

The Grace of Encountering Jesus

Presented by Deacon Lupe Treviño, Assistant National Spiritual Advisor, during the Region XI Virtual Encounter on June 11, 2022.

Prayer to the Holy Spirit.

Good morning, I am Deacon Lupe Treviño. Thank you for allowing me to be here with you this day – it is truly an honor and a blessing.

We begin with a reading from Luke 5:1-11.

“While the crowd was pressing in on Jesus and listening to the word of God, he was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret. He saw two boats there alongside the lake; the fishermen had disembarked and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, he asked him to put out a short distance from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. After he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch.” Simon said in reply, “Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing, but at your command I will lower the nets.” 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. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at the knees of Jesus and said, “Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.” For, astonishment at the catch of fish they had made seized him and all those with him, and likewise James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners of Simon. Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.” When they brought their boats to the shore, they left everything and followed him.” [Lk.5:1-11]

Our focus for this morning is “The Grace of Encountering Jesus” as St. Peter did in this Scripture passage.

Simon Peter, Andrew, and their buddies had been fishing all night, but the fish were not cooperating. It had been a long, unproductive night. And now they were on the shore with all the other fishermen, cleaning and mending their nets. Simon was tired and couldn't wait to be done. He was looking forward to a good breakfast and a few hours' sleep. Some nights were like that. Perhaps next time they would have better luck. *I don't know about any of you but I have lived that same experience – gone fishing with family or friends all night long and caught nothing and like Peter I was ready to go home and sleep.* But Peter's Day was just beginning!

He hears a commotion on the beach, looks up. Of course! It was Jesus, the rabbi who had been teaching and healing the sick. And as usual, a crowd of people were flocking to Him, excited to see His miracles and eager for more of what He had to say.

But wait, He was coming toward him! Jesus looks straight at Simon. Holding his gaze, He motioned with His hand. Simon wonders, Does Jesus want to get into my boat? What does this man want with me? And who does He think He is, expecting me to take Him on board?

Without skipping a beat Jesus says, “Can you row out a bit? The people can hear me better if I teach from out there.” All Peter wanted was to go home - But he couldn't very well say no. So, he

did as Jesus asked and rowed out. Peter had heard Jesus speak before, but he still couldn't help but be riveted by his words.

Pope Francis, in *Joy of the Gospel* states that our lives are all about encounter especially with Jesus. He invites all Christians, everywhere, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least, an openness to letting Him encounter them

As we all know, from that encounter, Simon Peter's life was turned upside down—all because Jesus took the initiative to pursue him. He came right into Peter's boat, the place where Peter was most comfortable, where he spent so much of his time, where he made his living. Jesus chose Peter, pursued him, and climbed into his boat and into his life. - Just as He does with us.

Now, did Jesus choose Peter's boat at random? After all, there were other fishermen with their boats on the shore that morning.

No, it was not random. Jesus clearly sought out Peter and his brother, Andrew. He wanted more from these two fishermen than just a couple of more followers; He wanted real friendship and closeness with them ~ wanted to develop a deeper loving relationship with them. So, Jesus came right up to them, spoke directly to them, and walked right into their boat ~ right into their lives! Just as He did with you on your Cursillo.

This is who Jesus is - He wants to establish a close relationship with us. And so, He comes right up to us and asks us to welcome Him. He tells us in Rev. 3:20: *“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, [then] I will enter his house and dine with him, and he with me.”*

He doesn't just stand at the edge of our lives and wait for us to notice Him. He knocks on the door to our homes, our workplaces, and especially the door of our hearts. He chooses us, not because of what we can do for Him, but simply because of the great love He has for each and every one of us. He is continually coming into our “boat.” He never forces himself into our lives. He simply “knocks” and then waits for us to invite Him in — again and again.

Jesus wants to come into your life and affect every part of who you are—your dreams and desires, your thoughts and fears, your habits and attitudes. He wants to fill all the good things with his grace and love and bring healing to the areas of darkness in you so that he can transform and renew your every desire, word, and action.

But don't think Jesus is expecting you to become a saint overnight! He knows this is the work of a lifetime. Look at Peter. He may have decided to become a disciple of Jesus that day in the boat, but he still had to grow in his faith. After this first encounter, Peter still had struggles. His sins and his tendency to rely on his own strength came along with him when he left the boat! Jesus didn't pursue Peter because he was perfect, and he didn't stop pursuing him when he failed. Jesus came for sinners, and Peter was one of them. In fact, you could say that Peter was a proud, overconfident macho man. For example, take that time the disciples were out in the boat and Jesus came to them walking on water. Peter jumps up and says, “This is cool. Lord, let me come out there with you. The other disciples in the boat said to Peter, “You sure about this?” and Peter looks back at them

and says, “I got this.” When Jesus asks about who people said who He is, after all His disciples answer, Peter says: “I got this guys. You are the Messiah.” And at the last supper when Jesus says they will all deny and abandon Him and Peter says: “Even though I have to die with You, I will not deny you. I got this.” And of course, we all know what happens, right?

Yet, Jesus is Faithful and Persistent. Peter had done the unthinkable. After following Jesus for three years, after proclaiming Him the Messiah, and after pledging never to deny Him, Peter did just that - yet Jesus once more sought and found Peter in a familiar, comfortable place: his fishing boat (John 21:1-19). Peter had gone back out on the lake, with some of his fishing buddies. We all know the story, right. Jesus takes Peter aside and asks him three times, “Do you love me?”—once for every time Peter had denied him. Neither Peter’s denials nor his sins from the past could stop Jesus from reaching out to him. Jesus did this not only to make sure that Peter knew he was forgiven but also to send him on his mission to preach the good news and be the leader he was meant to be. Then after telling Peter “Feed my lambs. Feed my sheep”. He looks lovingly at Peter and asks: “Simon Peter, you got this?” Peter replies, “No Lord - We got this!”

There is a poem written by Francis Thompson named “The Hound of Heaven.” The poem describes God in pursuit of Thompson's soul like a hound in pursuit of its prey. I quote: “*As the hound follows the hare, never ceasing in its running, ever drawing nearer in the chase, with unhurrying and unperturbed pace, so does God follow the fleeing soul by His Divine grace. And though in sin or in human love, away from God it seeks to hide itself, Divine grace follows after, unwearingly follows ever after, till the soul feels its pressure forcing it to turn to Him alone in that never ending pursuit.*”

This is how magnificent our God is! He pursues us even when we feel unworthy. He pursues us when we have sinned, even when we have let Jesus down as seriously as Peter did. Jesus never forgets the yes that we gave to Him in the past, so he continues to seek us out and to ask us to welcome Him into that boat of our heart.

So, look for Him always, “Acknowledge the Presence” of His grace because He will come to the place where you are most comfortable. He is seeking you in the ordinary daily routine of your life, just as He sought Peter. As Peter states in his 2nd letter, “Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” In other words: “Grow in the Grace of Jesus’ Presence.”

*Meanwhile, back on the boat: Peter was getting more restless by the moment. He had listened to Jesus’ preaching, he was tired, hungry, and thirsty but Jesus wasn’t finished with Peter yet, once Jesus finished speaking to the crowd, He tells Peter to put out into the deep for a catch.

Peter must have thought. You’ve got to be kidding me. I’m the fisherman here, not you. I’ve spent years on the water; I know when the fish are biting and when they’re not. What makes you think that I’m going to haul in a catch now? But Jesus was looking right into his eyes—and, it seemed, right into his soul. What would you have done if you were Peter? Would you have gone back out onto the sea, even against your better judgment? Following Jesus can be difficult, especially when we think we know better or would rather do it our way. But Peter was able to overcome his objections – his excuses because Jesus was right there with him in the boat. The “*Grace of His Presence*” moved Peter to obedience. What would have happened if Peter had laughed it off and

told Jesus, “Sorry, Lord, I’m done fishing for the day, maybe tomorrow. If Peter would have acted this way he would never have been blessed with this abundant catch. The same is true with us. If we fail to listen to the voice of God in our lives, and fail to heed His “radical” commands, we will not be *“the clay in His hands.”*”

How can we become more like Peter and throw out our nets? How can we become more obedient to God in our lives? Only thru grace, the “Grace of Obedience.” Obedience may seem unreachable, but it is first and foremost a grace that any of us can ask for and receive, simply because it comes from Jesus’ presence in our “boat” with us. One key to holiness is obedience. Obedience can be hard - You can’t half do it, see, *“partial obedience is still disobedience.”* So, look for opportunities to be obedient to Jesus, especially when you do not feel like doing so. Those are moments of great grace and conversion as we say in Cursillo: “A close moment to Christ.” Jesus is inviting us to a deeper experience of his love for us, a deeper experience of repentance, and a deeper willingness to surrender our lives more fully to him.

Yes! Rowing out into deep water can be scary. It’s easier to stay in the “shallow waters” of our lives, where we feel safe and in control. But staying safe in the shallows won’t get us closer to the Lord. So, when Jesus says, “Put out into the deep,” He’s not just giving us a gentle suggestion. Rather, calling us to a deeper loving relationship ~ calling us to trust and obey Him. Because of His great love for us we too come with an open, humble, and expectant heart.

I urge you, brothers & sisters to humble yourself before God. This word humble comes from the word humus, which is earth and like the earth - be open and receptive to the seed ~ most especially to the seed of God’s grace. *“Humble yourself before the Lord and He will lift you up.”* (Jm.4:10) A task that requires you to reach deeply within yourself and realize the miracle of your existence ~ that you are redeemed in Christ Jesus and that the Kingdom of God is within you and in truly searching for this kingdom within you will find the truth – and the “truth will set you free.” And what is the truth? No, God won’t respond to you as Jack Nicholson: “You can’t handle the truth.” The truth is as Eduardo Bonnín has taught us; that God, in Christ Jesus loves you – each one of you – a love so intense – beyond our understanding – revealed in Christ Jesus who because of His great love of the Father and for us gave His very life. God never asks us to do something without giving us the grace to do it.

*The same grace that allowed Peter to row out into deep water and lower his nets, just as Jesus had told him to do. Almost immediately, he felt a tremendous tug. With great effort, he and his brother, Andrew, began hauling in the nets. Their jaws dropped in astonishment. How could there be so many fish? The nets were breaking! As he watched the squirming fish piling on top of one another, Peter began to worry about the boat. Was it in danger of sinking? He had just witnessed a miracle. All he could do was fall to his knees before Jesus.

What Jesus said next changed Peter’s life forever: *“Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.”* Catching men? What does that mean? Peter had to find out. The presence and power of this man were leading him to do something almost beyond his comprehension—leave his livelihood and follow Jesus.

This is the “Grace of Mission.” When Peter got out of the boat and abandoned his nets, he embarked on a journey that would take him from Galilee, to other cities and finally to Rome. He would be given the “keys to the kingdom” as the first leader of the Church. He would be the first to baptize Gentiles and welcome them into the new Church. Eventually, he would give up his life for Jesus. And it all started with him getting out of his boat and following Jesus.

Why? Why was Peter able to make such a decision? Was he just being his usual impulsive self? No. That day he had a *personal encounter* with Christ. He heard Him speaking with authority and wisdom. And when he put out into the deep water and lowered his nets, he witnessed a great miracle. And Jesus was now inviting him to join Him in His mission. The grace of God that he had witnessed—the grace that was also stirring his heart—convinced Peter to accept Jesus’ invitation. He abandoned everything to set out into deeper waters, into the unknown.

The “Grace” of Jesus’ presence in Peter’s boat led to the “Grace” of Peter’s obedience. That in turn led to the “Grace” of a great catch - to “*The Grace of Mission*” that enabled Peter to get out of the boat and fish for people. This same pattern is at work in the life of every Christian. Jesus comes into our lives, asks us to listen and obey Him, and then sends us out on mission. At every step of the way, He offers us His abundant grace so that we can find the courage to do what He asks.

Our faith tells us that only God can fulfill the deepest desires of our hearts. Yet so many people feel empty and lost. You probably know a number of people like this. Do you yearn for them to know God? Do you feel a sense of urgency about their need for Jesus? If not, then ask God to give you His heart of love for them and His desire to share the “Good News” with them.

What does God’s heart look like? It looks like the Father, who sent his beloved Son into the world to rescue us from sin and death. It looks like the father in the parable of the prodigal son, who welcomes back his wayward son with joy and celebration.

Mission is all about looking outward. It’s about focusing on God and other people and not only on our own needs or wants. That can be especially difficult when we are facing problems and struggles of our own. But even in the midst of such challenges, Jesus is still saying, “*Get out of the boat. I want you to catch people for me.*”

You may worry that focusing outward will require you to ignore your current responsibilities. But that’s not necessarily so. God doesn’t want you to turn your back on your duties in life while you join Him on mission, but He does want you to be His ambassador! One definition of “ambassador” is that of a person who acts on behalf of another as a representative or promoter of a specified activity. Exactly what St. Paul says to us: “So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us.” (2 Cor.5:20)

When Jesus invited Peter to “catch people,” he could have thought, “Who, me? I can’t do that. I’m an uneducated fisherman - Nobody will listen to me.” [I pretty much thought the same thing: “Not me, so and so would do better.”] Thankfully, Peter paid more attention to Jesus’ invitation than to his own limitations.

Through the experience of a Cursillo weekend, you also were called to a deeper, fuller life centered on our Lord. You became aware of your need and responsibility to live what is fundamental for being a Christian. Beyond that weekend experience, you have been called to where you are now. Hopefully, you look at where you are today as having answered the Lord's calling as a way of life throughout your 4th day.

This grace of mission—being Christ to everyone you meet—begins and ends with Jesus. Without Him we can do nothing. Be willing to invite Him into your boat so that He can give you the grace to obey Him and the grace to get out of your comfort zone so that you can join Him in His mission. Know and believe that God will supply the grace. All He needs is an open and trusting heart.

Your mission – should you accept it. Oh, wait you already accepted it. Jesus says, your mission is to go to all people, make them His disciples, baptize them and teach them all He has commanded you. As baptized Christians you are to continue the mission of Jesus which is the very same mission of the Church. You my brothers and sisters, baptized into discipleship must go out and evangelize. Your discipleship cannot be something that you do occasionally, when you feel like it or when you have the available time. In your encounter with self and with Jesus and the realization of God's unconditional love for you - you are challenged to communicate the Good News to all —that God in Christ Jesus loves them.

As disciples of Jesus, we must act with the qualities of Jesus, we must give witness to our 'life in Christ' and we must show that we are trying to live the life that we are professing. Simply put, "we must walk the talk."

Pope Francis stated, "Life grows by being given away, and it weakens in isolation and comfort. Indeed, those who enjoy life most are those who leave security on the shore and become excited by the mission of communicating life to others. Thus, an evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral." ...And may the world of our time, which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the Good News not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervor, who have first received the joy of Christ."

In our evangelizing we are to employ the best means to reach others with God's Love: that is by friendship. Our friendship with others must be sincere so they may find a sincere friendship - a sincere encounter with Christ. By choosing to live the Gospel in all our environments they will be changed by the love of Christ. Gradually, all of society can be won for Christ. However, it all begins with our encounter with self and our personal encounter with Christ and then with others. In this Scripture passage, Peter experienced these 3 encounters: with self, with Christ and with others thus the "*Grace of Encountering Jesus.*" When we surrender to Him, our hearts are filled with His love and grace. When we allow Christ to dwell in our hearts and to use our talents, we reach our fullest potential and live our lives as God intended. My brothers and sisters, with Christ, all things are possible, and these three encounters are lived and shared by all of us through God's grace.

St. Catherine of Sienna wrote: "*Be who God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire!*" When we surrender to Him, allow Him to dwell in our hearts and to use our talents, our hearts are

filled “to overflowing” with the fire of His love and grace. When we reach our fullest potential and live our lives as God intended, we are truly living our Piety, Study and Action in our 4th day – truly living the “Grace of Encountering Jesus.”