

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time—Year C---February 9, 2025

A Wisconsin angler had a few too many beers and decided to go ice fishing. He grabbed his gear, stepped out onto the ice, and started to cut a hole when he heard a booming voice from above shout: "THERE ARE NO FISH UNDER THE ICE!"

The man jumped up and looked around but didn't see anyone. He carried on cutting a hole into the ice, and again, the voice boomed:" THERE ARE NO FISH UNDER THE ICE!"

Still nobody. Was he going mad? The man stumbled to a new spot and started drilling another hole when the voice shouted for the third time:" THERE ARE NO FISH UNDER THE ICE!"

The man looked up into the blinding light and said, "Is that you, God?" The voice answered, "NO, IT'S THE MANAGER OF THE ICE RINK!"

Fish stories, many of us have them and today we hear in the Gospel of a fish story from Jesus, where Jesus instructs Peter to put out into the deeper water for a large catch. As the story ends, Jesus invites Peter to become a "Fisher of Men".

About two years ago, I was asked by an older couple in the Kaukauna area if I would be willing to speak to their son and see if I could help to get him back to church. The father used the phrase, "See if you can get him hooked back into the faith". I asked the father if his son enjoyed fishing and he said yes. Well, about 2 weeks later, we set up a little fishing trip in the Shawano area to fish. We decided to try our luck at fly fishing. Little did I know that Joe was not very good at fly fishing, and it was a windy day. As we were throwing, his line caught mine and sent my fly towards the back of his arm and it lodged under his skin. We did get it out without too much pain and I joked with him that I don't think that his dad meant that I literally hook him to get him back to the faith.

We are all called to be fishers of men and of women in our lives whether we are fishermen or not. Some of us might not be up for the challenge though and say to ourselves that we just do not have the skills needed to go out and catch men and women for Jesus. We hear that same struggle in the first and second readings today. In the first reading, Isaiah writes about a vision of heaven and how he acknowledges that he is not worthy to acclaim the Lord. But the angel then came and touched his lips and gave him the courage to proclaim that he was ready to go and do the work that God asked him to do.

In the second reading, St. Paul, acknowledges that he also was a sinner and a persecutor of the church and then God touched him through his appearance and gave him the grace to be one of the greatest evangelists that the church has ever had.

I am sure that we all have had tackle boxes in some form or other growing up and we most likely filled it with different types of tackle in order to try to catch a fish or two. Some tackle may be

more effective than others, but depending on the type of fish that we are trying to attract, all the tackle in the box may work in different situations.

It is no different than the tackle box that God gives us in our lives. We all have different gifts and talents that God places in our tackle box of lives and asks us to go and use those gifts to seek out men and women and bring them to a closer relationship to him.

What might some of that tackle consist of in our boxes? Most have a cell phone—how about using that to call someone you have not talked to in a while or send an uplifting text. There may be car keys in each of our boxes—how about using those to go and pick someone up and give them a ride to an appointment or maybe take them for lunch. Some may have musical instruments in our boxes, maybe volunteer to go and play some music at an assisted living center. Some may have crocheting needles or knitting needles—how about using them to create a nice warm blanket to comfort someone who may have experienced a recent loss of a family member.

Maybe this week it is time to dig a little deeper into your own tackle box that God has given you and spend a little time in prayer asking God how you can use the “tackle” to seek out those men and women that are lost and just swimming around life with little faith or hope. Maybe if you use those tools to go a little deeper in the waters of this world, and use God’s grace, maybe you too may hook many people and bring them to the Lord and He will then continue to invite you as well to be “Fishers of Men”.

God Bless,

Deacon Jim