

Fifth Sunday *per annum*
Year C, 2025

Is 6:1-8 1 Cor 15:1-11
Ps 138 Lk 5:1-11

Duc in altum

Some of you are really getting to know me quite well, at least when it comes to my homilies, how I prepare them, what I might talk about. Not long ago one of our parishioners told me that they try to figure out what word or phrase from the Scripture readings I'll focus on, and then explain, and then develop into a reflection. That is, I confess it, my predominant *m.o.* I've told you before that I'm a "word nerd," and so I'm drawn to words or phrases, and I want to investigate them, see what they mean in themselves and how they then form a part of the words around them, the text and the context. This is how I dig into what the Scriptures, which are the written Word of God, mean. And from meaning comes understanding, light, truth, and a plan for action.

I think that's not a bad game to play before coming to Mass at St Patrick's. Which word, which phrase is Father going to delve into this time? To do that, you'll have to read the Scripture readings ahead of time and do a little investigating on your own. And you might come across words or phrases that somehow seize your attention. And you'll reflect on them and wonder about them and pray with them. You see, in preaching this way, I've been trying to show you how to pray with Scripture.

Anyway, today, let's take this sentence from the gospel: "After Jesus had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch.'" *Put out into deep water*. That's the phrase. In Latin that is rendered *Duc in altum*. Set out into the deep. This has become the spiritual mainstay of many a serious Christian, a motto to live by, a word of wisdom and truth, a saying worthy of trust. *Duc in altum*. Set out into the deep.

The text itself, the words themselves are simple, and so we don't have to dig very much into their meaning. But the context is interesting. Jesus is in Simon's boat, teaching the crowds. Simon had worked hard all night on the Sea of Galilee and had caught nothing. He's beyond tired. Exhausted. Discouraged. But he's drawn to this rabbi and agrees to let him into his boat and listen to him talk and teach the crowds. He's got to clean his nets anyway. Listening to Jesus talk will help pass the time, distract him from the tedium of his work, take his mind off his worries and fear and anxieties. Anyway, Jesus says interesting things and everybody, Simon, too, wants to hear him. It's like a real-life podcast, right there in his boat.

Jesus finishes speaking to the crowds. Now he turns to Simon. *Duc in altum*. Set out into the deep. A command. An imperative statement, not an interrogative one. Another follows: lower your nets for a catch. The words are simple. Here's the context. Simon is exhausted. He had just fished at the peak time to catch – all night – and had been unsuccessful. Now a carpenter-rabbi is giving him orders about fishing. How easy it would have been for Simon to

glare at Jesus and say, “Beat it, rabbi. We’re wiped out. We’re going home to eat, to sleep, to nurse our aching bodies, to be consoled by our loved ones. We’re done here, and so are you.” But exhausted, weary, discouraged, afraid as he is, Simon does, as Simon does, something else, something bold and generous. He surrenders. Before he lowers his nets, he lowers his defenses. What he is about to do is folly. But he does it anyway. When it’s all over and he is doubly defeated, will he walk away from the “master” with disgust and disappointment or with angry scorn and derision? He doesn’t know. But for some reason, unknown even to himself, Simon will submit, surrender, let go ... of all his heart, of all his soul, of all his strength, of all his mind (see Lk 10:27).

But notice his words: “Master, *we* have worked hard all night...” “But at your say-so, *I* will lower the nets.” Simon does not speak for the others. He speaks for himself. “We” ... my companions and I have toiled hard. We are exhausted. We are done working. Our nets are clean. Our boats are tidied. It is time to go home. *But... I* will do what you say to do. *I, Simon*. The others will do as they see fit, as they think best. I do not command them. (Open parentheses: they will, on their own and in freedom, follow Simon, stay with him, stick by him. Close parentheses.) But I will do as you say, even if it means I do it alone, even though I am bone-weary, even though I have my doubts, even though I can’t make sense of what I’m even doing listening to you.

What happens next – the unexpected and unimaginable – overwhelms Simon. He knows that he is in the presence of a power beyond anything that he has ever experienced before. At first he called Jesus master, boss, now he calls him lord, sir: “*Master*, we have worked hard all night...” “Depart from me, *Lord*, for I am a sinful man.” Encounter. Mystical encounter with God’s goodness, with his power, and with his gentleness ... *do not be afraid*. With these words, Jesus addresses Simon directly and leads Simon into God’s purpose for him: *from now on* ... From now on, you will be different. Your purpose has changed. No longer will you reach into the sea *with nets* to draw out fish. From now on, *with my word* you will reach into the hearts of your kin and fellow countrymen and all you meet to draw out faith, to draw them out of the waters of death and into the kingdom of life.

Yes, Simon, *duc in altum*. Set out into the deep. Remember this, all of you, especially...

When you’re exhausted. *Duc in altum*.

When you’re afraid. *Duc in altum*.

When you’re worried. *Duc in altum*.

When you feel defeated. *Duc in altum*.

When you feel discouraged. *Duc in altum*.

When you are old, and it seems too late. *Duc in altum*.

When you are young, and it seems too soon. *Duc in altum.*

When it all seems too much. *Duc in altum.*

When nothing is going right. *Duc in altum.*

When it seems pointless. *Duc in altum.*

When you “know better.” *Duc in altum.*

When you’re not sure. *Duc in altum.*

When you think you’re all alone. *Duc in altum.*

When you know yourself an unworthy sinner. *Duc in altum.*

Set out into the deep.

There, in the deep, when you lower your nets despite it all, the Lord is with you, and you will meet his might, gaze upon his glory, and you will never be the same. From then on, you will know and serve his purpose for you. And perhaps for the first time in your life, you will know his peace.

Duc in altum. Set out into the deep.