

## *Duc in Altum*

Homily for September 2, 2021

In Magdala, Israel, which is on the Sea of Galilee, there is a Church called in Latin “Duc in Ultum”, taken from the Lord’s direction in today’s Gospel “to put out into the deep”. When I entered this Church in January 2019 I was moved by its simple beauty. It looks out onto the Sea of Galilee. The altar, shaped like a fishing boat expresses architecturally something that is at the heart of the Mass. We are sent on mission when we leave Church to carry on the vocation entrusted to Peter and his companions. We are to let down our nets for a catch, not of slippery, smelly vertebrate animals, but of the homo-sapiens classification.

But here is our cry, echoing that of Peter. Master we have been fishing all night and have come up with nothing. We can experience in our day a similar heartache when we think of how the Church seems to be in a time where the fish are to speak “not biting”. But when we are in a place of human helplessness, this can be the opportunity Jesus is looking for. He wants to challenge us to look to him and put our nets out into the deep water. He sends us on mission so that in the words of Pope Francis we can be inspired to recognize what the Holy Father says in the Joy of the Gospel – the document that set the direction for his papacy.

“I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security. More than by fear of going astray, my hope is that we will be moved by the fear of remaining shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security, within rules which make us harsh judges, within habits which make us feel safe, while at our door people are starving and Jesus does not tire of saying to us: “Give them something to eat”<sup>1</sup>

But this is a challenging admonition from our Holy Father. We might think, this is beyond us, a exhortation that unsettles and leads us to also cry out: “Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man”. But here is the invitation in all this. When we do recognize I am a sinful person, who is so in need of the grace of Jesus in my life, as we grow in knowing him, we will yearn for others to come into the boat so that more people are discovering what Pope Francis terms the “Joy of the Gospel.

It is this joy that flows from the heart of St. Paul in the reading from Colossians. Listen again to the focus of his prayer.

He wants them to know God so they can be strengthened by God, so that in the present they can endure everything they face with patience while joyfully giving thanks to the Father because they share in the inheritance of heaven and are thereby joined to the saints in light. Jesus wants St. Peter’s to hear the call that is the heart of the Gospel. The Mass renews us to know Jesus with an ever deepening love so that we realize the Church is a fishing vessel that exists so more and more people can be caught up in the Joy of the Gospel. As Pope Francis also stated in his Apostolic Exhortation from 2014:

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<sup>1</sup> The Joy of the Gospel Paragraph 49

Christians have the duty to proclaim the Gospel without excluding anyone. Instead of seeming to impose new obligations, they should appear as people who wish to share their joy, who point to a horizon of beauty and who invite others to a delicious banquet. It is not by proselytizing that the Church grows, but “by attraction”. (Joy of the Gospel Par 14-15)

Let us pray that St. Peter’s will be ever more a church where from the Mass we are sent on mission to go into the deep in by the patient way of love attract others to him who is always wants to catch men and women for the kingdom his beloved son.