

*Reading*

Lk 5:1-11

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St. Augustine of Hippo  
354-430

We have heard the Gospel account of how the Lord Jesus, after the Resurrection, appeared to the disciples who were fishing in the Sea of Tiberias. When He had first called them, He had said: “Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” And then, indeed, when they had been called, lowering the nets at His word, they took a large number of fish, but the number is not specified. Furthermore, in that first fishing incident, He did not say to them: “Cast the net to the right side,” but only “Cast”; He said neither “to the right” nor “to the left.” Nevertheless, so great a number of fish was caught that it was innumerable, and their boats were filled. And to what extent were they laden? The Gospel says: “so that they began to sink.” Then He said to them what I have mentioned above: “Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” We belong to those nets; we have, indeed, been caught in those nets; but we do not remain captive. Let no man fear to be caught; if he can be caught, he cannot be deceived.

But what is the significance of that second fishing incident about which the Gospel told us today? The Lord, standing on the shore, appeared to the fishermen, and asked them if they had any food. They said that they did not, for they had taken nothing during the whole night. Then He said to them: “Cast the net to the right side,” which direction He had not given on the previous occasion. They obeyed, and they were not able to draw in the net because of the great number of fish. Moreover, 153 fish were found in it. And, since it had been stated that, in the first fishing incident, the nets were breaking because of the great number of fish, the Evangelist took pains to say in regard to this haul: And, although there were so many, the net was not torn.

Let us distinguish between these two fishing incidents: the one before the Resurrection, the other after the Resurrection. In the former, the nets were lowered in any direction; the right is not mentioned, lest only the good should be included; the left is not mentioned, lest only the evil should be included. Hence, the good and the evil were mixed together. And the nets were broken by reason of the great number. Broken nets suggest schisms. see this; thus it is; thus it happens. The two ships are filled on account of the two peoples – the circumcised and the uncircumcised – and they are filled to such an extent that they are overwhelmed and almost sinking. What this signifies is lamentable. A group has upset the Church. How great is the number of those who have been living evil lives, pressing and complaining! But the boats have not been sunk because of the good fishes.

Now let us consider that later fishing incident, the one after the Resurrection. No evil person will be there; great security will be there, but only if you will be good. Be good in the midst of evil, and so you will be good when the evil are not present. There is reason for your being disturbed in that first fishing episode; you are among evil persons, O you who hear me faithfully, O you for whom what I say does not pass in vain but descends into the heart, O you who are more afraid to live badly than to die badly because if you have lived a good life you will not have a bad death – you, therefore, who listen to me in order not only to believe but to live rightly, live good lives and so live even amidst the wicked; be unwilling to break the nets. Those who made their own decisions and were unwilling to put up with others because they were evil have broken the nets and have perished in the sea. Live good lives in the midst of the wicked; let not bad Christians persuade you to live bad lives. Let your heart not say: “I alone am good.” If you have begun to be good, believe that, if you have begun to be so, others can be good, also. Do not commit adultery; do not commit fornication; do not perpetrate a fraud; do not steal; do not give false testimony; do not swear falsely; do not

become inebriated; do not fail to repay loans; do not fail to restore somebody else's property found in the street. Shun these and similar actions, and you will be secure amid the bad fish. You swim about in the same nets; but you will come to the shore; you will be found on the right side after the resurrection. There, there will be no evil person. What good is it for you to know the Law, to understand the commandments of God, to know how to distinguish between good and evil if you do not act accordingly? Is not your conscience punished on account of that very knowledge? So learn that you may put your knowledge into practice.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*Sermon 249*, trans. M.S. Muldowney.