

Homily given by Fr Justin Gillespie
at Solemn Mass honouring St Josemaría Escrivá
Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish, Merrion Road, Dublin
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Many times we will have considered the words that we have just heard in the Gospel: “put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch”. As is always the case, the Word of God speaks to us in different ways and in very particular circumstances.

Right now, though, I’d like us to hear these words of Jesus keeping something in mind: the men who first heard them were exhausted. They were fed up and eager to go home. All night long they had been fishing and had caught nothing. Oh, and they were hungry too. On top of it, their families were waiting for them, and once more they’d have to face the questions: “how did it go? How much did you make?”

Jesus speaks these challenging and daring words to men like this. To sum it up, they weren’t in the mood for what he was saying, and it didn’t seem like an opportune moment for Jesus to be calling them to be even more daring and ambitious in their fishing.

What about us?

How do we hear these words of Jesus?

I’d like to be even more specific, and ask how we hear them as members of families. Tonight, let’s imagine Jesus speaking these words to families.

I don’t think I need to cite sociological studies or to give a long list of statistics in order to say that many families today are exhausted. Some are fed up. And unfortunately, many are conflicted - they are in pain. What is more, fewer and fewer people even see the Christian understanding of marriage and the family as a viable possibility.

We might even say that many families today, like the fishermen Jesus spoke to, are not in the mood for hearing Jesus’ words.

With this sobering reality before us, I’d like to read something that Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, the Prelate of Opus Dei, wrote several weeks ago, addressing this dilemma of the family:

*“In reflecting on this truth, some words of Saint Josemaría come to mind: **“The task for a Christian is to drown evil in an abundance of good. It is not a question of negative campaigns, or of being anti anything. On the contrary, we should live positively, full of optimism, with youthfulness, joy and peace. We should be understanding with everybody, with the followers of Christ, and with those who abandon him, or do not know him at all. But understanding does not mean drawing back, or remaining indifferent, but being active.”***

THIS is how we need to hear Jesus’ words, “put out into the deep!”

We need to hear them as a call from God Himself to not remain indifferent or discouraged, but to work with others, to build up the family - to be active.

Right now, in Dublin, you and I are presented with a very unique opportunity in this regard. A year from now, all of us will be preparing for the arrival of Pope Francis and the celebration of the World Meeting of Families. Let’s ask St. Josemaría to pray for us so that we might be convinced and eager to participate in this powerful opportunity for grace.

Once more, I would be like to be even more specific. I encourage each of us to not let this month end without having prayed about how we might work with others in preparation for the World Meeting of Families. The organisers are looking for volunteers; catechesis is available for parishes and families - there are many possibilities, no matter what our age or circumstances.

Thinking about possibilities like these, I’d like to read once more from the Prelate of Opus Dei’s recent letter:

“More than in other times, we see today, at all levels, how urgent it is to assist families with greater difficulties. A person isn’t born knowing how to be a father or mother, a husband or wife; we need to learn this ourselves and help other spouses and parents to do so. Families who help other families! ... Without “giving lessons,” with naturalness, how much can be done to prepare couples well and follow closely those who are recently married, or who are going through difficult times! Moreover, sometimes the family in difficulty may be your own; then is the moment to open your heart and let yourself be helped, with the same simplicity with which you have helped others.”

Families who help other families: this is what the upcoming event in Dublin gives us a chance to do. And helping others doesn’t require me to be flawless myself. There are no ideal families anyway. There are, however, families that have learned to love and to forgive in the middle of failure, brokenness, and joy that family life is.

Let us renew our faith that Jesus is still speaking to each one of us, whispering in our ear, *“put out into the deep!... Don’t settle into a comfortable passivity. I have given you an unconditional love: help your own family and others as well to discover it. And having discovered it, help them to try and make their family relationships reflect it.”*

Well before it was the common teaching of the Church as it is today, St. Josemaría repeatedly helped married couples discover that their marriage and family was precisely where God wanted them to live their Christian life to the full. St. Josemaría wanted them to see that precisely in the chaos and the challenges of family life, identification with Jesus was possible.

Last week, Pope Francis spoke in his Wednesday audience about the importance of seeing the fullness of Christian life as *possible*. But possible in a real way.

For if we think about it, there are a lot of things that we know are possible, but that we actually have little hope in. For example, I know that it’s “possible” that I could learn to speak Russian...but even though it’s possible, I don’t really think it’s likely. Each of us might look back at our New Year’s resolutions and learn a similar lesson: it was *possible*, but it’s probably not going to happen.

We need to stop looking at a fully-engaged Christian life in this way: as “possible”, but not too likely.

Making this change is what Pope Francis is encouraging us to do:

“However, one of you might ask me: “Father, can one be a Saint in everyday life?”

Yes, one can.

“But does this mean that we have to pray the whole day?”

No, it means that one must do one’s duty the whole day: pray, go to work, look after the children. However, everything must be done with the heart open to God, so that work – also in sickness and in suffering, also in difficulties – is open to God, and thus we can become Saints. May the Lord give us the hope of being Saints.

We must not think it is something difficult, that it is easier to be a delinquent than to be Saints! No. We can be Saints because the Lord helps us; it is He who helps us.

This is the great gift that each one of us can give the world. May the Lord give us the grace to believe so profoundly in Him that we become images of Christ for this world.

Our history is in need of “mystics”: of persons that reject all domination, that aspire to charity and fraternity; men and women who live accepting also a portion of suffering, because they take charge of others’ toil.

However, without these men and women the world would not have hope. Therefore, I wish you – and I wish also for myself – that the Lord give us the hope of being Saints.”

Let us ask St. Josemaría today that he pray for us so that we might have this hope. A hope that prevents us from thinking that Jesus is speaking to someone else when we hear the words, “put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.”