

Session 3: Sailing into Deeper Water

Stillness

Take a moment to become still as we begin this session: Call to mind any concerns you have been carrying recently . . . as you breathe out, share them with God . . . you might even be able to hand some of these over, at least for now . . . as you breathe out, hand them over to God . . . each time you breathe in, breathe in God's love for you . . . let it fill your body . . . take three deeper breaths... We will now hear this session's reading from the Gospel of Luke.

Scripture

(Luke 5: 1-6, 10-11)

Once while Jesus was standing beside the Lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch,' Simon answered, 'Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.' When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break.... Then Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.' When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

Reflection

The next stage of our Lenten journey, and our life journey towards the best we can be, can be expressed in just two words: 'Follow me.' Our response to this call will take a lifetime and is subject to daily renewal. Inigo accompanies us along the way in what he calls the Second Week (or second stage) of his Exercises during which he invites us to follow Jesus more and more closely by entering ever more deeply and personally into the Gospel. Today's reading offers us a powerful and compelling 'launch' into this stage of our journey.

In fact 'launch' is exactly what happens when Jesus encounters the fishermen on the lakeside. He first finds the empty boats, and then discovers the fishermen taking a bit of a break to wash their nets. Have you ever wondered how and where he might find you? Perhaps your spiritual boat is also moored at the lakeside while you, quite legitimately, get on with the chores of daily life. This interlude is about to be dramatically changed, however. Jesus steps right into Simon's empty boat. Just take a moment to reflect on how that might feel – if Jesus were to step right into your life's boat. Just when you think you have everything under control, along comes this captivating, enigmatic stranger and steps right in.

He then proceeds to tell you where to sail – first a little distance from the shore, so that he can better address the crowds that are gathering, and then the very challenging request: 'Put out into deeper water and try for a catch.' What he appears not to know is that you have been trying, and failing, to catch fish all night. How do you think you would have reacted to Jesus' words? Simon protests, but nevertheless does as Jesus asks.

We are being invited to put out into deeper water too. Each of us will find ourselves called to take our inner journey further, to go beyond the boundaries we may have set for ourselves. Following Jesus will never allow us to stay safely in our comfort zone. Following is always an active verb. It's about learning, moving and growing. For the human family as a whole the invitation is to grow beyond our present limitations and risk both the pain and the promise of growth and transformation. It is wisely said that you will never discover new lands if you don't leave the harbour. We will not discover the 'better' we long for unless we risk sailing into deeper water.

The reading ends with Jesus' promise that from now on they will become fishers of people. In a memorable sermon I once heard, the minister said this: 'Jesus invited them to become fishers of people because they were already fishers of fish.' In other words, God's call to us invites us to use the skills, talents and experience we already have. The minister went on to ask us: 'What would Jesus have said to you?' What personal gifts and abilities are you being asked to bring to this great adventure of transformation.

Talk to God

Perhaps the story of the call of the fishermen fails to capture your imagination because you have no interest in angling. If so, how would you respond to the question: 'How is Jesus inviting you to follow him?' What talents, interests and experience do you have that he needs for his mission? Do you perhaps feel that your spiritual journey is stuck on the shoreline or in the shallow waters? Perhaps there are just too many nets to wash and not enough time to sail? Can you imagine Jesus stepping into your 'boat' and asking you to set sail again? How would you respond?

You might, this week, bring to prayer the invitation to 'put out into deeper water.' How does this call feel to you? What, specifically, does 'deeper water' mean to you in the context of your inner journey?

Especially in the light of our experience of the past year, could it be that the entire human family is being called to sail into deeper water as we strive to become more fully and truly human? What might this mean? What 'fish' might we discover in the deeper waters?

Make a note in your journal of anything that has struck you particularly this week, and how you feel God may be calling you to sail into deeper water. Try expressing your response, either in words or pictures.

As we reflect on the many layers of Jesus' call, we might pray this week for the grace to understand what his call means to each of us, and for all of us, and for the courage to follow him, wherever he leads.