

Homily – Order of St. Gregory the Great

September 6, 2018

In today's gospel the crowd is "pressing in on Jesus and listening to the word of God." Who is in the crowd? Probably ordinary Galileans. Why were they "pressing in" on Jesus – hoping to get closer to him? To hear his every word? Because he was a great orator? Because he was entertaining? No, they were eager to listen to the word of God. Let us join the crowd this morning, listening attentively to the word that God speaks to our hearts – willing to respond appropriately in our lives.

In Luke's Gospel, this is the first time that Jesus encounters Simon Peter and his co-workers. Jesus asks to use Peter's boat as a place where he can seat and teach God's word. Is Peter flattered that Jesus asks to use his boat? Is he perhaps annoyed? He had been working all night and may have wanted simply to rest. Then Jesus tells Peter to return to fishing – during the day – when fishing was usually poor! Peter does what Jesus asks, even though it is against his professional experience. And then the miraculous catch!

Peter's response is extraordinary. He does not second guess himself about how he should have known the fish were there where

Jesus told him to fish. No, the encounter leads Peter to look at his whole life in the presence of the Lord and to say truthfully and honestly: “I am a sinful man. Depart from me, Lord!” When Pope Francis was asked by a journalist shortly after his election who Jorge Bergoglio is, the Holy Father answered simply: “I am a sinner.”

In recent weeks we heard more reports about sexual misconduct by bishops, priests, and others who work in the Church. These reports are shocking, scandalous, embarrassing. Our initial response is often anger, shame, disillusionment. The Church is divinely established, but it consists of human beings. The Church is always in need of conversion, reform, renewal, cleansing, healing.

Jesus says that Peter’s sins do not disqualify him. He will become a fisher of men, following in Jesus’ footsteps, continuing the Lord’s mission and ministry. Peter leaves everything to follow Jesus, but the journey will be long and difficult. Later Jesus will reprimand him as a Satan. Peter will try to walk on water. At the Last Supper he will vow to stay with Jesus no matter what happens, and a few hours later will deny three times he even knew Jesus. But Peter will go on, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to proclaim the word of God. Will we still press in on the risen Lord to listen to that word?