

Father O'Connor's Homily for 9 February 2025
Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time-C

Isaiah 6: 1-2a, 3-8
1 Corinthians 15: 1-11
Luke 5: 1-11

Have you ever heard the Latin phrase, **Duc in altum**? It means, “Put out” [**Duc**] “into the deep” [**in altum**]. That is the command that Jesus gave to Saint Peter in today's Gospel. “Put out into the deep and lower your nets for a catch.” And what a miraculous catch occurred!

Jesus is not talking to us about fishing, but about putting out our very best efforts into the depths of our spiritual lives. There can be nothing shallow, nothing halfway about our commitment to Him. It must be daily, deep and disciplined.

Like Saint Peter, who answered, “Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing,” we might sometimes wish that Jesus would just leave well-enough alone. But He won't. So often in our spiritual lives – when we seem to find a small cove where we might leisurely drift around for a while – Jesus steps in and tells us, **Duc in altum**. “Put out into the deep and lower your nets for a catch.” And the miraculous catch that followed for Saint Peter filled two boats with so many fish that “the boats were in danger of sinking.”

I was the oldest of six children in my family, so I find myself quite sympathetic with this command of Jesus. We older children get used to this “prodding to perfection.” Growing up, I would enter a freshly-cleaned room with my younger brothers, and in an instant that tidy room could become a total mess. My parents would let my little brothers off the hook for their reckless behavior, but not me. “You are the oldest,” my mother and father would say to me. “We expect more out of you.”

In a way, that is what Jesus was saying to Saint Peter. “Put out into the deep. Nothing shallow. Nothing halfway. I expect more out of you as the one I have chosen to be the chief of the Apostles. I am calling you to great holiness and heroic virtue.”

The late Cardinal John O'Connor [1920-2000], the Archbishop of New York, was surrounded by television reporters and was being hammered about his opposition to the widespread distribution of condoms in New York City schools to curb teenage pregnancies and AIDS.

One of the reporters said, “Cardinal O'Connor, you're expecting an awful lot out our young people by thinking that they can control themselves. Isn't it better to

just admit that young people aren't able to live up to this standard of purity, so they need to take precautions?"

And Cardinal O'Connor replied, "Oh, no. The whole world is saying to our young people, 'We know that you can't live a pure life. So at least be careful.' Well, somebody has got to say to our young, 'Be good. And I know that, with God's grace, you can be good.' And that someone has to be the Church."

Duc in altum. "Put out into the deep."

What are some ways that we can join Saint Peter in "putting out into the deep"?

The first is our prayer life. This is our call to holiness. It is an invitation to know and love Jesus in the very depths of our being. It is the task of developing a rich personal relationship with Jesus that can only come from spending time with Him in prayer that is daily, deep and disciplined.

Saint Bernard of Clairvaux [1090-1153] tells us, "If you were wise, you would tend first to the reservoirs and then to the channels." We are so often doing this and doing that, going here and going there. We are navigating the channels all the time.

But Saint Bernard says that we had better take care of the reservoir deep down in our souls and make sure that it is filled with the life-giving water of grace that only Jesus can give, or else the reservoir is going to go empty and the channels are going to run dry.

The insurance policy for making sure that the reservoir never goes empty is prayer: daily, deep and disciplined prayer

A second area where we can "put out into the deep" is in "never tiring of doing good." Saint Paul tells us this in Galatians 6:9 and in 2 Thessalonians 3:13. "Never tire of doing good."

For us disciples, we can get tired of doing good. Every once-in-a-while, we want to say to Jesus, "Enough! I need a break!" But as the Irish Benedictine monk, Blessed Columba Marmion [1858-1923], said, "'Enough' is not a word found in the Christian vocabulary, because we are never to tire of putting out into the deep and doing good."

Duc in altum. "Never tire of doing good."

A third area in our pursuit of holiness is that we must never become arrogant, never "holier than thou" in terms of judging others and their spiritual lives.

Holiness is a lifelong journey, and we can only make progress in it with humility and perseverance.

As Msgr. Martin Hellriegel [1890-1981] from Saint Louis remarked: “We are to have our heads in the clouds, and our feet firmly planted on the earth. And we are to have our hearts next to Jesus’ heart on the Cross.”

Our progress in holiness all begins with God’s grace and favor. We do not earn it, we cannot achieve it on our own. The Lord does it in us and through us – and oftentimes in spite of us.

Carve out regular time to grow in your relationship with Jesus through prayer which is daily, deep and disciplined.

“Never tire of doing good.”

Embrace your discipleship journey with humility and perseverance.

And at Jesus’ command, “Put out into the deep” – **Duc in altum.** Then lower your nets. And get ready for a catch.