

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

Leaving the Shore

When I was a teenager, attending a small Catholic high school in Maryland, one of our more colorful characters was a lively drama teacher named Mrs. Keller. She was a former actress and dancer, with bright blond hair and piercing blue eyes, and she moved with an energy that always made it seem like she was about to step on stage for her big number. Mrs. Keller seemed larger than life. When she stepped into the classroom, you felt the energy shift. She loved poetry, and rock music, and drove a little red convertible. She was also divorced.

I suspect the nuns probably prayed for her every morning. But the students all thought she was incredibly hip.

Every now and then she offered a bit of wisdom that really stayed with us. Mrs. Keller encouraged us to be as adventurous as possible, and one day she stopped in the middle of her English class to tell us why. “Remember, guys,” she said, “a harbor is a safe place for a boat. But it’s not what it was built for.”

Thirty years later, I’ve never forgotten that. I’ve repeated it often—to others and myself, at moments in life when the dock seemed like a better alternative to a choppy sea.

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That phrase comes to mind when we read Luke’s account of the extraordinary catch in the Lake of Gennesaret. The readings are about so much—discipleship, conversion, preaching, and even, I suppose, fishing. They speak to us about how grace, and miracles, and burning embers can transform apathy into apostleship—making the meek into missionaries, and even saints.

We are reminded of something else. You need more than water, nets and a boat to catch fish. And you need more than the bare necessities and hard work to be a disciple of Christ.

Working long hours in shallow water, safely hugging the shore, Simon Peter and the other disciples caught nothing. Only when they ventured into the unknown, where the mysteries are held and the bottom is invisible, did they find what they were looking for.

It’s a profound metaphor. Out there in the deep is where we find the richest haul. There is where the waters teem with life, and with possibility. The nets may tear, the boats may sink, but we can discover out in the deep more than we ever imagined.

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It’s tempting to stay near dry land, tethered to what is familiar and known, anchored to our own comfort zones. It is difficult and frightening to shove off into uncharted waters. This is true, I think, with prayer, as well. It is disconcerting sometimes to delve into the soul, to examine our consciences, to commune with God in the deepest and most mysterious corners of the heart. It’s so much easier to skim the surface.

Put out into the middle of the sea, Jesus tells us. Risk. Dare. Paddle out further. Work harder. Go against the tide, out to where the water is darkest. Pause there. Pray there.

And then go deep.

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