

Homily for the Second Sunday after Pentecost

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Sunday, July 4, 2021

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. One God.

Today, on the second Sunday of Pentecost, we listened to the Gospel reading from Saint Matthew. Although very short, it still has an important message.

Christ, our Saviour, called Peter, Andrew, James, and John to leave everything behind and follow Him. They did not hesitate, ask questions, nor object, but just did what He asked of them.

These disciples had already heard the preaching of John the Baptist and were prepared to accept Christ immediately. Though illiterate and unlearned in religion, these “people of the land” whom Jesus calls will be revealed at Pentecost to be the wisest of all.

Our Lord knew exactly what He wanted of them, but did they know? No.

They did not have a clear understanding of what Jesus wanted of them, because this was only the beginning of their ministry as disciples and apostles. They would only start to understand who Christ really was until after the resurrection.

Let us not forget that they were simple hard-working fishermen.

Nothing in their lives had prepared them for what was to come. Nothing had prepared them for this unusual Messiah, Christ. Nothing had prepared them for the sacrifices that would be expected from them once they obeyed Christ’s request to follow Him.

They did not need to understand right now. The only thing they needed to do was to abandon their old lives and follow Him.

This was not an easy thing to do for those four fishermen. They were asked to give up the only life they had ever known. Give up the only job that, probably like their fathers and grandfathers, they had ever had. They were asked to give up their families, friends, and sever all ties to where they had been born, and where they had lived their whole lives.

And so they did. They followed Christ as he went around teaching, preaching, and healing the sick. They did as they were told and became “fishermen of men”.

From the moment they decided to follow Jesus Christ, their lives were changed forever. More often than not, they would not know where their next meal would come from or where they would sleep.

They would suffer many, many hardships. They were imprisoned and persecuted, tortured, and, eventually crucified, for sharing the Gospel, the Good News that Christ the long-awaited Messiah, had come to give new life to all, a new identity to us fallen sons and daughters of Adam. In fact, except for John, all the disciples were martyred for following Christ.

In other words, in calling them to be “fishers of men,” Christ was not calling them to a life of ease, a life of power and leadership, of earthly riches. No, Christ instead called them to a life of self-denial, of service, of dying to one’s self, even if it meant they would lose their lives. He called them to put Christ and His Church above all things.

Fishing for men was not what the disciples did as a pass time, or a job on the side, it became their whole lives because the love of God compelled them, motivated them, to live life for Christ Our Saviour and to desire that life for others above anything else.

What about us! What about our calling to follow Christ!

Our lives are very different from that of the fishermen who followed Christ in the first century. Let us face it, it could not be more different. And some might say, just as well.

We now live in a world with proper medical care, social care, human rights, workers' rights, and so on. We have the time to spend on hobbies and to go on holidays. We have all kinds of gadgets to make our lives easier. We have more and more free time. But let us not forget: Idle hands are the devil’s workshop.

This causes other problems. We concentrate so much on worldly things that we forget about Christ. We are too busy trying to earn enough money to pay bills, put food on the table, and have enough money left for holidays, hobbies, gadgets, the latest fashion, and so on.

Also, people have so many excuses nowadays on why they cannot follow Christ. But in reality, we have much fewer excuses than Christ’s disciples.

Why? Because we have their example and that of so many faithful who have gone before us. We have all the saints from nearly 2,000 years of Christianity to which we can turn for spiritual help, guidance, and strength.

We seem to content ourselves with the fact that, as Orthodox Christians, we have received the fullness of God's revelation in the ongoing life of the church by the Holy Spirit. We should not be just content, or even proud about this. What we should do is to humbly accept the great responsibility given to us.

We must remember that, just like the Jews of old, it is no great thing to be a recipient of God's requirements if we are not going to follow those requirements.

Especially in this period following the Feasts of Holy, Glorious and All-praised Leaders of the Apostles, Peter and Paul; and the Synaxis of the Holy, Glorious, and All-praised Twelve Apostles, it is very important that we need to try and become more like those fishermen who left everything behind to follow our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

As we heard, their understanding was not perfect, and sometimes they made mistakes. Who doesn't? But Our Lord never abandoned or rejected them, even when they abandoned Him.

What is expected of us now is that we respond to His calling in the best way we can. And this will be different for every person. And our Lord knows that too.

Today, on this second Sunday of Pentecost, we at Saint Dunstan's commemorate all the Saints of Britain as well as all the Saints of Russia.

In August 2007, the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church instituted a holiday to honour Christians who lived on the islands of Great Britain and Ireland and had been canonized before the 1054 schism that divided Christendom into the Western Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches.

The Synod's decision followed an appeal of March 3, 2007, in which the diocese of Sourozh, a Russian Orthodox diocese having the islands of Great Britain and Ireland for its territory, asked the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Alexy II, and its Holy Synod to institute a holiday for pre-1054 British and Irish saints.

To many, who are not Orthodox Christians, Orthodoxy can appear as something exotic, a purely Eastern form of Christianity. In fact, it is a universal faith, with deep roots in this country, which was once part of a truly “ecumenical” Christian fellowship embracing both East and West.

The Orthodox Church thus recognises herself in the faith and life of the British and Irish Churches of the first Millennium and venerates their saints.

Among those saints are Saint Alban the First Martyr, Saint Patrick of Ireland, Saint David of Wales, Saint Ninian of Whithorn, Saint Cuthbert and Saint Aidan of Lindisfarne, Saint Brigid of Kildare, Saint Hilda of Whitby, the many saints of South West England, and....., our beloved Saint Dunstan of Canterbury and Saint Witte, patroness of Dorset.

Many of them died as martyrs trying to follow in Christ’s steps. I would like to remind you that during the 74 years of communist rule in the former USSR, more Christians were martyred than in the nearly 1900 preceding the Bolshevik revolution. Many of them became saints.

We can see that they showed the same example of selfless service and sacrifice that we see in the Apostles who followed Christ. They risked their lives and suffered hardship to spread the Gospel and the Orthodox faith.

They put the Kingdom of God and His righteousness first. These values, to put the things of the spirit first, are the values of the Saints of God.

They are exactly the opposite of the values of modern society, which puts anti-Gospel and anti-spiritual values first. By following the Gospel, we challenge all the vulgarity and barbarianism of the modern world, which is trying to overwhelm us.

And spiritual values prove that the only true revolution we need is the revolution that occurs in individual human lives and societies as a whole when human hearts and souls put the spiritual first.

May the Saints of Britain and Russia pray to God for us that we may come to partake of their values and their lives. May we repent and recommit ourselves to God and follow Christ.

And soon we will all be blessed with the righteousness of God and His Kingdom. To God be the glory, now and forever, and unto ages of ages.

Amen