scandalised so many more both within and without the Church. It is easy to become discouraged and disillusioned. At the same time we are living through a period of immense change in society, and in the Church, so much so the Pope Francis will speak not so much of an era of change as of a change of era. In such a context it is easy to lose our footing and feel de-stabilised as the



ground, both in the Church and in our wider society, seems to be shifting underneath us. In tonight's gospel, however, Saint Luke gives us a subtle reminder not to forget that the Lord is always with his Church. Already in the earliest days of the Church's life, the boat was seen as an image of the Church, and it is no accident that Luke chooses to make mention of the fact that Jesus preached from the boat. To be called to share in the ministry of the church is to be called to serve within the Body of Christ. As another gospel story reminds us, sometimes it may seem as if we who are in this boat are being tossed around by all kinds of storms. At times, we may think that Jesus has deserted us all or that he is asleep in the boat. But he will be saying to us, as he did to his first disciples on a number of occasions "Why do you doubt? Do not be afraid, for I am with you".

We know that from a human point of view, the Church is weak and fragile, and we recognise, both as individuals and communities, that we have so much in common with Peter. We, too, are sinful. We, too, are often painfully aware of our limitations and our struggles. But we are more than just a community of like-minded individuals who have chosen to group ourselves together. We are a community of disciples, the Church of which Christ is the head, and ultimately it is to him rather than to each other that we look for strength and renewal. It is for this reason that we must maintain our hope, not so much in ourselves, but in him, in his promise to be with us always, and in the presence of his Spirit whom he has given to us.

Perhaps the last thought I would offer you this evening is to invite you to reflect on what it might mean for you each of you, in your own personal situation, and all of you within the context of the communities to which you belong and the people with whom and for whom you work, to do what the disciples are reported as doing at the end of tonight's gospel passage: *they left everything and followed him*.

The *everything* those first disciples left behind refers to all those things which would stop them from responding fully and generously to the call which the Lord was giving them. As we reflect on our own personal lives and, especially in the context of tonight's celebration, on our work in and for the Church, we might each ask ourselves: what might I have to leave behind if I am to say yes to what the Lord seems to be asking of me? What might be stopping me from casting my net into the deep as the Lord encouraged Peter and those first disciples to do? What in me might be hindering my response to the Lord's call to share with him the challenge and privilege of unveiling of the mystery of God? How can I be the disciple he is calling me to be?