

into deep sea

we cast the nets

CONGREGATIONAL JOURNEY · CLARETIAN MISSIONARY SISTERS

*Reading keys to the text:
Lk 5,1-11*

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“Into deep sea” Lk 5,1-11

Reading keys

1. A providential failure

The episodes narrated in Mk 1:16-20 and Mt 4:18-22 evoke the first calls to follow him that the Lord addresses to a group of fishermen. Individuals who will become his closest disciples. In Lk 5:1-11 the scene illustrates, in a very personal and suggestive way, this crucial moment.

In Mark and Matthew, Jesus approaches fishermen during their daily work. But Luke adds a peculiar circumstance: the Master's invitation takes place in circumstances of failure and frustration: "... we've been working all night and haven't caught anything... (Lk 5:5).

It will be a providential failure. Curiously, fruitless fishing and sterile eagerness are for Jesus a propitious moment for his disconcerting interpellation: "Row out to sea and cast your nets for fishing" (Lk 5:4). Peter, bewildered and disheartened, leaves room for trust, even though reason within him seems to judge the futility of the effort: "... by your word, I will cast out the nets" (Lk 5:5).

Everything is eloquent in the story, and all the details call for serene attention. I would like to give some keys of interpretation that help to this purpose, before proposing a contemplative reading of these verses.

2. Natural geography and landscapes of the spirit

Everything happens on the shores of the lake or Sea of Galilee. The lake of Gennesaret, which Jesus travels with his disciples by boat with some frequency to shorten journeys between maritime villages, has a length of 21 kilometers from north to south, and a width of 11 kilometers. It is, therefore, a fairly large expanse of water, with a total area of 166 square kilometers. Its depth is variable, reaching 45 meters at some point. But in the pen of the evangelists, in their characteristic figurative language, such a location transcends the parameters of natural geography to evoke the landscapes of the human heart and spirit.

In the pages of the Gospels we find the written memory of a group journey experience, as particular as it is extraordinary: the experience of the path traced by Jesus of Nazareth together with his disciples. Walking in their footsteps means sharing their lifestyle. Living with him and like him.

Jesus is, at the same time, the Walker and the Way. Places, circumstances and encounters take on, together with him, a profound meaning. This journey takes us into human experiences that cross the ocean of the centuries, to speak to the heart of the reader of all times. For "the joy and hope,



the sorrows and anxieties of the man of our day, especially of the poor and of all kinds of afflicted, are also joy and hope, sorrows and anxieties of Christ's disciples. There is nothing truly human that has no resonance in his heart" (*Gaudium et spes*). Everything that makes up the topography of the events becomes, in the inspired literature, prodigiously eloquent: the sea, the desert, the mountains, the plains, the crossroads of the roads ...

In this adventure, the crossings of the Lake of Galilee keep a specific and suggestive message. They are not simple days of travel between regions and towns; they are also itineraries of learning, human maturation and spiritual transformation.

It is pertinent to remember that the lake is both a travel space and a fishing scene, but also the epicenter of unexpected dangers, such as strong currents and storms (see Mk 4:35-41, Mt 8:23-27; Lk 8:22-25). These events have a historical substratum that should not be forgotten. But they also evoke key moments of the disciple's journey. Specifically, the deep crises, misunderstandings, doubts and adversities that followers will have to face during their journey with the Lord.

The Sea of Galilee is an ideal geography to attract contrasts: an area of daily work, but also a risky area that causes fear, because it means leaving the mainland, that is, the limits where we can control, more easily, our life.

3. The mystery of a word

In the verses that focus our attention, Jesus' explicit call to follow him concludes the episode, after his preaching to the people and his journey in Peter's boat. On his return to land, dumbfounded by what he has beheld, Cephas hears the disconcerting invitation: "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be a fisher of men" (Lk 5:10).

The scene designed by Luke offers us important and suggestive keys to reading and reflection. I would like to highlight a fact that I consider to be of great importance. From a comprehensive reading of the sacred pages, the call, being narrated in the first chapters of the Gospels, is not only a one-time event, circumscribed to the inaugural period of the Saviour's ministry. Rather, it is revealed as a dynamic and progressive experience, which marks the entire period of coexistence with the Master. The experience of life and mission, the walks on foot and the boat trips, arouse a growing attraction of his figure and articulate a permanent and insistent invitation to follow him.

Jesus' appeal, "Row out to sea," is not the imperative of an order, for it does not nullify the freedom of the listener. However, it is the voice of the one who speaks with an "authority" as mysterious as it is impetuous. A word that penetrates the heart and unsuspected things happen. Where the improbable or the impossible happens: "... we've been working all night and we haven't caught anything..." (Lk 5:5). Everything flows from this spring, from this attractive figure and from this word that impels trust: "... by your word, I will cast the nets."

Those rough Galileans will discover that, in Jesus his life is his message. The message is the Messenger. The Walker is the Way. The figure is the Word. And his word is a voice that resonates like an echo along the path. Indeed, facing the missionary adventure with him between the pages of the Gospel, the reader notices an initial "vocation" and various progressive "calls", which occurred at different stages of the follow-up.



For this reason, I consider it pertinent to speak of a "pedagogy" of the call, prolonging the figurative language of the path. I apply the concept to both the invitation and the response of the summoned. This process, gradual and dynamic, illuminates the fundamental formative experience of every disciple; of the reader of the sacred text.

4. Pedagogy of the call

Let us pause for a moment on what we have called "different evolving calls of an initial vocation". The first exhortation of the Lord to follow him implies an interpellation as personal as it is pressing, before which we are free to accept, but he cannot delay the answer: "Then they took the boats ashore and, leaving everything, they followed him" (Lk 5:11). Such a vocation requires placing, at the first place of one's existence, the will of God and his kingdom: "No one who puts his hand on the plow and looks back is valid for the kingdom of God" (Lk 9:62).

From the beginning, it implies an immediate and total abandonment of family, work, and any other interest, occupation or life project of any kind. A radical and permanent change of life. For this reason, only some welcome the challenge of starting this journey on the road with Jesus.

However, the wonderful mystery of vocation does not lie in the demand; the key point is not what is left, but what is found. "The kingdom of God resembles a treasure hidden in the field: he who finds it hides it again and, full of joy, goes to sell everything he has and buys the field" (Mt 13:44).

What did these people see in Jesus to take on such a drastic life change, abandoning (and risking) everything to follow the Prophet of Galilee? Someone who radiated a light more intense than any other brightness or reflection of ordinary life. A figure that revealed the image of an irresistibly attractive God, while still being disconcerting.

Now, we cannot hide the fact that, as time goes by, both the person of Jesus and the content and scope of his message face, with increasing frequency and intensity, the incomprehension and rejection of various social groups. Also among his disciples, misunderstandings and doubts arise in the face of the radicality of the gospel lived and proclaimed. We notice a serious reformulation and a sharp rethinking of the conditions necessary to follow the Master. At a certain point, Jesus firmly affirms: "Whoever wants to come after me, let him deny himself, let him carry his cross and follow me" (see Mk 8:34-35).

As the culmination of their mission approaches, the disciples discover that following Jesus involves the risk of not being understood, of being rejected, and even of losing their lives violently. At a certain point along the way, his followers could affirm without hesitation: "You see that we have left everything and followed you" (Mk 10:28). But only later, when on the horizon of their itinerary loom the dark clouds of the Master's arrest and death sentence, will they begin to understand, in another way, the expression "we have left everything." Rowing offshore means facing the storms and the heat of the waves that hit the boat.

The challenge is to discover that the light of the person and word of Jesus shines brighter as the scene becomes darker. Only from empty nets can the prodigy of overabundant fishing be given.



5. What the story doesn't tell

What the story does not tell are the hours of effort and work involved in facing the waves to row again offshore. The sweat and fatigue of hitting the water with the oars, with arms already tired, trusting only the word of a barely known person. Look up and look at the face of a man who contemplates the rising sun, without speaking during the journey, until he gives brief and precise guidelines: "Cast your nets now". It is his presence that fills everything.

It is enough to dialogue with the older sisters, full of missionary experiences and services among the people, in difficult circumstances and adverse conditions, to weigh the depth and intensity of these unreported details. Our congregational chronicles fill pages of foundations, pastoral platforms, projects and missionary fruits. But where are written the hours of uncertainty, of doubt, of fatigue, of seemingly sterile efforts, endless hours of endless without sleep, of programming that has fallen into oblivion? And yet, with him everything will bear fruit. It is enough to look up and contemplate how the sunlight, just dawned, is reflected in his eyes, with his eyes fixed on the horizon.

The dynamic and pedagogical character of vocation can also be seen in this dimension of great importance. God gradually reveals his will to the person called, and the individual gradually knows and understands the will of God in his life. The vocation is a germ or seed, which stands out along the existential itinerary of the summoned.

Sometimes Jesus will ask us, "Do you understand what I have done with you?" (Jn 13:12). Other times he will reproach us: "Do you also not understand? Don't you understand?" (Mk 7:13). "Do you have a hardened heart?" (Mk 8:18). And at other times he will comfort us by saying: "What I do, you do not understand now, but you will understand later" (Jn 13:7).

In this exciting experience, a singular phenomenon is noticeable: in the first call, the meaning and integral content of the mission that God entrusts to the person is enclosed. But it is also a task clothed in a certain mystery, a task that is revealed, understood and assumed only slowly by each person, throughout life. It was so with the first women and men who followed him, and it continues to happen in us.

Accepting one's vocation means to receive an intense light, which reveals one's identity before God, and clarifies one's mission. But, at the same time, there will always be, in the development of vocation, areas of gloom and darkness. Moments where the person is impelled to trust in God and receive grace in an attitude of trust and hope. Let us recall what happened to Mary and Joseph: "But they did not understand what he told them (...) His mother (however) kept all this in her heart" (see Lk 2:50,51). Grace offers keys of interpretation and a special strength to face the events that are presented in life. But it is equally true that the circumstances, events, and encounters that unfold throughout life clarify the profound meaning of one's vocation.

To notice this unique phenomenon, the silence of contemplation is necessary. We need to journey in an inward exodus.



6. Exodus inward

"Row out to sea" makes us discover that the words of Jesus are born of silence and lead to silence. Accepting the invitation in Genesaret implies an "exodus" into ourselves, which leads us out to meet the needs and sufferings of our neighbors.

Those who follow the Lord closely, discover with amazement that the integrity of their ministry is born out of solitude and stillness: "He got up at dawn, when it was still very dark, he went to a lonely place and there he began to pray" (Mk 1:35). His gesture is not isolation. It is not to be interpreted as an attempt to escape the crowd, or a desire to abandon, even not sporadically, his activity among the disciples and the people. On the contrary, Jesus returns with renewed impetus to his mission among the peoples, as explicitly stated in the text: "Let us go elsewhere, to the nearby villages, to preach there too..." (Mk 1:38). Both dimensions are inseparable and form a deep synergy.

When we contemplate the itinerant life that Jesus of Nazareth adopts during his public ministry, we discover two aspects of his fundamental option: on one hand, a courageous and determined incursion into the human and social margins of his time. At the same time, an extraordinary introspective journey, which is an area of listening and dialogue with the Father. Both aspects are deeply intertwined and make up his teaching: "When you pray, enter your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is in secret... (Mt 6:6).

The Lord's footsteps do not only cross the social margins of his fellow human beings, where poor and abandoned people gather. Their situation points to the suburbs of selfishness, injustice, prejudice, and intransigence that generate them. For the walls of separation and misunderstanding between men are rooted in the human mind itself. Changing collective structures implies a profound transformation of hearts, because "what comes out of the mouth springs from the heart; and this is what makes man impure" (Mt 15:18).

In Jesus, individual prayer, in silence, stillness and solitude, is intimately intertwined with missionary action among the multitudes. The Gospels describe a mysterious connection between his prayer and his deeds, between his word and his contemplation. Silent prayer is the source from which his teachings and gestures flow. At the same time, his action impels him to seek moments of serenity and tranquility in which to pray in total calm.

For if it is true that prayer is not in Jesus a form of evasion, it is also true that it helps him to mark the distances and assess what his activity was awakening in the midst of the people. His meditation is an intimate and sacred place to listen to the voice of the Father: "... what I have heard from my Father I have made known to you" (Jn 15:15).

7. From lack to abundance

In Luke's account, Jesus finds fishermen frustrated and disheartened, after a long night of fruitless work. But accepting the Master's invitation will lead them to witness "a number of fish so great that the nets began to burst" (Lk 5:6). Together with Jesus, emptiness and lack are transformed into overabundance.



All of us seek in life security, we long for stability. In the everyday spaces of family, community, work or mission. Our vocabulary is prodigal in this desire for control and calculation, which gives us tranquility and provides us with serenity. Let's notice the prefixes: we need to foresee, program, project, prevent, prefix. The work of those fishermen, like ours, is always clothed with expectations and purposes. Something necessary and positive, but not always enough. And, if it takes primacy, it is counterproductive: "... do not be overwhelmed by tomorrow..." (see Mt 7:19-34).

To wrestle with Jesus among the waves involves trusting in his word and trusting in the grace that emanates from his presence. For "he who abides in me and I in him bears abundant fruit; for without me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5). The journey through the Sea of Galilee is a passage, from pure human expectations, to the hope that is founded on communion with Jesus. This is the space where the Spirit acts. And it is a space that transcends, many times, the limits of intellectual faculties, calculations, reasoning and forecasts.

It is worth emphasizing the fact underlined in previous sections: in our text we do not only find a beginning, but we also glimpse a process; it is not only root, but also seed of the path of the disciple. It is not a mere chronicle of the origins of the Savior's mission, but a key to understanding what is about to happen throughout his earthly existence. It is necessary to cross this narrative portico with pondering, to perceive its importance and to be open to the depth of its revelation.

In other moments which can be illuminating, we also perceive this experience of contrast, between lack and abundance. Perhaps one of the most significant is the episode of the multiplication of the loaves. The scene is narrated in the four Gospels, and is sometimes recounted twice (see, for example, Mk 6:30-44 and Mk 8:1-10). Which is indicating to us the importance it has in the life and message of the prophet of Galilee. Even then Jesus asks them for something that seems impossible: "Give him food" (Mk 6:37).

It is a mysterious and paradoxical sentence. As if Jesus were insinuating that what mind and reason see as impossible is not impossible for the eyes that behold things in the light of grace. This trust is born, precisely, of contemplative silence: "Truly, truly, I say to you: he who believes in me will also do the works that I do, and even greater, because I go to the Father. And whatever you ask in my name, I will do so that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (Jn 14:12-13). "If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask for what you desire, and it will be realized" (Jn 15:7).

Logic confirms that food is not enough for everyone, nor is it reasonable to return to struggle on the high seas after hours of sterile work. But faith is always an open door to hope. The action of grace, combined with generosity, is always surprising and opens, finally, to communion: "Then they beckoned to the companions, who were in the other boat, to come and lend them a hand" (Lk 5:7).

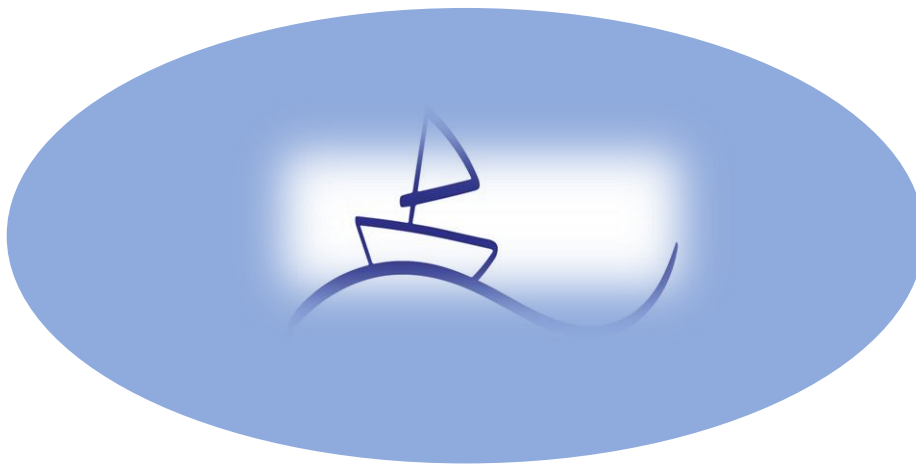
Jesus exhorts them to let themselves be carried away by the heart, illuminated by the radiance of faith that springs from within us. It is the same as making space in it, enlarging it, so that, in the face of the rigorous commands of pure reason, they know how to transcend it and open the doors to the action of the Spirit who acts in us, and is the fruit of its inhabitation in our soul: "how much more will the Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him to do so. ... "(see Lk 11:5-13).

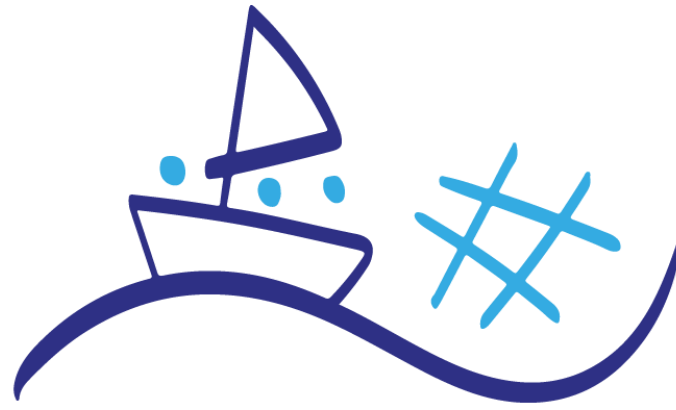
In the divine humanity of Jesus, paradox is the language that opens us to the gospel, with its wonderful burden of stupor and bewilderment. It is not perhaps a splendid paradox to say: "... whoever wants to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for me and for the Gospel will save it" (Mk 8:35). Or: "My yoke is bearable and my burden light" (Mt 11:30).



The preaching of Galilee already warned at the beginning of his preaching: "Be converted (change your way of thinking, change your heart) and believe in the Gospel" (Mk 1:15). In Jesus the opposites are twinned. What was divided and separated reaches unity. Our intellectual faculties separate lack from abundance; in the realm of faith, embracing lack, limit, emptiness, leads you to abundance. The evangelical paradox shows its truth, not in the sphere of the rational mind, but in the pure presence of the real, where God is presenting and acting "from the secret."

Paradoxically, then, journeys to distant places, journeys to other shores, leaving behind the security of one's own home, can reveal to us realities of the kingdom of God hidden in that which is closest and closest to us: ourselves. And what happens on the inside, if it is genuine and comes from God, always radiates outward.





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*Guidelines for contemplative Reading
of the text: Lk 5:1-11*





Guidelines for contemplative Reading: "Into deep sea"

Dear Sisters,

You are invited to carry out a contemplative reading of Lk 5:1-11.

I understand by "contemplative reading" to experience what is beautifully affirmed in the Catechism of the Catholic Church: "Everything that Christ lived means that we can live it in Him and that He lives it in us" (nº 521).

Let us remember what Vatican II affirms: "Sacred Scripture must be read and interpreted with the same Spirit with which it was written" (Dei Verbum nº 12).

The contemplative reading evokes this great promise of Jesus: "He who loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and dwell in him" (Jn 14:19-23). The phrase is an open door to enter into communion with the Master. Through listening to and guarding His word within us. Here are some simple guidelines that can illuminate and guide this task.

First, you are invited to a **personal, leisurely and attentive reading of the scene recounted by the evangelist Luke. It would be appropriate to read these verses every day, for example, for a week.**

In the material that has been given to you, we have tried to offer some reading keys that can help you to approach the text in a fruitful way, entering into some important aspects of its content and its message. These reflections are centered on an expression of Jesus, which inspired the title of the material: "Row out into deep sea and cast your nets for fishing" (Lk 5:4).

The comments have been articulated around the vocation or personal call that Jesus continues to address to all of us, as consecrated people. In fact, as we know, the scene evokes the first calls to discipleship that the Lord addresses to a group of fishermen.

In any case, our intention is not to abound in reflections on this episode, but to experience that the gospel becomes present and alive in us. This is the characteristic and proper thing of contemplative reading: as in the past he did with his first disciples, the Lord continues to invite us now, each one of us, to live with him and like him.

For this reason, there is an indication or premise to the first of the proposals made: even before taking the Gospel into our hands, and proceeding to the reading of the passage, **we can devote a sufficiently long time to recollection in solitude, silence, and stillness. To enter a space of calm and serenity, to become aware of the presence of the Spirit within us.** He who opens the doors to the wisdom, deep and genuine, of each text: "Then he opened to them the understanding to understand the Scriptures" (Lk 24:45).

Throughout these days, from the realm of silence, let the scene gradually penetrate our minds and hearts. **In this process, let us try to listen to and welcome whatever the voice of the Spirit may awaken within us, starting from the contemplation of the gospel.** The Spirit will make us listen to Jesus' invitation as addressed to us in the present moment.



Let us ask for the grace to enter into communion with the Master who tells us personally: "Row out to sea...", in my company. Ask yourself what resonance this invitation has at the present time in your life. Allow this sentence to resonate in your person incessantly, with all its strength and light, throughout each day.

It is timely and advisable practice **to repeat within us this or another phrase of the Gospel, or even a single word of the text, as a wonderful echo in the depths of our consciousness.** Thus, following the example of the fathers and mothers of the desert: ruminating in the heart terms or expressions of the inspired Word, until they reveal, stealthily, their message, and give off their force of transformation.

Let us move, guided by grace, effort, and intellectual faculties, to a simple and pure disposition of listening, of receptivity, of humble and trusting welcome. For from silence, nourished by the Word, springs a grace and wisdom that mysteriously illuminates and shapes our person and our existence.

In a second moment, I think it would be really enriching to ***engage in a dialogue with a sister, about what the Spirit may have awakened within you. Dialogue may also be opened in community or with a group.*** Perhaps taking advantage of a day of retreat, a community celebration or at another time. In this way, personal contemplative reading will also bear fruit of encounter and communion.

Let us remember that the central theme relates to vocation or calling. **What resonance does the Master's appeal to "go out to sea" and "cast the nets" again have at this point in your life as a Claretian missionary?**

I invite you to enter, with humility and trust, with Jesus, into the ocean of our silence, to welcome his Word there, and to receive there the gift of incarnating it in our lives.

