

**Monsignor Dennis Sheehan**  
**Homily Given on February 11, 2007**  
**5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time – Liturgical Year C**

Peter's reaction to the huge haul of fish has always fascinated me. He's tired and frustrated by his failure. I can hear his grumbling as he puts the newly-cleaned nets back in the boat. This Jesus is a great preacher, he mumbles, and, after all, he did heal my mother-in-law. But what does he know about fishing? He's a carpenter, after all. But I owe him one. So here we go: I'll humor him.

The word to describe Peter here is reluctant. He has no hope that Jesus will do better than he and his partners have. But off they go – reluctantly.

Then Jesus really gets to them: he tells them where to throw the nets. Go out into the deep water. Who does he think he is? We've tried it already and it doesn't work!

Is what follows a miracle? Well, it certainly isn't just a coincidence or the luck of a beginner. The result is quite baffling and unnerving. For one thing, the boat almost swamps with the load. Jesus doesn't fool around. Just like the wine at Cana, just like the loaves on the hillside, when Jesus gets involved, things happen in a big way.

But then comes my fascination. Notice what Peter does next. He gets down in front of Jesus and pleads for him to get out of the neighborhood. It's not logical. It's not even sensible. Here's Jesus proving at least that he's a real born fisherman – if not much, much more – and Peter literally wants to get him gone. Last Sunday, the crowd in the Nazareth synagogue throw him out of town. Here they want Jesus out of Galilee altogether. What's going on?

There's a powerful message here. If you get too close to Jesus, he begins to turn your world around and upside down. Peter was stuck in his failure. But at least it was his failure – safe, explainable and fixed. Now, with Jesus, he's moved out onto deep, dark waters, and he's just plain scared. That's what happens when you come into close contact with God.

Isaiah in our first reading was pretty much the same: reluctant to leave the safety of a closed, predictable world. With the temple shaking all around and angels darting dangerously in the air, he's terrified and wants nothing of it.

Let's be honest. When we meet holiness, real holiness, we have a hard time handling it. I remember meeting Mother Teresa. My only thought was "I wonder if she can read my soul." I remember meeting Pope John Paul II – he was less scary to be sure, but I had no desire to prolong the conversation. In both cases, I was in a world very different from my own. So is Peter today. So was Isaiah in the temple.

The good news is what Jesus says next to Peter: Don't be afraid; I've got work for you to do. What's happened? Peter has been appropriately terrified by a momentary brush with God's overwhelming power. But Jesus then steps in and says – believe it or not - the God you just glimpsed wants you to be a partner.

Reluctance. Isaiah was reluctant. Peter was reluctant. I've been reluctant. I can handle failure. Again, at least it's my own. Believing – really believing – that if I follow Jesus, if I put my hand in his and my future in his care, things will really begin to happen – that's the hard part. Among other things, it took Jesus to the cross before the resurrection.

What about your reluctance? Don't you sense something of Peter in you now and again? He said it: the neighborhood is more my own when you're not here. Be on your way, Jesus.

Jesus comes to us in our reluctance. As he did with Peter, he bids us put aside the fears, insecurities, and old habits of mind that are holding us back. He promised Peter. He also promises you and me – just wait till you see what we can do together.