**6th Per Annum, 2025**

I’ve never caught a fish. The most exotic thing I’ve ever caught is a cold. Nor can I handle a boat, unless it happens to be a gravy boat. I am not, in short, a fisherman. But I *do* share something with Simon Peter, The Fisherman. For one thing, “I am a sinful man, O Lord.” For another, cack-handed though I may be with a net, I *am* called to catch people, not with nets but with Good News.

And if that were all of it, we’d be in for trouble, because sinful men who take the Gospel on their unclean lips are apt to come a cropper. For one thing, we’re so very quick to judge the message by the messenger: if I were preaching myself, or my own ideas, you’d be right to disregard utterly the result.

But the Good News we are called to proclaim (not just the bishops, or the priests, or the deacons, or that-other-fellow-over-there, but all of us) is not our own. We receive it, in one sense, from other people, other messengers, other *Evangelists*. In a final sense, we receive it from Christ.

That which we have received, we are called to pass on. “I delivered to you,” says S. Paul, “what I also received,” that is, I haven’t made it up, you won’t find any difference between what I am preaching and what Cephas preaches, or James, or the other Apostles, or all the whole Church.

That is, or should be, the only reason you’re all sat there so patiently listening to me now: that I am preaching to you what the Church teaches; that I am handing on *to you*, without hesitation, repetition or deviation, what *I myself have received* from those who received it in their turn, all the way back through S. Paul and the other Apostles to Our Lord Himself.

That’s what S. Paul is getting at as he falls over himself to disclaim authorship of the Good News: I didn’t make this up, and you can check it with these other chaps, to prove that what I’m saying isn’t some private fancy, but the Teaching-with-a-capital-T of the Church. I’m only, so S. Paul says, “the least of the Apostles, unworthy to be *called* an Apostle,” but you can’t, for that reason alone, ignore the message I’ve been commissioned to bear.

The messenger, in other words, *is not* the message. The messenger, insofar as he is “a sinful man,” “a man of unclean lips,” who lives “among a people of unclean lips,” doesn’t matter. What matters is the message, that burning coal taken from the altar by the hands of the seraph, which is to say the message of God’s burning love for mankind, which comes to us by reason of the Passion of Christ, His sacrifice on the altar of the Cross, carried by the two-armed “tongs” of the Old and New Testaments. To accept that message of love is to be cleansed from sin – “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.” It is also to have our lips consecrated to bear the message to others.

All of this is accomplished by grace, symbolised by the six-winged angel, the seraph, to remind us that the spreading of the Gospel is not our own but *God’s* work in and through us. Perhaps that is why the Lord chose fishermen; why He chose the repentant Pharisee, why He continues to choose unworthy men to preach His Word: to prove that it is by grace alone that the Gospel is preached, that men are caught, that the Church grows. “not I, but the grace of God that is with me.”

Isaiah’s vision takes place in the Temple, the House of God, to remind us that *only* in the Church will we find the fulness of this truth. Not outside it, no matter the qualities of the messengers. Because only *in* the Church do we find that guarantee: “I delivered to you […] what I also received.” Not distorted by whim or preference, not stripped of the difficult bits, or the teachings which make life awkward. Because the Faith, the Gospel, is received whole, and must be handed on, whole.

Anything less comes not from God but from ourselves, which would be disastrous for us. Because the Faith we have received as a divine gift is the Faith in which we stand, which is to say by which we are lifted from the poverty of our fallen human nature and made sons and daughters of God Most High. It is the Faith “by which [we] are being saved” through grace, not all at once but little by little, across a lifetime of growth in God.

That Faith has a claim on us. First, to know it: we should know what the Church teaches and why, and be able to give some account of it to those wo might ask us. We shouldn’t be content with half-remembered bits and pieces from years ago, from Communion classes or confirmation sessions: we should aim to be growing in knowledge of our faith as much as we aim to grow in faith itself.

Second, we are bound to hold the Faith, all of it, as the Church passes it on to us. Not cutting out the inconvenient, or the difficult, or the bits that aren’t quite to our taste. And if we have doubts, we should pray for an increase of faith. And if we have difficulties, we should look for answers: not from any old where, but from the Church.

Third, we should be alert for opportunities, with tact and gentleness, to share that Faith. To encourage fellow Catholics who are doubting, or who have wandered from the Faith. To give an attractive and intriguing account to our brothers and sisters in Christ who aren’t – yet! – Catholics. To allow ourselves to be called into the Lord’s service to bring the Good News to those who do not yet know God, to be Fishers of Men for them by God’s grace.

Perhaps you’re thinking that you aren’t cut out for all of that. And you’re right: none of us, according to our own merits or our natural gifts are fit to be Evangelists. But by “the grace of God that is with” us, which re-creates us in Christ, we are summoned to be the witnesses of the One Who tells us “Do not be afraid.”