

Luke: 5:1–11

From Catena Aurea:

1. And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret,

2. And saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets.

3. And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship.

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.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. 25. in Matt.) 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 Gennesaret.

THEOPHYLACT. 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.

CHRYSOSTOM. 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.

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

CHRYSOSTOM. 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.

GREGORY NAZIANZEN. (Orat. 37.) Condescending to all, in order that He might draw forth a fish from the deep, i. e. man swimming in the everchanging scenes and bitter storms of this life.

AUGUSTINE. (de Quæst. Ev. 1. 2. c. 2.) 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 neighbouring 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.

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4. Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.

5. And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.

6. And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake.

7. And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. 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 unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. 6. in Matt.) For in His condescension to men, He called the wise men by a star, the fishermen by their art of fishing.

THEOPHYLACT. Peter did not refuse to comply, as it follows, And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all night and have taken nothing. He did not go on to say, "I will not hearken to thee, nor expose myself to additional labour," but rather adds, Nevertheless, at thy 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 inclosed 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 brake, 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.

AUGUSTINE. (de Con. Ev. lib. 4. c. 6.) 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, (Matt. 8:24.) 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 inclosed a great multitude of fishes.

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

AUGUSTINE. (ut sup.) Now the circumstance of the nets breaking, and the ships being filled with the multitude of fishes so 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.

AMBROSE. But the other ship is Judæa, 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.

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

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. But Peter beckons to his companions to help them. For many follow the labours 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.

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8. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.

9. For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken:

10. And so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.

11. And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. 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.

GREGORY OF NYSSA. 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.

AUGUSTINE. (de con. Ev. lib. ii. 17.) 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 unto Simon, Fear not.

AMBROSE. Say thou also, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord, that God may answer, Fear not. Confess thy sin, and the Lord will pardon thee. 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 thou shalt catch men.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. 14. in Matt.) 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.

AUGUSTINE. (ubi sup.) 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 thou shalt 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 marvelled 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. (Matt. 4:20, Mark 1:18.) 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 marvelling 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 thy own to the Lord, for what was His He has given to us.

AUGUSTINE. (de Quæst. Ev. lib. ii. c. 2.) 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 honours to them, just as Peter testified his respect by falling at the feet of our Lord, but his conduct in saying, Depart from me.

AUGUSTINE. (ubi sup.) But the Lord did not depart from them, shewing thereby that good and spiritual men, when they are 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.

From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:

5:1–3 Teaching the Crowds

First Catch of Fish the Church in the Present Time.

Augustine: So let me recall with you those two catches of fish made by the disciples at the command of the Lord Jesus Christ: one before his passion, the other after his resurrection. These two catches of fish stand for the whole church, both as it is now and as it will be at the resurrection of the dead. Now, as you can see, it contains countless numbers, both good and bad. After the resurrection it will contain only the good, and a definite number of them.

So call to mind that first catch, where we may see the church as it is in this present time. The Lord Jesus found his disciples fishing, when he first called them to follow him. They had caught nothing all night. But when they saw him, they heard him telling them, "Let down your nets." "Master," they said, "we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." They cast them at the command of the Almighty. What else could happen, but that which he intended? But all the same, he was pleased, as I said, to indicate something to us that he knew would be to our advantage.

The nets were cast. The Lord had not yet suffered, not yet risen again. The nets were cast. They caught so many fish that two boats were filled, and the very nets were torn by that vast quantity of fish. Then he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." They received from him the nets of the

Word of God, they cast them into the world as into a deep sea, and they caught the vast multitude of Christians that we can see and marvel at. Those two boats, though, stood for the two peoples, Jews and Gentiles, synagogue and church, those circumcised and those uncircumcised. Sermon 248.2.

5:4–7 The Miraculous Catch of Fish

Jesus Chooses Peter's Boat Instead of Moses'.

Maximus of Turin: He chooses Peter's boat and forsakes Moses'—that is to say, he spurns the faithless synagogue and takes the faithful church. For God appointed the two as boats, so to speak, which would fish for the salvation of humankind in this world as in a sea. As the Lord says to the apostles, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." ...

The church is called out into the deep, delving, as it were, into the profound mysteries of the heavens, into that depth concerning which the apostle says, "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!" For this reason he says to Peter, "Put out into the deep,"—that is to say, into the depths of reflection upon the divine generation. For what is more profound than what Peter says to the Lord, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God?" ...

This boat sails upon the deeps of this world, so that, when the earth is destroyed, it will preserve unharmed all those it has taken in. Its foreshadowing can be seen already in the Old Testament. For as Noah's ark preserved alive everyone whom it had taken in when the world was going under, so also Peter's church will bring back unhurt everyone whom it embraces when the world goes up in flames. And as a dove brought the sign of peace to Noah's ark when the flood was over, so also Christ will bring the joy of peace to Peter's church when the judgment is over. Sermon 49.1–3.

Christ Continues to Catch People in the Nets of Preaching.

Cyril of Alexandria: He told Simon and his companions to sail off a little from the land and to let down the net for a draught. But they replied that they had been toiling the whole night and had caught nothing. However, in the name of Christ, they let down the net, and immediately it was full of fish. By a visible sign and by a miraculous type and representation, they were fully convinced that their labor would be rewarded, and the zeal displayed in spreading out the net of the gospel teaching would be fruitful. Within this net they should most certainly catch the shoals of the heathen. But note that neither Simon nor his

companions could draw the net to land. Speechless from fright and astonishment—for their wonder had made them mute—they beckoned to their partners, to those who shared their labors in fishing, to come and help them in securing their prey. For many have taken part with the holy apostles in their labors, and still do so, especially those who inquire into the meaning of what is written in the holy Gospels. Yet besides them there are also others: the pastors and teachers and rulers of the people, who are skilled in the doctrines of truth. For the net is still being drawn, while Christ fills it, and calls to conversion those who, according to the Scripture phrase, are in the depths of the sea, that is to say, those who live in the surge and waves of worldly things. Commentary on Luke, Homily 12.

By Faith Peter Casts the Nets of Christ's Teaching.

Maximus of Turin: That you may understand that the Lord was speaking of spiritual fishing, however, Peter says, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." It is as if he were saying, "Through the whole night our fishing has brought us nothing, and we have been laboring in vain. Now I will not fish with fishing gear but with grace, not with diligence acquired by skill but with the perseverance acquired by devotion." When Peter lets down the nets at the word, therefore, he is in fact letting down the teachings in Christ. When he unfolds the tightly woven and well-ordered nets at the command of the Master, he is really laying out words in the name of the Savior in a fitting and clear fashion. By these words he is able to save not creatures but souls. "We toiled all night," he says, "and took nothing." Peter, who beforehand was unable to see in order to make a catch, enduring darkness without Christ, had indeed toiled through the whole night. But when the Savior's light shone upon him the darkness scattered, and by faith he began to discern in the deep what he could not see with his eyes. Sermon 110.2.

The Two Boats Represent the Jews and Gentiles.

Ephrem the Syrian: We have been toiling all night. This refers symbolically to the prophets. His teaching came down from on high on the world, which stands by way of parable for the sea. The two boats represent the circumcised and the uncircumcised. They made a sign to their companions. This refers symbolically to the seventy-two, for these disciples were too few in number for the catch and the harvest. Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron 5.18.

5:8–11 Peter’s Confession and Jesus’ Absolution

Peter’s Fear Comes from the Presence of Holiness.

Cyril of Alexandria: For this reason also Peter, carried back to the memory of his former sins, trembles and is afraid. As an impure man, he does not dare to receive the one who is pure. His fear was praiseworthy, because he had been taught by the law to distinguish between the holy and the profane. Commentary on Luke, Homily 12.

This Boat is the Church that Gives Life.

Maximus of Turin: Ordinarily people are not given life on a boat but transported. Nor are they comforted on a vessel but anxious about its journey. Notice also that this boat is not a boat that is given to Peter to be piloted—rather, it is the church, which is committed to the apostle to be governed. For this is the vessel that does not kill but gives life to those borne along by the storms of this world as if by waves. Just as a little boat holds the dying fish that have been brought up from the deep, so also the vessel of the church gives life to human beings who have been freed from turmoil. Within itself, I say, the church gives life to those who are half-dead, as it were. Sermon 110.