

Jesus is standing by the Lake of Gennesaret. The body of water is called the Sea of Galilee by the other gospel writers. “Gennesaret is the fertile area bordering the northwestern shore of the lake, south of Capernaum.”ⁱ We know that the fishing was not fertile for Simon Peter and his fishing companions. They had spent the night fishing and failed to catch anything on their own.

Jesus asks them to cast into the deep. “When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish and their nets were tearing” (Lk 5:6). “Unless the LORD build the house, they labor in vain who build. Unless the LORD guard the city, in vain does the guard keep watch” (Ps 127:1-2). Alone, we are limited in what we can accomplish. With trust in Jesus, the barren lake becomes a fertile fishing spot.

During World Youth Day in Toronto, I sat in a beautiful park to hear confessions. I had to preregister and was given a beautiful purple stole. The Canadian name for the park was temporarily renamed for the purposes of World Youth Day, Duc In Altum, Latin for Cast into the Deep. There were only a handful of people who came along to ask for God’s forgiveness. No large crowds at all. It was a little bit like the efforts of Peter and his companions prior to the arrival of Jesus and his teaching from the boat on the lake.

Later that week, in a large auditorium, Cardinal Arinze began to teach about forgiveness and God’s healing power through the sacrament of confession. The Gospel tells us, “When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish and their nets were tearing. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come to help them. They came and filled both boats so that they were in danger of sinking” (Lk 5:6-7). Something similar happened in that auditorium. Young people formed lines in front of many of the priests so that they could go to confession. The inspired talk by Cardinal Arinze, lit hearts on fire and many more people sought out confession in the confines of the crowded auditorium than the beautiful, spacious, outdoor park.

Luke’s account at the outset of Jesus’s ministry has a parallel story in the Gospel of John after Jesus has risen from the dead. The apostles have been out all-night fishing but to no avail. Jesus again instructs them where to fish. “Cast the net over the right side of the boat and you will find something” (Jn 21:6a). Although they did not recognize Jesus at first, they followed his instructions and “were not able to pull it in because of the number of fish” (21:6b). By the overflowing nets, John, the beloved disciple, recognizes that the Lord is present and there to help them. They haul in 153 fish and then have breakfast with Jesus. “When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?’” (21:15). Peter had denied Christ three times before the cock crowed on Good Friday. Here, at Lake Tiberias, he affirms three times that he loves Jesus and will faithfully shepherd the flock unto death.

With trust in God and the help of Jesus, we can fill our nets to overflowing. Let us respond in a likewise manner casting into the deep and working with Jesus to invite others to follow the call of our risen Savior.

ⁱ Gadenz, Pablo T.. The Gospel of Luke (Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture) (p. 112).