**14th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**

One day one man named Georgy prayed, "Good Lord, I just received a notice from the bank that they are going to foreclose on my restaurant if I do not make a payment right away. I do not have the money. Good Lord, you are Greek and I am Greek. Help me to save the restaurant that's been in my family for three generations. O Lord , help me win the lottery." This man did not win. The next week, he prayed again, "O God, didn't you hear me? This is your obedient servant. I must win the lottery to save the restaurant. Please, help me to win the lottery." He didn't win. The bank repossessed the restaurant. In tears, a man prayed again, "O Lord, why did you let me down? The restaurant is gone. What am I going to do? Oh, why did You fail me?" Suddenly, a voice came from the clouds, "dear Georgy, you could have met Me halfway. You could have bought a lottery ticket."

Now if you leave church today and go out and buy a lottery ticket, you've missed the point of my story. It's not about playing the lottery. The message is when we are in trouble, do we meet God halfway? I would assert that we meet God halfway, whenever we follow Him. In today's Gospel reading (1st Sunday of Luke 5:1-11) Peter basically hits the jackpot when Jesus walks into his life. After working through the night and not catching a single fish, Jesus tells Peter, James and John to launch into the deep water and cast their nets. They do this and land a huge catch of fish. It was so large that the nets were starting to break and they ended up filling two boats so full that they beginning to sink. When Peter sees the miraculous catch, he falls down at Jesus' feet and says, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" (v.8). One can get the sense that Peter is not being necessarily repentant as much as he's thinking, "Depart from me so I can go out and catch another boatload of fish."

However, Jesus has other plans for Peter, James and John. He calls them to a whole new vocation where they will try to catch men, not fish, and their net will be the Gospel, the Good News that the Messiah has come and the Kingdom of God is at hand.

Looking more closely, we see that Peter won the lottery, not because he caught a huge haul of fish. Rather, Peter won because he met and followed Jesus. Unlike the lottery, this meeting was not by chance. No encounter with the Lord is by coincidence. The change in Peter's life, and our life, is because we continue to meet God halfway. As I said before, we must follow the Teacher. Here's how it can happen:

First, we must Want the Teaching. In the gospel, the crowds draw near to Jesus to hear the word of God (v.1). We must demonstrate our desire for God's teaching by rising each morning to pray to Him, cracking open and reading our Bible each day, participating in worship services every week, getting to know the lives of the saints and the teachings of the Church Fathers. These are all ways of drawing near.

Second, we must Hear the Teaching. Our prayer to God should be a dialogue, not a monologue. We don't have to rush through and read whole books from the bible. It would be better to take little morsels, memorize them and chew on them throughout the day. Our worship of God must be in Spirit and truth. We are not here to impress God or each other. Neither should we come to liturgy to be passively entertained. Most of the substantive teaching takes place in the first half of the Liturgy with the epistle, gospel and sermon. We must be on time to hear the teaching.

Third, we must Trust the Teaching. Despite the fact that Peter caught nothing all night, he trusts the command of Jesus' and obeys it by letting down his net. At the end of the passage, Peter, James and John trust Jesus' call to become fisher of men and the leave everything behind to follow Him (v.10-11). Despite all our prayers and liturgies, despite our knowledge of the scripture and the saints, our life will not mean very much if we don't believe and trust these things enough to actually take risks in order to change.

To conclude, Following the Teacher involves Wanting, Hearing, Trusting and Following His Teaching. Each of these actions is like meeting God halfway. All of these imply movement and change. For many of us, this is scary stuff. We easily grow accustomed to our way of life, even if it is not pleasant or productive. Before Jesus calls Peter, James and John to follow Him, He says, "Do not be afraid" (v.10). God is saying the same thing to us, "Do not be afraid. Meet me halfway. I will come to you. I will reveal Myself to you-sometimes in a miraculous way but often in a subtle yet reassuring way. Leave your former life behind. I have a plan for a new life for you." Amen.

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