



That All May Be Saved¹

Our Christian vocation, this calling which Our Lord makes to each of us personally, leads us to become identified with him. But we should not forget that he came on earth to redeem everyone, because 'he wishes all men to be saved'.² There is not a single soul in whom Christ is not interested. Each soul has cost him the price of his Blood.³

As I think about these truths, there comes to mind a conversation which took place between the apostles and the Master shortly before the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand. A great multitude had followed Jesus. Our Lord looked up and said to Philip, 'Where shall we buy bread for these to eat?'⁴ Philip made a rapid calculation and answered: 'Two hundred silver pieces would not buy enough bread for them, even to give each a little.'⁵ They didn't have that kind of money; what they could find was paltry in comparison. 'One of his disciples, Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, said to him: There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fishes; but what is that among so many?'⁶

Leavening the dough

We want to follow Our Lord. We are anxious to spread his Word. From a human point of view, it's only natural that we should ask ourselves: who are we, for so many people? Compared with the total population of the world, even though there are millions of us, we are few in number. We must therefore see ourselves as a tiny measure of yeast, prepared and ready to do good to the whole of mankind, remembering the words of the Apostle: 'a little leaven is enough to leaven all the dough',⁷ transforming it completely. We have to learn to become that yeast, that leaven, and so modify and transform the multitude.

Is yeast, by its nature, better than dough? No. But it is what makes the dough rise and become good and nourishing food.

Reflect a moment, even if only in general terms, on the way yeast works in the making of bread — that simple, staple food which is available to everyone. In many places (you yourselves may have seen it done) the baking process is like a real ceremonial, ending up with a splendid product that you can almost taste with your eyes.

They start with good flour, of top quality if possible. Then the dough is worked in the kneading-trough and the yeast is mixed in. It is a long and patient job. The dough must now be left to rest; this is essential for the leaven to do its work and make the dough rise.

Meanwhile, the oven is made ready, its temperature rising as the logs of wood burn bright. The risen dough is placed in the glowing oven and turns into high quality bread, wonderfully light and

¹ A homily given on 16 April 1954

² 1 Tim 2:4

³ cf 1 Pet 1:18-19

⁴ John 6:5

⁵ John 6:7

⁶ John 6:8-9

⁷ 1 Cor 5:6

fresh. This result would never have been possible had it not been for the small amount of leaven, which dissolved and disappeared among the other ingredients, working effectively and passing unnoticed.

If we pray and meditate on these words of St Paul, we will realise that we have no alternative but to work, in the service of all souls. Anything else would be selfishness. If we look at ourselves humbly, we will see clearly that, in addition to his gift of faith, Our Lord has also granted us a number of talents and qualities. None of us has been mass-produced. Our Father has created us one by one and shared out different goods among his children. It is up to us to use these talents, these qualities, in the service of all men. We are called to use the gifts God has given us as instruments to help others discover Christ.

Please don't think that the desire to help others is in the nature of an extra, a lace trimming for our ordinary lives as Christians. If leaven is not used for fermenting, it rots. There are two ways leaven can disappear, either by giving life to dough, or by being wasted, a perfect tribute to selfishness and barrenness. We are not doing Jesus a favour when we make him known to others: 'When I preach the gospel, I take no credit for that; I act under constraint,' obliged by Jesus' command; 'it would go hard with me indeed if I did not preach the Gospel.'⁸

Going fishing

'Behold, I will send many fishermen, says the Lord, and I will catch those fishes.'⁹ That is his way of explaining the great task we have before us: we must become fishermen. The world is often compared, in conversation or in books, with the sea. It is a good comparison, for in our lives, just as in the sea, there are quiet times and stormy seasons, periods of calm and gusts of strong wind. One often finds souls swimming in difficult waters, in the midst of heavy waves. They travel through stormy weather, their journey one sad rush, despite their apparently cheerful expressions and their boisterousness. Their bursts of laughter are a cover for their discouragement and ill-temper. Their lives are bereft of charity and understanding. Men, like fish, devour each other.

Our task as children of God is to get all men to enter, freely, into the divine net; to get them to love each other. If we are Christians, we must seek to become fishermen like those described by the prophet Jeremiah with a metaphor which Jesus also often used: 'Follow me and I will make you fishers of men',¹⁰ he says to Peter and Andrew.

Let us accompany Our Lord as he goes about his divine task of fishing. We find Jesus by the Lake of Genesareth, with the crowds pressing upon him, eager 'to hear the word of God'.¹¹ Just as they do today! Can't you see? They want to hear God's message, even though outwardly they may not show it. Some perhaps have forgotten Christ's teachings. Others, through no fault of their own, have never known them and they think that religion is something odd. But of this we can be sure, that in every man's life there comes a time sooner or later when his soul draws the line. He has had enough of the usual explanations. The lies of the false prophets no longer satisfy. Even though they may not admit it at the time, such people are longing to quench their thirst with the teachings of Our Lord.

Let us follow St Luke's description. 'At this he saw two boats moored by the lake, whose fishermen had gone ashore, and were washing their nets. And he went on board one of the boats, which belonged to Simon, and asked him to stand off a little from the land; and so, sitting down, he began to teach the multitudes from the boat.'¹² When he had finished his catechising, he told Simon: 'Put out into the deep, and lower your nets for a catch.'¹³ Christ is the master of this boat. He it is that

⁸ 1 Cor 9:16

⁹ Jer 16:16

¹⁰ Matt 4:19

¹¹ Luke 5:1

¹² Luke 5:2-3

¹³ Luke 5:4

prepares the fishing. It is for this that he has come into the world, to do all he can so that his brothers may find the way to glory and to the love of the Father. It is not we who have invented the Christian apostolate. If anything, we get in its way, through our clumsiness and lack of faith.

'Simon answered him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and caught nothing.'¹⁴ A reasonable enough reply. The night hours were their normal time for fishing, and this time the catch had yielded nothing. What was the point of fishing by day? But Peter has faith: 'nevertheless, at your word I will let down the net.'¹⁵ He decides to act on Christ's suggestion. He undertakes to work relying entirely on the Word of Our Lord. And what happened? 'When they had done this, they took a great quantity of fish, so that the net was near breaking, and they must needs beckon to their partners who were in the other boat to come and help them. When these came, they filled both boats, so that they were ready to sink.'¹⁶

When Jesus went out to sea with his disciples he was not thinking only about the catch of fishes. And so when Peter falls down at his feet and humbly confesses: 'Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man,' Our Lord replies: 'Do not be afraid; henceforth you shall be a fisher of men.'¹⁷ In this new task of fishing, all the power and effectiveness of God will also be at hand: the apostles are instruments for the working of great wonders, in spite of their personal shortcomings.

Miracles will multiply

The same is true of us. If we struggle daily to become saints, each of us in his own situation in the world and through his own job or profession, in our ordinary lives, then I assure you that God will make us into instruments that can work miracles and, if necessary, miracles of the most extraordinary kind. We will give sight to the blind. Who could not relate thousands of cases of people, blind almost from the day they were born, recovering their sight and receiving all the splendour of Christ's light? And others who were deaf, or dumb, who could not hear or pronounce words fitting to God's children... Their senses have been purified and now they listen and speak as men, not animals. In nomine Iesu!¹⁸ In the name of Jesus his Apostles enable the cripple to move and walk, when previously he had been incapable of doing anything useful; and that other lazy character, who knew his duties but didn't fulfil them... In the Lord's name, surge et ambula,¹⁹ rise up and walk.

Another man was dead, rotting, smelling like a corpse: he hears God's voice, as in the miracle of the son of the widow at Naim: 'Young man, I say to you, rise up.'²⁰ We will work miracles like Christ did, like the first apostles did. Maybe you yourself, and I, have benefited from such wonders. Perhaps we were blind, or deaf, or paralysed; perhaps we had the stench of death, and the word of Our Lord has lifted us up from our abject state. If we love Christ, if we follow him sincerely, if we stop seeking ourselves and seek him alone, then in his name we will be able to give to others, freely, what we have freely received.

I have constantly preached about this opportunity that is both supernatural and human and which is offered by God our Father to us his children: we can share in Christ's work of Redemption. How glad am I when I find this teaching in the writings of the Fathers of the Church. St Gregory the Great explains: 'Christians free men from serpents, when they uproot evil from their hearts by exhorting them to do good... They lay their hands on the sick and cure them, when they see their neighbour flagging in his good work and they offer to help in so many ways, strengthening him with their example. These miracles are all the greater in that they are worked in spiritual things and give life not

¹⁴ Luke 5:5

¹⁵ Luke 5:5

¹⁶ Luke 5:6-7

¹⁷ Luke 5:8,10

¹⁸ Acts 3:6

¹⁹ Acts 3:6

²⁰ Luke 7:14

to bodies but to souls. You too, if you do not weaken, will be able to work these wonders, with the help of God.²¹

God wants all men to be saved. This is an invitation to us and also a responsibility that weighs upon each one of us. The Church is not a place of refuge for a privileged few. 'Who says the great Church is only a small part of the earth? The great Church is the whole world.'²² That is how St Augustine describes it. And he adds: 'Wherever you go, Christ is there. Your inheritance reaches to the ends of the earth; come take possession of it with me.'²³ Remember the nets? They were full to overflowing, bursting with fish. God ardently longs to see his house full.²⁴ He is a Father and likes to live surrounded by all his children.

Apostolate in our daily life

Let us turn now to the second catch of fish, after Jesus' Passion and Death. Peter, having denied his Master three times, later wept in humble sorrow. The cock with its crowing reminded him of Our Lord's prediction and with all his heart he asked to be forgiven. While with contrite heart he waits for the promise of the Resurrection, he goes about his ordinary work: he goes fishing. 'Regarding this catch of fish, we are often asked why Peter and the sons of Zebedee returned to the jobs they had before Our Lord called them. They were fishermen when Jesus told them: "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." To those who are surprised by this behaviour, we must answer that the Apostles were not forbidden to exercise their profession, it being a legitimate and honest thing to do.'²⁵

The apostolic concern which burns in the heart of ordinary Christians is not something separate from their everyday work. It is part and parcel of one's work, which becomes a source of opportunities for meeting Christ. As we work at our job, side by side with our colleagues, friends and relatives and sharing their interests, we can help them come closer to Christ who awaits us on the shore. Before becoming apostles, we are fishermen. After becoming apostles, we are fishermen still. The same profession, before and after.

What has changed? There is a change inside our soul, now that Christ has come aboard, as he went aboard Peter's boat. Its horizon has opened wider. It feels a greater ambition to serve and an irrepressible desire to tell all creation about the *magnalia Dei*,²⁶ the marvellous doings of Our Lord, if only we let him work. Here I would like to make the point that the professional work, to put it that way, of priests is a divine and public ministry, so demanding that it embraces everything they do, and to such an extent that it can be stated as a general rule that, if a priest has time to spare for other occupations that are not strictly priestly, he can be sure that he is not fulfilling the duties of his ministry.

'Simon Peter was there, and with him were Thomas, who is also called Didymus, and Nathanael, from Cana of Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two more of his disciples. Simon Peter told them, I am going out fishing; and they said, We too, will go with you. So they went out and embarked on the boat; and all that night they caught nothing. But when morning came, there was Jesus standing on the shore.'²⁷

He passes by, close to his Apostles, close to those souls who have given themselves to him and they don't realise he is there. How often Christ is not only near us, but in us; yet we still live in such a

²¹ St Gregory the Great, *Homiliae in Evangelia*, 29,4 (PL 76,1215-1216)

²² St Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 21,2,26 (PL 36,177)

²³ St Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 21,2,30 (PL 36,180)

²⁴ cf Luke 14:23

²⁵ St Augustine, *In Ioannis Evangelium Tractatus*, 122,2 (PL 35,1959)

²⁶ Acts 2:11

²⁷ John 21:2-4

human way! Christ is so close to us and yet we can't spare him an affectionate glance, a loving word, a good deed done by his children.

'The disciples', writes St John, 'did not know that it was Jesus. Have you caught anything, friends, Jesus asked them, to season your bread with?'²⁸ The close, family nature of this scene fills me with happiness and joy. That Jesus, my God, should say this! He, who already has a glorified body! 'Cast to the right of the boat, and you will have a catch. So they cast the net, and found before long they had no strength to haul it in, such a shoal of fish was in it.'²⁹ Now they understand. They, the disciples, recall what they have heard so often from their Master's lips: fishers of men, apostles. And they realise that all things are possible, because it is He who is directing their fishing.

'Whereupon the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, It is the Lord.'³⁰ Love, love is farsighted. Love is the first to appreciate kindness. The adolescent Apostle, who felt a deep and firm affection for Jesus, because he loved Christ with all the purity and tenderness of a heart that had never been corrupted, exclaimed: 'It is the Lord!'

'Simon Peter, hearing him say that it was the Lord, girded up the fisherman's coat, and sprang into the sea.'³¹ Peter personifies faith. Full of marvellous daring, he leaps into the sea. With a love like John's and a faith like Peter's, what is there that can stop us?

Souls belong to God

'The other disciples followed in the boat (they were not far from land, only some hundred yards away), dragging their catch in their net behind them.'³² They bring in the catch and immediately place it at Our Lord's feet, because it is his. This is a lesson for us, so that we may learn that souls belong to God; that no one on earth has that right over souls; and that the Church's apostolate, by which it announces and brings about salvation, is not based on the prestige of any human beings but on the grace of God.

Jesus questions Peter, three times, as if to give him a triple chance to atone for his triple denial. Peter has learned his lesson from the bitter experience of his wretchedness. Aware of his weakness, he is deeply convinced that rash claims are pointless. Instead he puts everything in Christ's hands. 'Lord, you know well that I love you. Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.'³³ What is Christ's reply? 'Feed my lambs, feed my sheep.'³⁴ 'Not yours, Peter; not yours: mine!' Because he created man; he redeemed man; he has bought each soul, one by one, at the cost, I say once again, of his Blood.

In the fifth century, when the Donatists were orchestrating their attacks against the Catholics, they claimed that Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo, couldn't possibly profess the truth because he had previously been a great sinner. St Augustine suggested to his brothers in the faith that they could reply as follows: 'Augustine is a bishop in the Catholic Church. He bears his burden and he will have to give an account of it to God. I met him in the company of good men. If he is a bad man, he will know it. But even if he is good, it is not in him that I have put my trust, because the first thing I learned in the Catholic Church is not to put my hope in any man.'³⁵

We are not doing our apostolate. If we were, what could we possibly say? We are doing Christ's apostolate, because God wants it to be done and because he has commanded us to do it: 'Go out all

²⁸ John 21:4-5

²⁹ John 21:6

³⁰ John 21:7

³¹ John 21:7

³² John 21:8

³³ John 21:15-17

³⁴ ibid

³⁵ St Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 36,3,20 (PL 36,895)

over the world, and preach the Gospel to the whole of creation.³⁶ The errors are ours; the fruits are his.

Daring to speak about God

How are we to carry out this apostolate? First of all, by our example, by living according to the Will of the Father, as Jesus, with his life and teaching, taught us to do. True faith does not permit our actions to contradict what we say. Let us examine our own behaviour, to see how genuine our faith is. We are not sincere believers if we are not striving to put into practice what we preach with our lips.

This is a good moment to recall and reflect on an event that demonstrates the wonderful apostolic zeal of the early Christians. Scarcely a quarter of a century had passed since Jesus had gone up to heaven and already his fame had spread to many towns and villages. In the city of Ephesus a man arrived, Apollo by name, 'an eloquent man, well grounded in the Scriptures. He had had instruction in the name of the Lord; and, with a spirit full of zeal, used to preach and teach about the life of Jesus, accurately enough, although he knew of no baptism except that of John.'³⁷

A glimmer of Christ's light had already filtered into the mind of this man. He had heard about Our Lord and he passed the news on to others. But he still had some way to go. He needed to know more if he was to acquire the fullness of the faith and so come to love Our Lord truly. A Christian couple, Aquila and Priscilla hear him speaking; they are not inactive or indifferent. They do not think: 'This man already knows enough; it's not our business to teach him.' They were souls who were really eager to do apostolate and so they approach Apollo and 'made friends with him, and gave him a fuller explanation of the way of the Lord'.³⁸

Then there is St Paul. How admirably he behaves! Imprisoned for spreading the teachings of Christ, he misses no opportunity of preaching the Gospel. Brought before Festus and Agrippa, he declares unflinchingly: 'Thanks to God's help, I still stand here today, bearing my witness to great and small alike. Yet there is nothing in my message which goes beyond what the prophets spoke of, and Moses spoke of, as things to come; a suffering Christ, and one who should show light to his people and to the Gentiles by being the first to rise from the dead.'³⁹

The Apostle doesn't silence or hide his faith, or his apostolic propaganda that had brought down on him the hatred of his persecutors. He continues preaching salvation to everyone he meets. And, with marvellous daring, he boldly asks Agrippa: 'Do you believe the prophets, King Agrippa? I know you do.'⁴⁰ When Agrippa comments: 'You would have me turn Christian with very little ado. Why, said Paul, it would be my prayer to God that, whether it were with much ado or little, both you and all those who are listening to me today should become just as I am, but for these chains.'⁴¹

Where did St Paul get all his strength from? *Omnia possum in eo qui me confortat!*⁴² I can do all things, because God alone gives me this faith, this hope, this charity. I find it very hard to believe in the supernatural effectiveness of an apostolate that is not based, is not solidly centred, on a life of constant conversation with Our Lord. Yes, right there in our work; in our own home, or in the street, with all the small or big problems that arise daily. Right there, not taken away from those things, but with our hearts fixed on God. Then our words, our actions — our defects! — will give forth the *bonus odor Christi*,⁴³ the sweet fragrance of Christ, which other men will inevitably notice and say: 'Here is a Christian.'

³⁶ Mark 16:15

³⁷ Acts 18:24-25

³⁸ Acts 18:26

³⁹ Acts 26:22-23

⁴⁰ Acts 26:27

⁴¹ Acts 26:28-29

⁴² Phil 4:13

⁴³ 2 Cor 2:15

If you were to fall into the temptation of wondering, 'who's telling me to embark on this?' We would have to reply: 'Christ himself is telling you, is begging you.' 'The harvest is plentiful enough, but the labourers are few. You must ask the Lord to whom the harvest belongs to send labourers out for the harvesting.'⁴⁴ Don't take the easy way out. Don't say, 'I'm no good at this sort of thing; there are others who can do it; it isn't my line'. No, for this sort of thing, there is no one else: if you could get away with that argument, so could everyone else. Christ's plea is addressed to each and every Christian. No one can consider himself excused, for whatever reason: age, health or occupation. There are no excuses whatsoever. Either we carry out a fruitful apostolate, or our faith will prove barren.

Besides, who ever said that to speak about Christ and to spread his doctrine, you need to do anything unusual or remarkable? Just live your ordinary life; work at your job, trying to fulfil the duties of your state in life, doing your job, your professional work properly, improving, getting better each day. Be loyal; be understanding with others and demanding on yourself. Be mortified and cheerful. This will be your apostolate. Then, though you won't see why, because you're very aware of your own wretchedness, you will find that people come to you. Then you can talk to them, quite simply and naturally — on your way home from work for instance, or in a family gathering, on a bus, walking down the street, anywhere. You will chat about the sort of longings that everyone feels deep down in his soul, even though some people may not want to pay attention to them: they will come to understand them better, when they begin to look for God in earnest.

Ask Mary, Regina Apostolorum, Queen of the Apostles, to help you make up your mind to share the desires of sowing and fishing that fill the Heart of her Son. I can assure You that if you begin, you will see the boat filled, just like the fishermen from Galilee did. And you will find Christ on the shore, waiting for you. Because the catch belongs to him.

St Josemaria Escriva, Friends of God, "That All May Be Saved"

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⁴⁴ Matt 9:37-38