

Homily. 5th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Year. C. 5/6 February 2022.

They asked him, “Why does it have to be said again, because surely everything that can be said has been said?” And Einstein answered them, “It all has to be said again because no one was listening the first time.” They weren’t really listening to Jesus at Nazareth either, because they only heard what they wanted to here, cherry picking the nice, comfortable bits while letting themselves become enraged over His more challenging message. This is one reason why pope Francis so dearly wants us to have a weekend each year devoted to the Word of God; so that we will honour the depth of God’s teaching and revelation, learning to better listen to Good-News of truth and life that God is offering to us.

As Nazareth went mad about the breadth and compass of God’s merciful freedom, unable to get God or their boy, Jesus to sit nicely under their control and in their pockets, He quietly and calmly slipped away from them. He journeyed some 50 Kms back down the hill to the fishing towns clustered around the Western bank of the Sea of Galilee. Like Isaiah before Him, Jesus had been sent by God to serve us. The fire of God’s call and Word was burning within Him, only more brightly still.

He went to the shore, to the fishermen who worked night and day to keep their businesses and families afloat hoping that they would listen. Jesus asked Simon to lend Him with his boat so that He could speak more easily to the crowd who were hungering for what He had to say. Finishing up, Jesus then asked for something seemingly stupid; that Simon and his crew, all expert fishermen by the way, put out into deep water for a catch despite having fished all night long for nothing.

It was a risky request, but would Simon listen? Despite some initial doubts he did and the catch was enormous, filling Simon's boat and that of his partners to the brim. Amazing things happen when we don't just hear the words people speak, but listen actively to the meaning of those words, especially when they are the Words of the living God.

Simon had enough humility to have the free space within himself to really listen to what Jesus was saying and not just to hear what he liked and wanted. His humility, his openness to what could be lead Simon to ask for mercy, for as he said, he was a sinful man. Jesus had something divine, liberating, full of grace and even more surprising to say about this. Don't be afraid! Don't worry about your sins, past failures and weaknesses. Look to the future Simon and partners, for as Jesus said, from now onwards a new day and way has dawned for you where you will be in the business of catching the ears, minds and hearts of others. But, it was crunch time now. Would they keep listening or shut their minds and souls down? They chose to listen again and listen deeply, leaving everything and everyone behind as they followed Him into a future unknown.

A few years after this, after the scandal and shame of the Cross and the surprising springtime of Easter joy and hope was done, Saul met the same Lord, Risen, released from death's grip yet still bearing the wounds of life but now spilling grace. On the ground, blinded by the Lord's light, he became the new man Paul, dedicating his remaining decades to preaching the Word of God's great news. He tells us that it no longer mattered to him who did the preaching as long as they preached the truth and people believed, for faith is always a gift of God's grace and working.

It has all been said before, but what Einstein said is true. We have to say it over and over again because so often, unlike the Galilee fishermen and Paul on the Damascus road, we weren't listening. Maybe this will be the day, the moment that we will listen, letting in the Word of Gods call to a life made new. Then, finally, we can live as one in Christ, joyfully bearing fruit for the salvation of the world, which after all is all that really matters.