

When John Paul became Pope in 1978, in his first homily he proclaimed to the world “Do not be afraid.” It was a powerful message that the world needed to hear – the theme really of his whole pontificate. For if humanity, since the Fall of Adam and Eve, had a theme, it would be that of fear.

After the first sin, they hide from God, they are ashamed and afraid. Look even in today’s readings – God reveals Himself to Isaiah and Isaiah’s first reaction is that of fear: “Woe is me. I am doomed. I am a man of unclean lips.”

In this Gospel, after Jesus works the miracle of the fish, Peter kneels down and begs Jesus to leave him. “Leave me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.” Peter is afraid.

Some healthy sense of fear is good. We should fear danger, we should fear sin, we should fear Hell. But our fear, many times, goes overboard. It can invade us. It paralyzes us. It keeps us from thriving as the disciples Jesus wants us to be.

We fear that we are inadequate

We fear that we won’t have enough

We fear what other people think of us

We fear suffering

We fear because we have fear

Really, it’s ridiculous, and the voice of Jesus calls us: “Do not be afraid.”

Do not be afraid to put your life on the line for the sake of the Gospel.

Do not be afraid to suffer for the sake of love.

Do not be afraid of hardship for the sake of the kingdom.

Open wide the doors for Christ, John Paul II would tell us.

Jesus goes even farther than this. Looking again at the Gospel, in the face of failure in their fishing that night, Jesus commands Peter, “Put out into the deep” and Peter obeys the Lord and there is a miraculous catch.

We too are called to put out into the deep in our lives. We can’t just live on the surface of being Christians. The life of discipleship is a life of risk. This is not a life of rashness – that would be foolish. It’s a life of listening to the voice of Christ in our lives and trusting the path on which He sets us.

It’s risky to become a priest, to give up wife, children, to dedicate one’s self completely to the Lord. Will I be happy?

It’s risky to get married, to give one’s self to another person for the rest of your life. Can I be faithful? Will I be happy?

Priesthood, marriage, living your faith openly, opening a school – risky. Put out into the deep. Peter risked looking foolish. It's risky to be open about your faith. Will I be ridiculed? Will my co-workers think I'm weird? Put out into the deep, Jesus says. Do not be afraid.

We cannot allow our lives to be paralyzed with fear, a fear that would keep us from living the Gospel, from being a disciple as Christ asks us to be. Yes, and sometimes when we risk for the Gospel, things might not work out. We can't control other people; we can't always control circumstances. So maybe it doesn't always work out, but as Mother Theresa once said, "God doesn't necessarily call us to be successful. He calls to be faithful."

Enough with fear. Do not be afraid. Put out into the deep. Live the Gospel.

Given by Father Mark Gurtner at Our Lady of Good Hope, Fort Wayne, Indiana, on the 5th Sunday of Ordinary Time, 2015.