

## 5th Sunday (C)

- Several years ago a friend of mine, a woman for many years actively involved in the Church told me that she was appointed by her bishop to be the director of a Ministry to Families commission that he had established in his diocese.
- She felt both honoured & humbled to be asked & she threw herself into the task of setting up the commission.
- Then, within a few weeks, to her horror, she learned about a hugely scandalous set of behaviours perpetrated by members of her extended family that could become public knowledge.
- She thought - there was no way she could lead the commission - after all, anyone could accuse her of hypocrisy.
- She had to inform her bishop & tell him that regretfully she has to resign.
- They had a meeting in which she truthfully expressed the reason why she had to resign.
- Her bishop asked her whether she remembered the time he called around to her home to see her about 10 in the evening.
- She did, & remembered with embarrassment that she could only offer him instant coffee.
- That day, he said, he was with a young man who had been abused by a priest of his diocese & he listened to the pain & suffering he endured ever since that time, & he said he was filled with shame; then, in the evening the bishop had to give a talk about vocations to the priesthood & talk about the joy & value of priestly ministry.
- He said to her, "if I had to do that, I'm asking you to lead this commission."
- Maybe the most qualified ones to do certain works are those who have been brought low by the recognition of their brokenness & sinfulness.
- The story of the 'miraculous catch of fish' in the lake of Galilee must have been well-known & widespread among the first Christians.
- Luke's Gospel story culminates in this moving scene in which Simon Peter is at the same time believer, disciple & sinner.
- Peter is a man of faith, fascinated by Jesus.
- His words have more power over him than his own experience.
- Peter knows that nobody goes to fish in the lake at noon, especially if you haven't caught anything at night.
- But it is Jesus who has told him to do so & Peter trusts him fully, "Because you say so, I will let down the nets".
- Peter is also a sincere man.
- Surprised by the huge catch before him, he fell at Jesus' knees & spontaneously says, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man".
- Peter acknowledges before everyone his sinfulness & his utter unworthiness to live close to Jesus.
- But Jesus is not afraid of having at his side a disciple who is a sinner.

- On the contrary, if he knows himself to be a sinner, Peter will be able to better understand his message of forgiveness for all, & his welcome to sinners & undesirable people.
- "Don't be afraid. From now on you will catch people".
- Jesus rids him of the fear of being a disciple who is a sinner & associates him with his mission to gather & call men & women from all walks of life to take part in God's great project & plan for creation.
- The church can be so reluctant to acknowledge its sins & confess its need for conversion - officially we can say the right words, but little evidence is there to show that we have been broken by our shame & be in true & humble solidarity with those who have been harmed.
- The church belongs to Jesus Christ, but it is not Jesus Christ.
- It shouldn't (but does) surprise people that it has sinned.
- The church is "holy" because it is sustained & animated by the Spirit of Jesus, but it is sinful because it quite frequently resists the Spirit & is unfaithful to the gospel.
- There is sin in believers & institutions (all institutions), in the hierarchy & the people of God, in priests & Christian communities - we all need conversion.
- To regularly hide the truth is serious, whether we talk about church or even ourselves - it prevents us from engaging in a process of conversion & renewal.
- Moreover, is not a fragile & vulnerable church, which has the courage to acknowledge its sin, closer to the spirit of the gospel, than an institution needlessly insistent on covering up its failings?
- We would be more credible when we collaborate with Christ in the task of preaching by our words & lives, the Good News of Christ by humbly acknowledging our sins as a broken people.
- Jesus doesn't write us off because we are sinners; he is broadminded when it comes to working with & through people because he doesn't believe that people should be summed-up by their sin.
- Jesus has other plans because he believes that sinners have a future, not just a past.
- Peter, like Isaiah & Paul, had to experience failure, so that he would realise that any success he had as an apostle & as the leader of the community came from God & not from his own gifts.
- We're reminded today that God will fulfil his purpose for us if we are open.
- When we acknowledge our weakness, God can strengthen us;
- When we acknowledge our emptiness, God can fill us;
- When we acknowledge our shame & poverty, God can enrich us;
- When we acknowledge our brokenness & sin, God can heal us;
- Then we become available to do his work, & he can accomplish in us the things we find impossible. Humility is the starting point & this is what we need before we move on in any way as a community faithful to our calling.