

Put out into deep water- all aboard for Lent!

Having celebrated the feast of the Presentation only last week, (which traditionally brings to an end the Christmas season), we will on Wednesday celebrate Ash Wednesday and so begin the season of Lent. As such with it being so early this year, Lent seems to have come upon us with a bit of a rush. So perhaps we should try and use this week's liturgy to help us to take a breath and a pause for thought. To reflect on where we are and where we are going in our response to our Christian calling, and it just so happens that today's gospel is a perfect one for the task.

Beginning a new liturgical season is always a moment of invitation, a new opportunity. It is an invitation which Jesus places before us this week and as a consequence we are called upon to treat it seriously. Accepting this invitation from Jesus has about it the element of the unknown as well as a feeling of trepidation since our decision will have consequences. Jesus invites us to *put out into deep water* and when we think about what this means we begin to recognise that Jesus is asking us to re-evaluate our lives. He is inviting us to look again at what it is that motivates us. He is calling us to examine once more whether our Christian values continue to inform our choices. This is a daunting prospect, one that can fill us with much apprehension and yet in the midst of this uneasiness, Jesus offers his words of encouragement - *do not be afraid*. They may sound rather mundane and unspectacular; simple enough to say yet seemingly impossible to verify, but remember where we will hear these words again. They will resound down the ages from the entry to an empty tomb and because of what happened in that tomb, they will not just dispel our fear but offer us the hope and joy that our future is assured. This assurance is the motivation for us to enter into our Lenten observances of prayer, fasting and alms-giving with a new perspective.

We sometimes forget that underlying all our work is the presence of the risen Lord. Even when we feel our efforts are in vain or our energies have been wasted, the presence of the risen Lord means that such thoughts should be alien to us. Even when we are filled with disappointment and we become frustrated by the lack of response to our promptings, the fact of the resurrection means that no expression of Christian charity is without effect. This is illustrated perfectly for us by the reaction of Peter. He has done his work and fished all night without success. He feels jaded and unvalued. He knows he has given his all and seemingly it has come to naught. How often is our experience just like that of Peter? We do all we can to live our faith in today's unresponsive and indifferent world and we seem to make little impression. The impact of our work founders on what seems the harsh reality of a society which has turned its ear from the gospel message. Yet that message once it is out there does and will have its effect. Our task is not to redeem the world; that has already been done through the resurrection. Our task is to make known to the world the love of God through the lives we live and the example we give. Our task is to cast that net of love out into the deep water and let the reality of the resurrection do the rest. That net consists of and is made up of our prayer, our fasting and our charity and we must never be afraid to witness to it. Let's get ready for Lent!