

SERMON on the Abundant Catch of Fish, Luke 5:1-11, Sunday, September 22, 2019

In the life of St. Nektarios is the following excerpt: "...Nektarios continued to find time for those who came to him in need. Such was the case with Uncle Theodore, who visited Nektarios in frayed clothes, holes in his shoes, with no gift in his hands and tear-filled eyes. When Nektarios' eyes met his, the old man could not help but to start sobbing quietly. "What has happened, Theodore? Why are you crying? Has anyone in your family died?" Nektarios questioned the old man gently. "No, Papouli,* something worse than death has befallen us." "Worse...What could that be?" "Dogs have taken to our fishing nets, and are destroying them. I put bait and bait, and more bait in, and I cannot even catch a fish small enough for a snack. I am in danger of losing my equipment and of having to sell my boats as well, and then I will be left with nothing. My children have been going to bed without dinner for four weeks now. I feel too ashamed to go to the market and beg." "I don't understand how dogs can..." "I mean dogfish, as we call them, or sharks...Schools of sharks. They bring shameless destruction to breeding waters." "And is this going on throughout the coast?" "Everywhere, Papouli, everywhere, from Ermioni to Angistri..." "...Won't they change course and leave?" "No, Papouli. Whenever it happens, the fish are lost for five years. It is sheer destruction. I tell you, sheer destruction." The old man started crying again. "Please don't cry. Sit down and have something to eat with me. We will try to support you in whatever way we can, even if our funds are scarce. Where do you have your equipment?" "Down at the harbor." "Do you want to bring them here for a blessing?" "Do I want to? Of course I do...At least I know that the Great Lord Jesus Christ listens to you." "He listens to you even more." The old man left quickly after that, and almost flew to the town and its harbor. By late dusk, he was back again. He had two baskets filled with fishing nets and hooks balanced on his head. Nektarios smiled, took them quietly and lifted them up in his hands. He smelled the sea in them. He then took them to the chapel and stood in front of the holy altar. He whispered something and blessed them. In his mind he remembered the guileless fishermen of Tiberias which the Lord Jesus turned into wise men of humanity. When Nektarios exited the chapel and came into the courtyard, he handed the nets back to Uncle Theodore. "Take them," he said with a smile. "Take them and throw them back into the sea. I hope that the sharks will now leave." A fortnight later, Uncle Theodore went back to the monastery, dancing on the rocks as he ascended the hill. He was carrying two large snappers in his hands. "Papouli, Papouli," the fisherman called, "Come and see my fish, Papouli. Come and admire them...Your blessing was most holy...Blessed is your soul. I threw the nets you blessed back in the sea and I haven't had enough time to take all of the fish out yet. The damned sharks have left and the seas are once again blessed. There are now more fish than anyone can handle. As long as Uncle Theodore lives, you will have fish to eat, even eels that you like so much." They looked at each other with tear filled eyes. "My friend, the Lord is infinitely better than we can ever imagine," Nektarios whispered, "Infinitely better..Thank you so much for the gift. Come with me so that we can quickly offer him a doxology." (*Saint Nektarios the Saint of our Century* by Sotos Chondropoulos, Publications Καινογενεια ΓΗ, Athens, 2004, pages 225-226). St. Nektarios was known for his philanthropic deeds and extreme love and co-suffering for all of those in need or help. Many were jealous of him and slandered him, which caused him great suffering throughout his entire life. However, nothing could extinguish the fire that his burning heart had for love towards Jesus Christ and towards his fellow men. During the last years of his life he established the women's monastery on the island of Aegina, where his holy relics are entombed. Through the prayers of our holy Father St. Nektarios, may our souls be saved! Amen!

*Papouli, a term used affectionately toward elderly priests.