

5th SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME – C (February 6, 2022)

[just one commercial today: after visiting with some of our cluster young adults about the Bible discussion sessions they used to have here, I'm glad to announce a restart for that group: later this month we will begin a series of discussions based on "The Chosen" and how they portray so well the gospel scenes; there will also be a chance for some Q & A on anything with respect to our Catholic faith. Please see the bulletin for details, especially about viewing episodes 1 & 2 ahead of time and how to do so.]

It's hard to blame Simon Peter here, isn't it? He had already heard about Jesus but apparently didn't know much about him yet. The fishing had not gone well that day, and so Jesus' suggestion about going out to deeper water and lowering the nets didn't seem to make much sense. You can almost hear Peter muttering under his breath: "he's got to be kidding; we've been out all night and caught zilch!" But he went along with it, just for the heck of it...and we know what happened: they got so many fish that they almost sunk their two boats. He and James and John, his fellow fishermen, then left their nets and job and followed Jesus.

Bishop Robert Barron recently wrote insightfully about this gospel passage. As we saw, Peter seemed at first content to stay close to shore after an unsuccessful night of fishing; he didn't want to take a chance on another wild goose (fish?!) chase. Likewise, we can give in to the temptation to 'stay in the shallows', close to shore, and try to find contentment in what this world offers. But, the bishop says: "we are not meant for such child's play. We are meant for the depths, for the adventure of the open seas" in connecting with and following the God of Jesus Christ. The job description of the Christian, the disciple of Jesus, is not about comfort or not having too much asked of us. No—we are called to holiness, to be perfect as the Father is perfect (Matt. 5:48). And that necessarily means a willingness to take the occasional plunge, 'to put out into deep water' as Jesus told Peter.

What does that mean for us? What kind of deeper water is the Lord calling us to? That can involve a wide variety of issues (e.g. one's life direction, vocation, job, school, or relationships) on a variety of levels (personal, marriage, family, career, etc.). And it definitely involves our relationship to God and our faith and Church life. To take just one example: you are aware of the pastoral planning process that Archbishop Jackels has announced that we will be undergoing. And I'm sure you are wondering just as much as I am what that is going to look like and what the final results will be. One of the first major steps in that process is seeking and gathering information and feedback from us and from all the faithful of our archdiocese. You should have received your letter and survey from the archbishop this past week. If you haven't already responded, please do so (deadline is March 1--three weeks from this Tuesday). You are encouraged to do so online—the survey has instructions on how to do so—or you can simply fill it out by hand and send it in the envelope provided.

I grant you that this whole process may seem a bit scary; we probably can't help but wonder at least to some extent what (if anything) will happen to Holy Rosary Cluster or to our individual parishes. I truly have no idea what the end result will be, and as I've said before: Archbishop Jackels does not have a pre-ordained plan that he's waiting to roll out. He genuinely and sincerely wants to hear from all of us here and throughout the archdiocese. Obviously he will

not be able to meet and fulfill everyone's hopes and expectations; that won't ever happen at any time this side of heaven and eternity!

Some change in parish structure and organization may very well happen; frankly, I'd be surprised if there were no changes at all throughout the archdiocese. I'd also say that I certainly and strongly hope that there will be no closing of parishes anywhere...but I can't promise that will not happen. Our own local part of the archdiocese has seen a number of parish closures over the years—including those in Chester, Meyer, St. Ansgar, McIntire and St. Cecilia. There is no part of the Archdiocese of Dubuque that has not experienced parish closure. Those decisions are never made casually, and it is certainly a very difficult thing to have to experience for those whose faith lives have centered in so many ways in those parishes.

In any event, we also need to remember that Jesus never promised that we will never be inconvenienced (or worse) by choosing to follow him. In fact, he said just the opposite: "Whoever wishes to be my follower must deny his very self, take up his cross each day, and follow in my steps" (Luke 9:23). Jesus' words; not mine! He encouraged and challenged Peter to 'put out into deep water'—to go beyond his comfort zone, to push the proverbial envelope. Peter didn't want to at first; he seemed satisfied with the kind of mediocrity that says 'why bother trying anymore? It won't work anyway.' But he did finally say 'yes' to Jesus, he followed his lead...and astonishing things happened that Peter would never have otherwise anticipated. Let's follow Peter's lead and answer the challenge that Jesus extends to each of us to follow his lead. Let's trust and follow him in all things—in our archdiocesan planning process and in all other matters as well. And let's be prepared and expect to be amazed and astonished at what Jesus can accomplish for us and for everyone who trusts him enough to 'put out into [that] deep water'.