

Saint Thomas on the 4th Sunday after Pentecost.

*And it came to pass, that when the multitudes pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Genesareth, And saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets. And going into one of the ships that was Simon's, he desired him to draw back a little from the land. And sitting he taught the multitudes out of the ship. Now when he had ceased to speak, he said to Simon: Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon answering said to him: Master, we have labored all the night, and have taken nothing: but at thy word I will let down the net. And when they had done this, they enclosed a very great multitude of fishes, and their net broke. And they beckoned to their partners that were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they were almost sinking. Which when Simon Peter saw, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying: Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord. For he was wholly astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken. And so were also James and John the sons of Zebedee, who were Simon's partners. And Jesus saith to Simon: Fear not: from henceforth thou shalt catch men. And having brought their ships to land, leaving all things, they followed him.*

AMBROSE; When the Lord had performed many and various kinds of cures, the multitude began to heed neither time nor place in their desire to be healed. The evening came, they followed; a lake is before them, they still press on; as it is said, And it came to pass, as the people pressed upon him.

CHRYS. For they clung to Him with love and admiration, and longed to keep Him with them. For who would depart while He performed such miracles? who would not be content to see only His face, and the mouth that uttered such things? Nor as performing miracles only was He an object of admiration, but His whole appearance was overflowing with grace. Therefore when He speaks, they listen to Him in silence, interrupting not the chain of His discourse; for it is said, that they might hear the word of God, &c. It follows, And he stood near the lake of Genesareth.

THEOPHYL; The lake of Genesareth is said to be the same as the sea of Galilee or the sea of Tiberias; but it is called the sea of Galilee from the adjacent province, the sea of Tiberias from a neighboring city. Genesareth, however, is the name given it from the nature of the lake itself, (which is thought from its crossing waves to raise a breeze upon itself,) being the Greek expression for “making a breeze to itself.” For the water is not steady like that of a lake, but constantly agitated by the breezes blowing over it. It is sweet to the taste, and wholesome to drink. In the Hebrew tongue, any extent of water, whether it be sweet or salt, is called a sea.

THEOPHYL. But the Lord seeks to avoid glory the more it followed Him, and therefore separating Himself from the multitude, He entered into a ship, as it is said, And he saw two ships standing near the lake: but the Fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets.

CHRYS. This was a sign of leisure, but according to Matthew He finds them mending their nets. For so great was their poverty, that they patched up their old nets, not being able to buy new ones. But our Lord was very desirous to collect the multitudes, that none might remain behind, but they might all behold Him face to face; He therefore enters into a ship, as it is said, And he entered into a ship, which was Simon's, and prayed him.

THEOPHYL. Behold the gentleness of Christ; He asks Peter; and the willingness of Peter, who was obedient in all things.

CHRYS. After having performed many miracles, He again commences His teaching, and being on the sea, He fishes for those who were on the shore. Hence it follows, And he sat down and taught the people out of the ship.

GREG. NAZ. Condescending to all, in order that He might draw forth a fish from the deep, i.e. man swimming in the ever changing scenes and bitter storms of this life.

THEOPHYL; Now mystically, the two ships represent circumcision and uncircumcision. The Lord sees these, because in each people He knows who are His, and by seeing, i.e. by a merciful visitation, He brings them nearer the tranquillity of the life to come. The fishermen are the doctors of the Church, because by the net of faith they catch us, and bring us as it were ashore to the land of the living. But these nets are at one time spread out for catching fish, at another washed and folded up. For every time is not fitted for teaching, but at one time the teacher must speak with the tongue, and at another time we must discipline ourselves. The ship of Simon is the primitive Church, of which St. Paul says, He that wrought effectually in Peter to the Apostleship of circumcision. The ship is well called one, for in the multitude of believers there was one heart and one soul.

AUG. From which ship He taught the multitude, for by the authority of the Church He teaches the Gentiles. But the Lord entering the ship, and asking Peter to put off a little from the land, signifies that we must be moderate in our words to the multitude, that they may be neither taught earthly things, nor from earthly things rush into the depths of the sacraments. Or, the Gospel must first be preached to the neighboring countries of the Gentiles, that (as He afterwards says, Launch out into the deep) He might command it to be preached afterwards to the more distant nations.

CYRIL; Having sufficiently taught the people, He returns again to His mighty works, and by the employment of fishing fishes for His disciples. Hence it follows, When he had left off speaking, he said to Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.

CHRYS. For in His condescension to men, He called the wise men by a star, the fishermen by their art of fishing.

THEOPHYL. Peter did not refuse to comply, as it follows, And Simon answering said to him, Master, we have toiled all night and have taken nothing. He did not go on to say, "I will not hearken to you, nor expose myself to additional labor," but rather adds, Nevertheless, at your word I will let down the net. But our Lord, since he had taught the people out of the ship, left not the master of the ship without reward, but conferred on him a double kindness, giving him first a multitude of fishes, and next making him His disciple: as it follows, And when they had done this, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes. They took so many fishes that they could not pull them out, but sought the assistance of their companions; as it follows, But their net broke, and they beckoned to their partners who were in the other ship to come, &c. Peter summons them by a sign, being unable to speak from astonishment at the draught of fishes. We next hear of their assistance, And they came and filled both the ships.

AUG. John seems indeed to speak of a similar miracle, but this is very different from the one he mentions. That took place after our Lord's resurrection at the lake of Tiberias, and not only the time, but the miracle itself is very different. For in the latter the nets being let down on the right side took one hundred and fifty-three fishes, and these of large size, which it was necessary for the Evangelist to mention, because though so large the nets were not broken, and this would seem to have reference to the event which Luke relates, when from the multitude of the fishes the nets were broken.

AMBROSE; Now in a mystery, the ship of Peter, according to Matthew, is beaten about by the waves, according to Luke, is filled with fishes, in order that you might understand the Church at first wavering, at last abounding. The ship is not shaken which holds Peter; that is which holds Judas. In each was Peter; but he who trusts in his own merits is disquieted by another's. Let us beware then of a traitor, lest through one we should many of us be tossed about. Trouble is found there where faith is weak, safety here where love is perfect. Lastly, though to others it is commanded, Let down your nets, to Peter alone it is said, Launch out into the deep, i.e. into deep researches. What is so deep, as the knowledge of the Son of God! But what are the nets of the Apostles which are ordered to be let down, but the interweaving of words and certain folds, as it were, of speech, and intricacies of argument, which never let those escape whom they have once caught. And rightly are nets the Apostolical instruments for fishing, which kill not the fish that

are caught, but keep them safe, and bring up those that are tossing about in the waves from the depths below to the regions above. But he says, Master, we have toiled the whole night and have caught nothing; for this is not the work of human eloquence but the gift of divine calling. But they who had before caught nothing, at the word of the Lord enclosed a great multitude of fishes.

CYRIL; Now this was a figure of the future. For they will not labor in vain who let down the net of evangelical doctrine, but will gather together the shoals of the Gentiles.

AUG. Now the circumstance of the nets breaking, and the ships being filled with the multitude of fishes that they began to sink, signifies that there will be in the Church so great a multitude of carnal men, that unity will be broken up, and it will be split into heresies and schisms.

THEOPHYL; The net is broken, but the fish escape not, for the Lord preserves His own amid the violence of persecutors.

AMBROSE; But the other ship is Judea, out of which James and John are chosen. These then came from the synagogue to the ship of Peter in the Church, that they might fill both ships. For at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, whether Jew or Greek.

THEOPHYL; Or the other ship is the Church of the Gentiles, which itself also (one ship being not sufficient) is filled with chosen fishes. For the Lord knows who are His, and with Him the number of His elect is sure. And when He finds not in Judea so many believers as He knows are destined to eternal life, He seeks as it were another ship to receive His fishes, and fills the hearts of the Gentiles also with the grace of faith. And well when the net brake did they call to their assistance the ship of their companions, since the traitor Judas, Simon Magus, Ananias and Sapphira, and many of the disciples, went back. And then Barnabas and Paul were separated for the Apostleship of the Gentiles.

AMBROSE; We may understand also by the other ship another Church, since from one Church several are derived.

CYRIL; But Peter beckons to his companions to help them. For many follow the labors of the Apostles, and first those who brought out the writings of the Gospels, next to whom are the other heads and shepherds of the Gospel, and those skilled in the teaching of the truth.

THEOPHYL; But the filling of these ships goes on until the end of the world. But the fact that the ships, when filled, begin to sink, i.e. become weighed low down in the water; (for they are not sunk, but are in great danger,) the Apostle explains when he says, In the last days perilous times shall come; men shall be lovers of their own selves, &c. For the sinking of the ships is when men, by vicious habits, fall back into that world from which they have been elected by faith.

THEOPHYL; Peter was astonished at the divine gift, and the more he feared, the less did he now presume; as it is said, When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.

CYRIL; For calling back to his consciousness the crimes he had committed, he is alarmed and trembles, and as being unclean, he believes it impossible he can receive Him who is clean, for he had learnt from the law to distinguish between what is defiled and holy.

GREG. NYSS. When Christ commanded to let down the nets, the multitude of the fishes taken was just as great as the Lord of the sea and land willed. For the voice of the Word is the voice of power, at whose bidding at the beginning of the world light and the other creatures came forth. At these things Peter wonders, for he was astonished, and all that were with him, &c.

AUG. He does not mention Andrew by name, who however is thought to have been in that ship, according to the accounts of Matthew and Mark. It follows, And Jesus said to Simon, Fear not.

AMBROSE; Say you also, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord, that God may answer, Fear not. Confess your sin, and the Lord will pardon you. See how good the Lord is, who gives so much to men, that they have the power of making alive. As it follows, From henceforth you shall catch men.

THEOPHYL; This especially belongs to Peter himself, for the Lord explains to him what this taking of fish means; that in fact as now he takes fishes by the net, so hereafter he will catch men by words. And the whole order of this event shows what is daily going on in the Church, of which Peter is the type.

CHRYS. But mark their faith and obedience. For though they were eagerly engaged in the employment of fishing, yet when they heard the command of Jesus, they delayed not, but forsook all and followed Him. Such is the obedience which Christ demands of us; we must not forego it, even though some great necessity urges us. Hence it follows, And having brought their ships to land.

AUG. Matthew and Mark here briefly state the matter, and how it was done. Luke explains it more at large. There seems however to be this difference, that he makes our Lord to have said to Peter only, From henceforth you shall catch men, whereas they related it as having been spoken to both the others. But surely it might have been said at first to Peter, when he marveled at the immense draught of fishes, as Luke suggests, and afterwards to both, as the other two have related it. Or we must understand the event to have taken place as Luke relates, and that the others were not then called by the Lord, but only it was foretold to Peter that he should catch men, not that he should no more be employed in fishing; and hence there is room for supposing that they returned to their fishing, so that afterwards that might happen which Matthew and Mark speak of. For then the ships were not brought to land, as if with the intention of returning, but they followed Him as calling or commanding them to come. But if according to John, Peter and Andrew followed Him close by Jordan, how do the other Evangelists say that He found them fishing in Galilee, and called them to the discipleship? Except we understand that they did not see the Lord near Jordan so as to join Him inseparably, but knew only who He was, and marveling at Him returned to their own.

AMBROSE; But mystically, those whom Peter takes by his word, he claims not as his own booty or his own gift. Depart, he says, from me, O Lord. Fear not then also to ascribe what is your own to the Lord, for what was His He has given to us.

AUG. Or, Peter speaks in the character of the Church full of carnal men, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man. As if the Church, crowded with carnal men, and almost sunk by their vices, throws off from it, as it were, the rule in spiritual things, wherein the character of Christ chiefly shines forth. For not with the tongue do men tell the good servants of God that they should depart from them, but with the utterance of their deeds and actions they persuade them to go away, that they may not be governed by the good. And yet all the more anxiously do they hasten to pay honors to them, just as Peter testified his respect by falling at the feet of our Lord, but his conduct in saying, Depart from me.

THEOPHYL; But the Lord allays the fears of carnal men, that no one trembling at the consciousness of his guilt, or astonished at the innocence of others, might be afraid to undertake the journey of holiness.

AUG. But the Lord did not depart from them, showing thereby that good and spiritual men, when they were troubled by the wickedness of the many, ought not to wish to abandon their ecclesiastical duties, that they might live as it were a more secure and tranquil life. But the bringing their ships to land, and forsaking all to follow Jesus, may represent the end of time, when those who have clung to Christ shall altogether depart from the storms of this world.

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