

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on Quinquagesima Sunday  
February 7, 2016

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Today's gospel incident is often called "The miraculous catch of fish." But the fish are only props. They are incidental to the *real* story, the miraculous catch of Simon Peter! For on that day this canny fishermen, who knew the lake and its fish like the back of his hand, did three things he thought he would never do: he accepted fishing advice from a landlubber; he made his confession; and he left his home and business to follow the Lord.

When you visit high-end Chatham on Cape Cod a must stop is the very work-a-day place called the fish pier. I sometimes think of today's gospel when I watch the fishing boats tie up, off-load baskets of fish that are then covered with shovels of ice and loaded onto refrigerator trucks. Except for the modern trucks and boats, and the harbor seals, it could be the Sea of Galilee. The gulls were ever-present, looking for a handout. There is the unmistakable fish smell! And there are the muscular and often-bearded fishermen with their rough but good-natured talk, going about their business. On that day 2000 years ago the fishermen were taking a good-natured ribbing. A carpenter from Nazareth had made the day's catch (and the evening meal) possible. So the customers lined up, haggled about the price, handed over their shekels, and went away happy.

In the midst of all the merriment and bustle one man was silent. Something had welled up in him. And we know what it was because this man told us. It wasn't the Lord who gave us this incident. Jesus never wrote a book. The occasion was remembered in St Peter's preaching. Simon Peter alone realized that Jesus had been able to look into the heart of the lake. *He knew the fish were there.* And Peter would go on in his sermons: "And He sees me as He saw them. *Jesus reads my heart.*" Everyone else saw Simon bar-Jona as a fishing colleague, a neighbor, and a family man. But the *real* Simon was the one Jesus knew. From Him nothing was hidden. Only the Lord and Simon knew what was in Simon's heart. But Simon bar-Jona could not bear the thought of it, and he fell to his knees, probably in full view of the fish market crowd, and blurted out, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

When the day began, Simon called Jesus "master." This showed his respect for one who he had heard preach powerfully. Simon Peter had witnessed the Lord's

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miracles and even saw the cure of his own mother-in-law. All of that was preparing Simon Peter for the moment when this fisherman saw the power of Christ in his *own familiar workplace*. And it brought Peter to his knees before His Lord.

That is how it can happen. The power of Our Lord Jesus Christ in our own practical everyday experiences is pushing all the buttons to work our complete conversion. It can happen whether you deal in compound sentences or compound molecules, wood-lot management, or fishing. In any place where we seek the truth and seek to express it and earn our living from it, we can be invaded by Christ's claim to be sovereign over our lives. And when we do that we are ready to be Christians.

So Peter had knelt and made his confession. He told said to Jesus "You had better leave," while fervently wishing nothing of the sort! And the Lord Jesus, Who knew where the fish were, also knew Peter's heart. The Son of God must have been smiling as He responded with such gracious words of love. "All is well, Simon. Now I can get close to you. Your reserve and resistance are gone. There will be no more fishing for fish! From henceforth thou shall catch men for Me and My gospel."