

# The Holy Ark of the Christian Church

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*Fifth Sunday after Trinity (4 July 2010)*  
*Saint Luke 5:1-11*

Dearly beloved, first century fishermen were rough and rugged men who worked long and odd hours. All night they dropped their nets in the shallow waters, dragged them, and pulled them in, hoping for a good catch of fish. This dropping, dragging, and pulling in of their nets happened over and over again until morning came. Then they came back to shore, readied their catch of fish for market, and cleaned their nets for the following night. It was good, honest labor and brought in the means to provide for one's household.

In today's Holy Gospel we meet Simon Peter, a fisherman from Capernaum who owned his own boat and had his own work crew. This rough and rugged fisherman had faced sudden storms on the Sea of Galilee. He had battled wind and wave. And yet on this particular day he experienced the fear of God like never before.

It all started when Jesus entered Simon's boat and said to him: **"Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch."** That request must have sounded strange to Simon's ears. After all, he had been out all night and caught nothing. Simon, an experienced fisherman, knows that one does not fish in the heat of the day. Nor does one fish out in the deep. Yet, he has heard Jesus' preaching and seen His miracles. And so, he responds: **"Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at Your word I will let down the nets."**

After Simon heeds the word of Jesus and lets down the nets, the miracle happens. He and his workmen enclose a large number of fish. The nets begin tearing. The boats begin sinking. Simon, a brawny fisherman, is filled with fear. Not because of the sinking boats. Not because of the breaking nets. Not because of the large number of fish. But because he—a sinner—is standing in the presence of the holy Son of God. So he falls to his knees and exclaims: **"Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."**

Such a confession is good and proper. It is good for Simon Peter. It is also good for you. That is why the Church, in her wisdom, places similar words in your mouth whenever you come into God's house and enter the presence of Jesus Christ. *"I, a poor, miserable sinner, confess unto You all my sins and iniquities*

*with which I have ever offended You and justly deserved Your temporal and eternal punishment. But I am heartily sorry for them and sincerely repent of them, and I pray You of Your boundless mercy and for the sake of the holy, innocent, bitter sufferings and death of Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to be gracious and merciful to me, a poor sinful being.”*

As sinners, do not ever grow tired or weary of confessing those words. You are not worthy to be in Jesus’ presence. You are sinful and unclean. The more you know and understand the magnitude of that confession, the more you will appreciate and live from Christ’s forgiveness! **“I came not to call the righteous,”** says Jesus, **“but sinners”** (Mt 9:13).

In response to Simon’s humbling confession, Jesus does what He does best. He forgives. He absolves Simon with four simple words: **“Do not be afraid.”** “You have nothing to fear, Simon, even though you are a sinful man. For I have come to seek and to save sinners, even you. Even as knowledge of your sinfulness has first humbled you and put the fear of God into you, now My righteousness exalts you and puts the love of God into you. You are forgiven. For I am going to the cross to shoulder your burden, to die your death, to take your sin away. My body will be broken and My blood will be shed for you. So do not be afraid. You are Mine!”

Then Jesus commissions Simon to give out the same forgiveness that he had just received. **“From now on you will be catching men.”** This brawny fisherman who had been catching fish with a net and pulling them into his boat would now catch sinners with the Gospel and place them into the care and protection of Christ’s Church. That is what the Office of the Ministry is. It is Christ publicly calling sinners to repentance and faith through Word and Sacrament. By God’s grace, Simon and his colleagues heed Christ’s call. They leave everything behind, including this miraculous catch of fish, and follow Christ.

That’s good news for you, for you are sinners who daily need the Gospel. You are fish who need a fisherman. You are people who need a pastor. You are children of God who need the care and protection of His Church.

Do you see yourself in today’s Holy Gospel? You are there. First and foremost, you are there in the crowd standing on the shore. That is your primary calling. Gathering around Jesus to hear His Word. **“My sheep hear My voice,”** says Jesus, **“and I know them, and they follow Me”** (Jn 10:27). Sadly, there are many who have bought into the devil’s lies and given up coming to God’s house, observing God’s day, and holding God’s Word sacred and gladly hearing and

learning it. That's a shame because one cannot be a Christian apart from Christ's Church and Christ's Word.

Second, you are there in Simon Peter as he leaves the shore and goes out into the deep in the heat of the day to do what seems impossible. Your destination is different from Simon's, but has just as many unknowns. Will terrorists attack? Will government continue to spend your children and grandchildren into poverty? Will you have a job next week? How will you pay your bills? What if you become afflicted with sickness or disease? Are you teaching your children by word and example that Christ and His Word are everything to you? Can you and your spouse reconcile your differences and rekindle the love of Christ in your relationship? Follow Simon's lead. Heed Christ's Word and face the day at hand in the confidence of His goodness and mercy.

Third, you are there in Simon Peter as he confesses: **“Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”** This we've already talked about.

Finally, you are there in Simon Peter, James, and John, who, **“when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him.”** The call to discipleship is just that. It is a call to forsake the temptations of the devil, the world, and your sinful nature, and to follow Christ, who died and rose for you, by daily dying to sin and rising to new life in Him.

Simon Peter, as rough and rugged as he was, was reduced to nothing by his sinfulness. The same is true of you. Thankfully, you have a Savior who has come to cast the net of His Gospel into the sea of this world to catch sinners and place them in the care and protection of His Church. Such is the gift you received in Holy Baptism and still receive in Word and Sacrament. The part of the church in which you are sitting is called the *nave*, which is derived from the Latin word for ship. You, dear friends, are here in Christ's boat, receiving His care and protection as He leads you in your voyage to the shoreline of life everlasting. We pray that each and every time someone is baptized at this font. “Grant that so-and-so be kept safe and secure in the holy Ark of the Christian Church.”

So, whatever life throws your way, do not be afraid. He who named you as His own in Holy Baptism and called you to forsake all and follow Him, has placed you in the holy Ark of the Christian Church. Here you are safe, for here you are with your Savior. Thanks be to God!

In the name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Jesus Christ unto life everlasting.

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