

# **HOMILY FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (All the Saints of Britain)**

**Fr. Filip Lommaert**

**Sunday, June 21, 2020**

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

Today, on the second Sunday of Pentecost, we listened to the Gospel reading from Saint Matthew. Although this is a noticeably short reading, it still contains 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 did they object, but did what Our Lord asked of them.

Our Lord knew exactly what He wanted of them, but did they know what He wanted from them? No, they did not.

They had no clear understanding of what Jesus wanted of them, because this was only the beginning of their ministry as disciples and apostles. This would become their life's work. They would only start to understand who Christ really was until after His crucifixion and resurrection.

Let us not forget that these men 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, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Nothing had prepared them for the sacrifices that would be expected from them once they obeyed Christ's request to follow Him.

There was no need for them to understand right now. They just needed to abandon their old lives as fishermen and follow Him.

This was not an easy thing to do for these four fishermen. They were asked to give up the only life they had ever known. These four were asked to 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 everything they felt close to.

And they did so, without any hesitation, to follow Christ as he went around teaching, preaching, and healing the sick. They did as they were told and became "fishers of men".

From the moment they decided to follow Jesus Christ, their lives were changed forever. Often, they would not know where their next meal would come from or where they would sleep, or even where they would end up.

After Christ's resurrection, 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, only one of the Apostles, John, did not die the death of a martyr. All the others died a martyr's death, because of Christ.

In other words, in calling them to be "fishers of men" Christ was not calling them to a life of ease, of power through their leadership, of earthly riches, but rather, of self-denial, of service, of dying to one's self, even at the cost of their own earthly lives. He called them and asked them to put Christ and His Church above all other things.

Fishing for men was not something that the disciples did on the side, it became their whole lives because the love of God compelled them and motivated them to live life for Christ, our God, and desire that life for others above anything else.

And what about us? What about our calling to follow Christ?

Our lives are vastly different from that of the fishermen who followed Christ in the first century. In fact, it could not be more different. And just as well. We now live in a world with proper medical care, social care, human rights, workers' rights, education for everyone and so on. We have hobbies and 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: "The devil finds work for idle hands."

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.

People have so many excuses nowadays on why they cannot follow Christ. But, in fact we really have much less excuses than Christ's disciples had. 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 bounty if we are not going to follow His requirements.

Especially in this period of the Fast of the Apostles, 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. But Our Lord never abandoned or rejected them, even when they abandoned Him.

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

Today, on this second Sunday of Pentecost, we commemorate all the Saints of Britain.

Among those saints are Saint Alban the First Martyr, Saint Patrick of Ireland, Saint David of Wales, Saint Cuthbert and Saint Aidan of Lindisfarne, Saint Brigid of Kildare, Saint Hilda of Whitby, Saint Wite of Whitchurch Canonicorum, Thekla and Leoba of Wimborne, and... our beloved Patron Saint and protector of this parish, Saint Dunstan of Canterbury.

Many of them died as martyrs following in Christ's steps. 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.

I understand that since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic at the end of March this year things have been difficult for many of us. Thousands and thousands of people have been furloughed, many people have lost their businesses for which they worked so hard for many years, and other people will probably be told in the very near future that they no longer have a job to go back to. And that is an

exceedingly difficult thing to deal with and causes a lot of stress in many, many families up and down the country.

But what do people do?

Well, let us just look back at the events of last Monday, June the 15<sup>th</sup>. On that day non-essential shops and churches were opening their doors again, albeit with severe restrictions. The Nike Shop in London and other shops in the UK had queues of hundreds waiting at their doors, with people showing no respect for social distancing, and in a couple of cases even getting into fights. On the other hand, pictures of Westminster Cathedral, which had set up everything in such a way that social distancing could be respected, showed a church with only a handful of people inside.

That is what happens when people put Mammon before God and put anti-Gospel and anti-spiritual values first.

And that is why it is so important that we follow and live by the Gospel. By following and living by the Gospel, we challenge all the vulgarity and barbarity of the modern world.

And spiritual values prove that the only true revolution worth having is the revolution that occurs in individual human lives and societies where human hearts and souls put spiritual values and the spiritual life first.

May the Saints of Britain 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 ever, and unto ages of ages.

Amen.