

## **HOW TO CATCH FISH**

**Meditations by Subdeacon Dr. Joshua D. Genig**

**On St. Luke 5:1 – 11**

*(Gospel for the 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost, 25 September 2016)*

St. Innocent Orthodox Church, Redford, MI

In the Name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



It's embarrassing to admit, but I have never, ever caught a fish. That doesn't mean, of course, that I've never been fishing. I have been fishing on many occasions, but never once have I actually caught anything! In fact, I can remember going fishing with my grandparents as a young boy on the Detroit River in Wyandotte. And after a full day of catching nothing, a very nice gentleman felt so bad for me that he actually gave me one of his fish. Little did he know that I didn't know what to do with it. So I took it home, and feeling slightly guilty and even more embarrassed that I didn't actually catch it, I buried it in the backyard.

And my luck with keeping living fish alive is just as bad. A few years back, for Clare's fourth birthday, one of her presents with a goldfish. That goldfish, purchased on her fourth birthday, lived for a total of 72 hours!

No, I'm not very good with keeping fish alive, nor am I very good at catching them.

So, if someone hopped into a boat with me and told me to push out a little further so that I would catch something, I would have no reason to doubt him. In fact, I'd

probably do it. Why? Because clearly someone with such confidence knows what they're doing. Or so I'd think.

But that is not really faith. Faith is trusting someone else when all of the facts would tell you to do otherwise.

And here are the facts: Peter, James, and John are fishermen. They're professionals. Unlike me, they actually catch fish. But this particular morning, they had nothing to show for it. And then along comes Jesus, telling them to head back out for a catch. It's almost like he's adding insult to injury.

But then come these remarkable words from St. Peter: "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net." And they are remarkable because, as the Gospels say, Jesus was the carpenter's son, not the fisherman's boy. And so Jesus, who clearly was **not** an expert fisherman, tells the professionals to head back out after a long night, if they wish to catch something.

But, what's most amazing is that they actually do it!

They didn't say no. They didn't laugh at him. And they didn't even throw him overboard. No, they listened. They obeyed. They...had...**faith**. And as St. Luke tells us, the catch was so great that the nets began to break, and the fishermen had to call their friends to help. But even with the extra hands and an extra boat, the boats were so heavy that they were almost sinking. And so the question before us: Why a great catch of fish? Why not a healing miracle or some other sign of his glory?

As St. Cyril of Alexandria says in his commentary on this text:

*He bade Simon and his companions push off a little from the land, and let down the net for a catch. But they replied, that they had been laboring the whole night, and had caught nothing: in the name, however, of Christ, they let down the net, and immediately it was full of fish; in order that by a visible fact, [...] miraculously enacted, **they might be fully convinced that their labor would not be unrewarded.***

There is so much that can be said of this miraculous catch, but this, to me at least, seems most important: The mark of being a Christian is **obedience**. Not obedience to a ruthless judge, but obedience to a merciful Savior or, as the pre-Communion prayers say, to a God who calls us his friends. That is what it means to be a Christian. That is what it means to follow Christ. And that – alone – that obedience to Him is how we will fully and finally be saved.

Astonished at this catch, and having fallen down at Jesus' feet, St. Luke tells us that **"they forsook all and followed him."**

May we have that same courage, that same faith, lived-out obediently toward Him by giving up all to follow Him, for He – alone – is good and loves mankind.

In the Name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen