

**Reflection on the Gospel– Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C
(Luke 5:1-11)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

The gospel reading opens with Jesus by the lake shore looking for a little space from the people who are pressing around him to hear “the word of God”. For the gospel writer, the word of Jesus *is* the word of God. The listener/reader has been gradually prepared, in the baptism scene and in the synagogue at Nazareth, to receive this momentous statement. Jesus is the anointed of God who brings good news/God’s word to the destitute. The gospel narrative assumes that the crowd by the lake receives his teaching as God’s word.

Jesus spots two empty boats, gets into the one that belongs to Simon Peter, whom he seems to know since he feels free to do this and even to ask Simon to move the boat out from the shore. Having gained the distance he needs, Jesus sits down and teaches the crowd from the boat. God’s word thus comes to the people from the potentially regenerative waters of the lake. Simon no doubt has one ear on Jesus’ teaching as he and his despondent business partners clean the nets and pack up ready to go home without any fish. They have fished all night without a single catch.

Evoking the creation story of Genesis where God’s spirit moves over the face of the deep, Jesus invites Simon and his companions to put out into deep water and lower the nets for a catch, even though the odds of a catch seem very slim. Simon Peter hesitates, noting that they have laboured without success all night. He nonetheless follows Jesus’ instructions. The dramatic result of his attending to Jesus’ word brings Simon to his knees: he acknowledges his limitations, his “sinfulness” in gospel terms. Jesus then commissions him to engage fearlessly in a new mission of reaching out beyond his present business enterprise to “catch people”. This commission is not to be understood as a recruitment drive for the reign of God movement. As the gospel story unfolds we discover that it is, rather, a mission to bring the vulnerable safely to shore where they can know the compassion and justice and “hospitality” of God.

While Peter and his companions are said to “leave everything” and “follow” Jesus, the subsequent narrative makes it clear that they do not abandon their fishing activities. They simply re-centre their lives on the following of Jesus. In other words, they undertake to live out in their lives the pattern of Jesus’ life amid the ordinary concerns of daily life. The previous chapter has provided glimpses of that pattern: bringing good news to the destitute, release to the shattered, healing to the sick and the broken. In our times, we are beginning to realise that the “shattered” includes the despoiled Earth and its often polluted waters