

## **5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Cycle C, 2.10.19

Isaiah 6:1-2, 3-8/1 Corinthians 15:1-11/

Luke 5:1-11

### **CAST YOUR NET INTO DEEP WATERS**

A few months ago the New York Times published a story written by a Mom about her challenging relationship with her fifteen-year old daughter.\* For a lot of parents loving a 15-year-old can be heart-wrenching. The little girl you spent a decade and a half nurturing and feeding and picking up after and dropping off and helping with homework and braiding hair and supervising play dates and fighting battles and holding hands to cross the street suddenly shuts you out of her life. She's busy with school and clubs and projects, and when she has free time she would rather be out with friends. You hear snippets of her life ringing from her upstairs room, conversations and laughter, favorite songs occasionally played in the car from her iPhone. You feel that you are losing her.

Paulina, the daughter in the article, was as remote as a 15-year-old could be from her mother. Not only did the Mom worry for Paulina as most parents do, but she missed being part of her daughter's life. Then one day, Paulina's mom ran into Maddie, a friend of her older son who was away at college. After chatting about school, Maddie asked, "How's Paulina?" "Good, I think," she said, mentioning that Paulina was taking a photography class taught by professionals. "She loves photography. Hates her math teacher." Then Maddie, eyes wide, asked, "Have you seen her Instagram feed?" The Mom started to panic. All she could think of were other parents she had spoken to whose daughters' feeds were filled with revealing photos. Oh God, she thought; here it comes. "No," she said. "Why?" "It's

amazing," Maddie said. "She's a great photographer. She has over a thousand followers."

Paulina's mom was stunned. A thousand followers?! That night, she worked up the nerve to ask Paulina if she could follow her on Instagram. Miraculously, her daughter said yes, shrugging as she walked up the stairs to her room. Her Mom grabbed the iPhone, and suddenly, there it was: Paulina's life. In black-and-white and full color. Beautifully framed photos of her friends, of their Brooklyn neighborhood. Paulina had a wonderful eye for finding the unique in the simple, the wondrous in the ordinary and everyday. There were gorgeous landscapes from the place on Long Island where the family spent part of every August. The photo was lovingly captured with the title "My Happy Place." There was a picture of her best friend bandaged in a hospital bed after an accident the year before. "I love you," Paulina wrote under it.



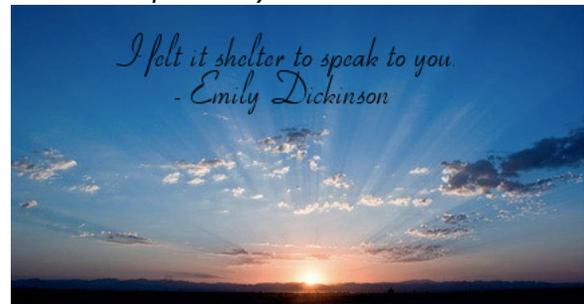
Social media has been blamed for ruining our democracy, shortening children's attention spans and undermining the fabric of society. But Paulina's mother wrote: *"Through her photography shared on media I was able to be with Paulina out in*

*the world again, to see what she sees, to virtually stand beside her and witness the people and places she moves through, in nearly real time. Not in a parent-policing role, but in a wonderful-world sort of way."*

There was the photo her daughter posted of herself as a little girl among autumn leaves, wearing a checkered skirt, pink leotard and green high-tops. *Wish I was still a little kid*, the caption read. "So I wasn't the only one," her mom says.

Love compels us to venture out on the "sea" of the new and different, to leave the safe harbor of our own perspective to cast our nets into the "deep water" of another's world. Recently, I was getting ready to go out to dinner with some friends when the office sent me a text message: *A young man just called and said he urgently needs to talk to a priest.* Those calls aren't so unusual for a priest to get, but, of course, they never come at a convenient or welcome time. Sometimes the inner reaction is: "Why now?" The young man had directions to the office. He came in from Berkeley by BART and walked to the parish office in pouring rain – all his belongings in his backpack. His was a sad story of growing up with a father who was abusive both physically and emotionally, and who now would have nothing to do with his son. His mother died when she was only fifty-two. He told me upfront that he was mildly autistic and struggled with Aspergers syndrome; it often led him into depression and suicidal thoughts. He felt so alone in the world. Friends he thought would be there for him disappointed him. His eyes often looked downward toward his feet as he was speaking. There are those moments when words are so inadequate. All you can do is listen with compassion and an attempt to understand a life so dramatically different than my own.

I have no idea how he got the parish number – this wanderer from Arkansas whose path took him from job to job -- to Denver, then to New Orleans, then back to Denver and now to Berkeley. This shy, fragile child of God who wore his heart on his frayed and rain-soaked sleeve but kept on going through all his struggles. He asked me: "Have you ever traveled by Greyhound Bus? I hope you never have to." He said he found support in the Church and had even been part of an RCIA program where an understanding priest helped him a lot. Henry David Thoreau mused that one of the greatest miracles would be if we could actually look through each other's eyes for an instant. By interrupting my schedule on a rainy evening that young man invited me to "put out into deep water and lower my nets for a catch." What I caught was a glimpse of the world I seldom see and the truth of what Emily Dickinson once wrote: *I felt it shelter to speak to you.*



A Safeway gift card for food, some money for BART and a room for the night, and a lift to the BART station in the pouring rain ended our encounter. The lyrics of our opening hymn offer a challenge to me as a disciple of Christ and as a priest:

*You call us, Christ, to gather  
the people of the earth.  
We cannot fish for only  
those lives we think have worth.*



Likewise, Paulina's Mom carefully and sensitively ventured out into that "deep water" of social media and re-connected with her daughter. Jesus challenges all of us to put aside our own fears and anxieties and dare to lower our nets into the "deep water" of patience and understanding, the treacherous sea of reconciliation and selfless generosity. It often demands risking our own security and comfort and putting aside our discouragement and exhaustion. It can require us to keep "fishing" despite the criticism and doubts of the many who have returned to shore. Confident of God's grace and wisdom, we can set out in our own small boats and cast our fishing nets — despite the long night already passed — to bring in the "catch" of God's healing and peace, kindness and understanding.

*John Kasper, OFS*

\*"Recovering My Daughter Through Instagram,"  
by Helene Stapinski – NY Times, 12.8.18