

LUKE 5:1-11

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.
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.
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.

This was not the first time the Jesus' apostles worked with Him on His mission. We saw how they followed Him as Jesus began His work following His baptism by St. John the Baptist. They were even with Him when He did His first miracle of changing water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee. In fact, as the Gospel tells us, one of the reasons for this miracle was, in fact, to build faith in the apostles' hearts in Christ as the Savior. After this, the apostles went back to their normal life of being fishermen. Now, Jesus is calling them to leave everything behind and assist Him full time in His Mission.

In Jesus' call are contained several very important lessons that can help us in our spiritual life. It is vital to always remember that the Kingdom of God begins here on earth in our hearts. We are called to strive to be Christ-like during our earthly life. The external acts of piety that we succeed in accomplishing with the help of God's Grace, soften and purify our hearts, allowing God to mystically move into them. The spiritual condition of our hearts that we attain during our life is what we present to Christ when we stand before Him in judgment when our life on earth comes to an end.

The first thing that we can see is how the Savior does not infringe on our free will. He does not command us, but calls us to freely follow Him. Jesus does not order Simon Peter to take Him out in his boat but "prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land". In the end, the Savior also does not command him into full time service but calls him: "from henceforth thou shalt catch men". Our free will is a magnificent gift that God gives us in our creation. As rational creatures, if we are not free to make our own choices, we can never be truly happy. God wants us to be His children, not His slaves.

The second very important lesson here is to comprehend how beneficial it is to always obey God even when it seems to be something that is not necessary or even foolish. The fishermen had spent the whole night fishing and caught nothing. Obviously, this was not the time that the fish were running. But, Peter trusted Jesus so much that even when Jesus told him to do something that appeared to be totally foolish, he did what he was asked to do. Peter obeyed and was handsomely rewarded. We, however, so often are very selective in our obedience to God. If we think something is unnecessary or foolish, or we just don't want to do it, we don't. We either forget or simply ignore the fact that God is all-knowing and loving, and that everything that He instructs us to do is for our spiritual good.

The last thing that I wanted to talk to you about is for you to examine the statement: "they forsook all, and followed Him". Jesus also calls us to follow Him. As Christians, we are not of this world but are traveling, following Him, through this life toward the Heavenly Kingdom. But the world is a very tempting place, and we find ourselves facing very difficult choices. Obviously, Jesus does not expect all of us to forsake everything in order to follow Him, as did the apostles. But how much are we willing to forsake on His behalf? What do our hearts value the most, the world or God?

May God inspire us to always clearly see in front of us the royal, middle road through life. Not straying off of this path will allow us to find fulfillment in our life on earth but not at the expense of eternal damage to our spiritual life and salvation.

In Christ,

Archpriest Serge Kotar