Are You Hugging the Shore?

As many of you know, this past weekend I led our third Fishing for the Lord Great Outdoors retreat in northern Wisconsin. We were blessed with a great group of guys attending the retreat and we had some great faith filled group discussions as well as some smaller group boat discussions. Of course, we all caught a good number of fish as well.

After reflecting on this weekend's Gospel, I thought about a talk that I presented to the guys on the last day of the retreat when I was about to close the retreat and send them back out into the world to share what they had learned and reflected on over the retreat weekend.

In today's Gospel, we see Jesus choosing the disciples (which was how Matthew titled them in this passage) and then sending them out with an interesting directive. Do not go into pagan territory or enter into a Samaritan town, but stay with the people of Israel. Did you ever think of why Jesus gave this directive?

According to Catholic and biblical scholarship, God's plan of salvation was to be revealed to the Jewish people first—the covenant family of God. Jesus was the Jewish Messiah, and his primary earthly mission was to fulfill the ancient promises made to the patriarchs and prophets of Israel.
This restriction was temporary and applied only to their first missions. The apostles were still learning and needed to mature in their faith without the immediate confusion of preaching to non-believers who lacked the foundational background in Jewish scriptures.

So it is quite reasonable that Jesus wanted to start them slowly and not get them thrown out way into the depths at that time, but to develop their proclamation of the Gospel to those close by.

The last talk that I shared with the men at the Fishing for the Lord retreat came from a book written by Harold E. Kohn entitled Outdoor Reflections for Fishermen.

In the book, there is a Chapter entitled, "Hugging the Shore". The author tells about Jesuit Priest Father Charlevoix who traveled along the shores of Lake Michigan from Mackinac to the Fort of St. Joseph. He writes, "Like a slender sensitive finger of a blind man, his frail craft felt along the shore, touched each bay, probed every tributary gathering the impressions of the new land."

He continues on, "How was it that the Americas, so rich in beauty and natural wealth, lay here so long before discovery? For one reason primarily, for so long many sailors had hugged their shores, fearful of venturing into the open sea. As long as they cherished the comfortable security of seeing nearby land, great discoveries were impossible."

He concludes “How often we hug the shore and shrink from new discovery? Then God presses us into shipboard service and we sail out from our beloved harbors of the familiar upon the unfamiliar waters. And beyond our limited little horizons, we find a new world.

But as we sail from yesterday, through today and visit at last tomorrow, like Columbus, we find our imaginations had played tricks on us. What lie beyond are not ugly monsters to devour us, but unexplored continents to challenge and thrill us.

If we embrace the Gospel this weekend, we will open our ears to see what new shores that God is asking us to explore in our lives. God knows that the harvest is still plentiful, but most of those who are being called to help with the harvest, refuse to leave the shore for new adventures.

At the end of every Mass, the final words are directing you to go out and be sent as disciples to spread the Gospel.

Are you willing to stop hugging your shore and be sent out to experience new discoveries and help spread the Gospel?

God’s Blessings

Deacon Jim