

Homily – Lk. 5: 1-11
St. Patrick's Day - , 16th/ 17th March, 2021

Today is a very important day for the Irish people all over the world and for all others who have been so warmly welcomed into this great land of saints and scholars. Yes! Today we celebrate the solemnity of St. Patrick - a saint for all seasons and for all times.

His Holiness Pope John Paul II in his Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, that is, “At the beginning of the New Millennium” published in 2001, addresses the Bishops, Clergy and Lay Faithful with the following words: At the beginning of the new millennium, and at the close of the Great Jubilee during which we celebrated the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of Jesus and a new stage of the Church's journey, our hearts ring out with the words of Jesus when one day, after speaking to the crowds from Simon's boat, he invited the Apostle to "put out into the deep" for a catch: "*Duc in altum*". Peter and his first companions trusted Christ's words, and cast the nets. And "when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish".

Pope then continues: *Duc in altum!* Put out into the deep! These words invite us today to remember the past with gratitude, to live the present with enthusiasm and

to look forward to the future with confidence. And he says: “Do not be afraid. Do not be satisfied with mediocrity. Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch”.

Well! Today we are celebrating the feast of a great saint who dared to put out into the deep and let down his net for a catch at the command of Jesus. Even though young Patrick who, having spent 6 years in captivity as a slave, returned to his own home in Britain to be with his family, later did come back to Ireland as he felt called by the Lord for the people of Ireland. Patrick writes in his Confessions: One night I saw a vision of a man coming as it seemed from Ireland with the message: “We ask you Holy boy, come back and walk among us once more”. And compelled by this vision, and by his sense of vocation, Patrick would pursue his studies towards priesthood, eventually was ordained a priest and then a Bishop and later would return to Ireland. And the rest we know is history.

Even though raised in a devout Catholic family, we are told that as a young boy Patrick never took his religion very seriously. But while in captivity, when he felt intensely lonely, when he felt he had no one to talk to, he started talking to God. And over a period of time, he nurtured a deep personal relationship with God. Well!

We could say Patrick was caught by Jesus to draw the people of Ireland closer to the Lord. In fact, his great mission to the Irish people was born and nurtured in his desert experience as a captive. There he came to know God in a personal way. And today, it is the same for you and for me. We would meet God in our desert experience in these difficult and challenging times. Do we really look for Him? Do we really turn to Him in prayer?

Now, Simon, James and John knew how to catch fish. They were experts. They were professionals. But Luke would tell us that all of those professional fishing skills mean very little when compared to one life changing fact. And that is: Jesus has now invited them to follow Him. And that changes everything.

Luke would say: They worked all night and their nets were empty. And then Jesus steps in and calls out to them. Well! God takes the initiative. And God carries us to new directions where He wants us to be. And it is a reminder as if we needed it: “That God is in charge”. Oftentimes, we like to be in charge, don’t we? We like to think that we’ve got things under control. We tell ourselves that we know how to do, what to do and when to do it.

But again and again, the Scriptures would remind us that God is in charge, that He is the King and Master of our lives.

Well! As Jesus came to Simon, James and John, and to Patrick, He comes to each of us today in our struggles, in our pains, in our anxieties and in our fears. And, He comes to us in the most profound way in this celebration of the Holy Eucharist. For, here is the most sublime encounter with Christ that any of us can have. Here, He is truly and really present with us. He enters into our being and touches us and strengthens us and it is His word that changes our lives.

On this solemnity, let us thank God for St. Patrick and the faith that he brought to this great land. I believe St. Patrick, our Patron Saint is walking among us today; holding us close to Jesus. The man who seemingly chased away all the snakes from Ireland, which for me is a clear indication of eliminating every evil from this beautiful land, is still protecting his chosen people from all harm and adversity.

And, even though we may not know where exactly the boat is going, we would know that Jesus is sitting in the boat with us. And so, let us pray with St. Patrick today: "I pray to God to give me perseverance and to deign

that I be a faithful witness to Him to the end of my life for my God”.

God bless you all, **Amen!**