SAINT GEORGE
ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH
EL PASO - TEXAS

His Eminence Metropolitan SABA

RT. Rev. Archimandrite Fadi Rabbat Pastor — Rev. Dcn. Miguel 'Michael' Sifuentes Deacon

"And the Disciples were first called Christians in Antioch". Acts 11:26

Tel.: 915-584-9100 www.stgeorge-elpaso.org **office@stgeorge-elpaso.org**

"My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations." Mark 11:17

"The Church is a hospital, and not a courtroom for souls, she does not condemn on behalf of sins but grants remission of sins. – St. John Chrysostom

"Don't leave the church, for nothing is stronger than the church. The church is your hope, your salvation and your refuge." – St. John Chrysostom

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost
& Second Sunday of Luke

Hieromartyr Hierotheos, bishop of Athens; Hieromartyr Peter of Capitolia in Syria;
Martyrs Domnina and her daughters of Syria

Sunday, October 4, 2026
Tone 1/ Eothinon 7

Saturday Vespers Service: 5:00 PM
Orthros (Matins) 9:30 AM, followed immediately by Divine Liturgy (10:30 AM)
Inquirers in Eastern Orthodoxy are encouraged to attend the Divine Liturgy at 10:30 AM
Sunday Epistle Reader: Stephanie Chloe Del Corral

RESURRECTIONAL APOLYTIKION IN TONE ONE

When the stone had been sealed by the Jews, and the soldiers were guarding Thine immaculate body, Thou didst arise on the third day, O Saviour, granting the life unto the world. Wherefore, the powers of the heavens cried out to Thee, O Life-giver: Glory to Thy Resurrection, O Christ. Glory to Thy Kingdom, Glory to Thy dispensation, O only Friend of man.

APOLYTIKION OF ST. GEORGE IN TONE FOUR

Since thou art a liberator and deliverer of captives, a help and support of the poor and needy, a healing physician of the sick, a contender and fighter for kings, O great among Martyrs, the victory-clad George; intercede with Christ God for the salvation of our souls.

ORDINARY KONTAKION IN TONE TWO

O protection of Christians that cannot be put to shame, mediation unto the Creator most constant, O despise not the suppliant voices of those who have sinned; but be thou quick, O good one, to come unto our aid, who in faith cry unto thee: Hasten to intercession, and speed thou to make supplication, thou who dost ever protect, O Theotokos, them that honor thee.

THE EPISTLE

(For the Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost)

Let Thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us. Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous.

The reading from the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians. (9:6-11)

Brethren, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work. As it is written, "He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your resources and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for great generosity, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.

THE GOSPEL

(For the Second Sunday of Luke)

The reading from the Holy Gospel according to St. Luke. (6:31-36)

The Lord said: "As you wish that men would do to you, do so to them. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful."

THE SYNAXARION

On October 4 in the Holy Orthodox Church, we commemorate the Hieromartyr Hierotheos, bishop of Athens.

Verses

Of old Hierotheos to Thee was consecrated;
Now gone hence, O Word, he hath to Thee been united.
On the fourth dawn, the grave covered Hierotheos.

He was a friend of Dionysios the Areopagite, and received the Christian faith from the Apostle Paul a little after Dionysios. This Apostle later made Hierotheos the first bishop of Athens. At the time of the Dormition of the most holy Mother of God, Hierotheos arrived in Jerusalem, carried by the clouds, and took part in the funeral. With his divine singing, he brought heartfelt joy to many and showed himself to be greatly inspired. He labored greatly for the sake of the Gospel, brought many pagans to the truth, governed his flock well and finally ended a martyr for Christ in the first century.

On this day, we also commemorate the Hieromartyr Peter of Capitolia in Syria; and Martyrs Domnina and her daughters of Syria. By the intercessions of thy saints, O Christ God, have mercy on us. Amen.

PROSPHORA IS OFFERED BY

Zena Esper for the health and wellbeing of our clergy and Sylvana Aldouri, and in celebration of her daughter Ronda's birthday on October 3rd and her grandmother Nancy's birthday on September 25, and her uncle Ramsey's birthday on September 28th.

FESTIVAL TICKETS

PLEASE BRING IN THE MONEY FOR THE TICKETS THAT YOU SOLD ASAP AND ALL UNSOLD TICKETS TO DR. RAED ALDOURI.

COFFEE HOUR & FELLOWSHIP AFTER LITURGY

In our parish life, let us foster brotherly love by gathering after worship for coffee hour as a warm, sharing family; it is wonderful when, atop the coffee, there is a small bite to accompany the drink—so we have a simple, inviting table for all to enjoy. Please know you are not required to sponsor everything; even a partial contribution—whether a pot of coffee, a tray of treats, or a small snack from home—blesses our communal table, so that we can welcome one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.

If you have any questions, you can reach Vanessa at (915) 373-5550. Thank you.

ST. GEORGE TEEN MONTH - OCTOBER

Teen Month is October 2026. The following individual will be reading the Epistle at Liturgy on Sunday, October 4, 2026: Stephanie Chloe Del Corral

The Teens will be offering refreshments for the Coffee House after liturgy.

2027 ARCHDIOCESE 58th BIENNIAL CONVENTION IS COMING TO ANAHEIM. CALIFORNIA – JULY 19 – 25, 2027

Hotel registration is now open! Please refer to the FLYER attached to the church bulletin email.

TEACHINGS FROM METROPOLITAN SABA

Dear parishioners and friends, you will periodically be receiving the **weekly teachings** by His Eminence Metropolitan Saba, in English and Arabic. When we receive them from the Archdiocese Office we'll send it under a separate church email.

HOMILY BY FR. FADI RABBAT

The Homily given on Sunday September 27 for the First Sunday of Luke by Fr. Fadi Rabbat at the Cathedral St. Nicholas, Sidon – Lebanon is located at the end of the bulletin.

THE ADULT STUDY GROUP FOR INQUIRERS IN EASTERN ORTHODOX MEETING DATES

For future planning, here are the Adulty Study Group meeting dates for inquirers interested in learning about the Eastern Orthodox faith. We'll meet on 10/11, 10/25, 11/8, 11/22, 12/6, and 12/20. The Group meets in the mini hall from 9:15 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.

In Christ,
Dr. Sandra Edwards, Master of Theological Studies (MTS).
Instructor, The Adult Study Group

ADULT STUDY READING

On Living Life More Generously

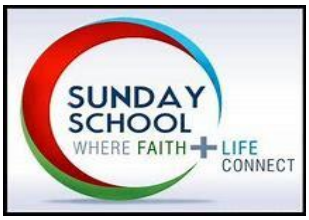
During the Stewardship Project, check this box every week for inspirational perspectives about living life more generously, and as a guideline to becoming more generous to your church. Then see the attachment to the bulletin for what our Archdiocese wants us to know about giving

#14

In the days of Moses, God outlined a model for offering Him sacrifices and gifts. God would not accept the sheep that was sickly, the runt of the litter or the animal that would place second in a livestock competition. God expected the FIRST and the FINEST of what the people had – the choicest –the first fruits.

Today – we are still called to give God our best **not** because He needs our gift. He doesn't. We are called to give for two reasons:
1-God is worthy of our gift; We are called, then, to make our gift **worthy of HIM.**
2- Offering a proper gift is a tangible way that we put God FIRST in our lives.
It is easy to give what we no longer want – our leftovers. Such gifts cost us little or nothing. But God is not a charity like Goodwill accepting most anything. A gift that honors God is one that requires sacrifice. Gifts reflect what's in the heart. What we offer God declares the position God holds in our hearts. Gift-giving to God becomes less about checking the box when a certain percentage is met, and more about the transformation of the heart . When a loving and generous heart prompts the gift, it shows that lasting change has been achieved --- the heart has been transformed.

SUNDAY SCHOOL



Every Sunday students should be present at 9:25 AM to be with Fr. Fadi for the opening prayers.

STUDENT ATTENDANCE ROSTER FOR SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2026 – 33 students

Pre-School (ages 3 and 4 years old)	**Doris Shaheen** Leo Sarah, Elena Perfilio, Amelia Aldeghlawi, Julius Hernandez & Gabriela Heredia
Grades Kinder/1st	**Jehan Al-Hanna** Jack Horton, Rafael Heredia, Julia Sanchez & Kennedy Morgan
Grades 2/3	**Adriana Anzaldo** Eliana Aldeghlawi, Marylaine Del Corral, Leon Perfillio, Ezra Espinosa, William Cuellar, Knight Joudi & Gianna Morgan
Grades 4/5	**Anne Thomas** Christina Sarah
Grades 6/7	**James Shaheen Jr.** Caleb Crawford, John Baptist Del Corral, Kingston Joudi & Joshua Sanchez
Grades 8-12	**Johnny Odeh** Majd Al Dayoub, Noah Espinosa, Elias Al Dayoub, Annabelle Horton, Nia Isaac, Stephanie Chloe Del Corral, Melaina Horton, Joseph Salloum Aubrey Lopez Alfredo Ramirez
Sunday School Director:	**Laila Ferris**
Co-Director:	**Anne Thomas**
Special Projects:	**Jaclyn Ferris**

AHOS OPEN ENROLLMENT 2027-2028

Following the successful completion and closing of admissions for the 2026–2027 academic year, we are pleased to announce that applications are now officially open for the 2027–2028 academic year at the Antiochian House of Studies (AHOS).

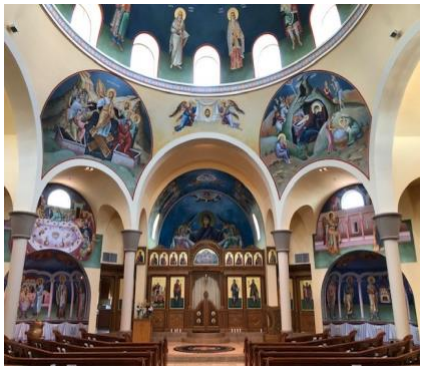
Answer the call to serve the Lord in His parish and community, pursue excellence in theological education and pastoral formation, and deepen your relationship with God.

Theological Offerings for 2027–2028:

- ✦ St. Stephen's Certificate Program (SSC)
- ✦ Master in Theological Studies (MTS)
- ✦ Master in Pastoral Care & Counselling (MPCC)
- ✦ Master of Divinity (MDiv)
- ✦ Doctorate of Ministry in Eastern Orthodox Theology
- ✦ Ph.D. in Orthodox Studies

Whether you are discerning a call to ministry, seeking academic excellence, or wishing to grow deeper in the Orthodox faith, AHOS invites you to begin your journey with them. Visit www.ahos.edu for more information.

ST GEORGE CHURCH ICON PROJECT



From the Prayer behind the Ambon for the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom and written in Arabic on the archway above the iconostasis "…*sanctify those who love the beauty of Thy house*."

Orthodox churches are a glimpse of heaven on earth and icons are representations of the Heavenly. They are expressions of Orthodox faith, teaching, and worship. The Orthodox Church uses icons to assist in worship. Icons are a 'window to heaven' and they help us to focus on divine things.

Fr. Fadi is overseeing the Icon Project to have icons written on the bare interior walls in the church. This project continues beautifying the Church for the glory of God. **If you wish to make a monetary donation towards the Icon Project in memory of a loved one(s) and/or the health of your family, please contact Fr. Fadi at (973) 780-0221.** Please address your check to St. George Church, earmarked Icon Project Donation. A warm thank you to all who have donated toward the Icon Project. Based on your gifts from the heart there will be more icons to come.

DONATIONS FOR THE ICON OF ST. SPYRIDON

We are blessed to prepare an iconographic project in honor of Saint Spyridon the Wonderworker, the humble bishop of Trimythous and defender of the Orthodox faith.

His icon proclaims his witness: the shepherd's cap recalls his humility, the Gospel Book his teaching, and the miracle of the brick at the First Ecumenical Council reveals the Holy Trinity—one God in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Saint Spyridon, known as the "walking saint," continues to intercede for the faithful, as reflected in the tradition of his worn slippers. Our parish is especially blessed to have a relic connected to these holy slippers, which will be reverently incorporated into this icon setting.

To complete this sacred space behind the baptismal font, we are raising $6,900 for a hand-written icon, two candelabras, and a proper devotional arrangement. Fr. Fadi will donate his relics with the reliquary.
We invite all to participate in this offering of faith and beauty. May Saint Spyridon intercede for us and bless all who contribute.

Your gracious donations towards a written icon of St. Spyridon and two candle stands are most appreciated. **If you wish to make a monetary donation towards the Icon Project in memory of a loved one(s) and/or the health of your family, please contact Fr. Fadi at (973) 780-0221.** Please address your check to St. George Church, earmarked St. Spyridon icon.

Sharing further information about St. Spyridon provided by Trisagion Films:

Saint Spyridon the Wonderworker and Champion of Orthodoxy

ONLINE LITURGICAL GUIDE FOR CHURCH SERVICES

Being present, prayerful and present in the church community and in the celebration of the Divine Liturgy is key to being orthodox. Please click on the following link to access the liturgical services for Saturday Vespers, Sunday Orthros, Sunday Divine Liturgy, and special services:
https://www.antiochian.org/liturgicday/4696
Click on the SELECT DATE in the top calendar. The services will appear under the DAILY LITURGICAL TEXT on the right column. Click on the service you need. You can follow the service using your cell phone or print a copy for your use.

To use your cell phone to access the above information while in church, you can link to the church's Wi-Fi Network. Information is posted at the church entrance.

When using the small red Service Book found in the church pews, the general services can be found on the following pages:
- **Vespers,** page 24 – 43 - **Orthros**, pages 44 – 80 - **Liturgy**, pages 91 - 127
Please note that some of the prayers may change based on the Tone of the day.

OFFERING PROSPHORA FOR LITURGY

Dear St. George parishioners, offering Prosphora to be used in the Liturgy for the Eucharist. is an offering of oneself to God. The Eucharist is not a modern symbol but ancient and true center of Christian worship since the apostles. If you plan to offer Prosphora on a Sunday for your health and your Orthodox loved ones, or in memory of an Orthodox departed, please indicate your offering on the sign-up board located in the Narthex (entrance) of the church or email Rev. Dcn. Michael by the prior Monday at deacon@stgeorge-elpaso.org to have it placed in the week's Church Bulletin. Rev. Dcn. Michael will then contact you to make the necessary arrangements for the Prosphora. The usual cost for preparing the five loaves is $30. **A bulletin board is available in the Narthex if you would like to sign-up to offer Holy Bread for the year 2026.**

CHURCH ETIQUETTE – MOST HELPFUL!

The attached web site is a guide for how to show proper respect and reference in church. This guide is also meant for personal reflection, not as a means of judging others. Keep in mind that there are different traditions even among the Orthodox faith. We are reminded that a glimpse of Heaven on earth exists. It's called the Divine Liturgy, and we are entering the presence of the Living God. We come to church to pray and worship God above all else, and that should be our only focus.

https://antiochianprodsa.blob.core.windows.net/websiteattachments/ChurchEtiquetteBooklet.pdf

WHO CAN RECEIVE COMMUNION IN AN ORTHODOX CHURCH?

"First cleanse the inside of the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also." (Matt. 23:26)

"When God revealed himself, he united himself with our mortal nature in order to deify humanity through this close relation with divinity. Since this is so, through his flesh, constituted by bread and wine, he implants himself in all believers."
– St. Gregory of Nyssa

Only Orthodox Christians who prepared for Communion through confession, prayer, and fasting can go up to the chalice to receive the Holy Eucharist from the priest. When you approach the chalice and the Priest or Deacon say, 'The servant of God…', please say your first name or that of your saint.
All visitors are welcomed to worship with us; however, non-Orthodox Christians may not partake of the Holy Eucharist but rather wait till the Dismissal of the Divine Liturgy and partake of the blessed bread (called Antidoron in Greek) placed in front of the Solea.

2026 MEMBERSHIP PLEDGE (TITHING) TO ST. GEORGE ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

"Return to Me and I will return to you," says the Lord Almighty….Return now in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not open for you the floodgates of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it is overflowing." – Malachi 3:8-10
In the Orthodox tradition, tithing reflect our gratitude to God, our commitment to our spiritual family, and our desire to participate meaningfully in the life of the Church. Whether you have been Orthodox since birth, converted recently, or are just discovering Orthodoxy, understanding how to give financially to the Church is essential and spiritually enriching.
Tithing traditionally means giving 10% of your income to the Church. In Orthodoxy, however, tithing isn't viewed strictly as an obligation or a legalistic rule. Instead, it's encouraged as an ideal practice—a meaningful benchmark reflecting generosity and trust in God's providence.
In practical terms, each Orthodox Christian is encouraged to reflect prayerfully on their financial situation and give in a way that honors God, supports our church, and expresses genuine gratitude.

For 'Orthodox stewardship' isn't just about giving money—it's about nurturing a lifestyle of generosity. Giving should be regular, intentional, and proportionate to one's means. It's deeply connected with gratitude for God's blessings and a commitment to support the Church's clergy, ministries and maintenance, **and to pay the annual Archdiocese Contribution required of all parishes to the Antiochian Archdiocese.**
The Orthodox perspective emphasizes that everything we have is ultimately God's gift. By returning a portion of these blessings, we affirm our trust in God's continued provision and care.

The actual proportion you choose should be your own prayerful decision. If there is one word to describe "how much", we like the advice to make it "meaningful". This will vary considerably with an individual's financial situation. In considering the definition of meaningful, consider the lesson of the widow's mite. She gave a tiny amount, but this was given in love, NOT from her abundance but from her necessities.

The minimum pledge (tithing) contribution of at least $500.00 pledge per Baptized or Chrismated Orthodox person, ages 18 and older is required or $1000 per family (or more from the gift of the heart). You can either pay your pledge immediately, or make payments throughout the year, however, the final amount must be met by December 31st of each year. **The met pledge makes you eligible to vote at the Annual General Assembly of Voting Members in January each year.** Please make checks payable to St. George Church in the donated amounts. In the purpose line indicate **Church Pledge**.
If you are an Orthodox attendee and want a pledge envelop box for 2026, please contact Kyle Horton, Parish Council Treasurer. Otherwise, on the blank envelopes provided at the donation box, write your full name, the amount donated, and that the donation is to be applied towards your annual pledge.

By embracing generous and joyful stewardship, every member of our parish—regardless of their journey or experience—helps build a vibrant, caring, and spiritually enriching community. Together, we honor God, sustain our parish's ministry, and continue the timeless tradition of Orthodox generosity.

If you have financial difficulties, please see the priest for available options. **The option would be to contribute what you can to the church.**

May your giving always reflect your gratitude, faith, and joyful participation in the Church's life.

PRAYER FOR THE SICK

Please let us know if you are ill and/or hospitalized by contacting Fr. Fadi Rabbat. We too will add your name to the prayer list for Sunday's Divine Liturgy.

CONTACT INFORMATION

For Pastoral needs, emergencies, visitation to hospital, homes, and prayer/holy communion during the year, contact Fr. Fadi Rabbat directly and not through the Deacon. Fr. Fadi will not visit without permission extended to him from the sick person and/or their family.

Confessions are by appointment with Fr. Fadi Rabbat. PLEASE contact Fr. Fadi TWO days in advance to ensure his schedule is free.

Fr. Fadi Rabbat at:
***Cell phone*: 973.780.0221**
***Email*: fadi.rabbat@icloud.com**

Rev. Dcn. Michael Sifuentes at ***Cell Phone:*** (915)309-1511 ***Email:*** deacon@stgeorge-elpaso.org

CHURCH BULLETIN STAFF

The RT. Rev. Archimandrite Fadi Rabbat, Chief Editor
Rev. Dcn. Michael Sifuentes, Editor
Vanessa Salloum, Assistant Editor
Jameelie Dayoub, Web Site Poster

Please note the weekly church bulletin is always posted on the church web site page at:
https://www.stgeorge-elpaso.org/

FOLLOW US ON OUR SOCIAL MEDIAS:

https://linktr.ee/StGeorgeAntiochianOrthodox?utm_source=linktree_profile_share&ltsid=189abd88-74d6-44c7-b26e-bb8796ada5a3

ONLINE ORTHODOX STORES

Below are some online stores that have a large selection of traditional Orthodox religious items and books on the Eastern Orthodox faith and service books.

Alpha Omega ART (New York): https://aoart.gr/contact
Ancient Faith Store: https://store.ancientfaith.com/
Antiochian Village Store: https://store.antiochianvillage.org/
Catherine's Corner -Church Bookstore & Gifts:
www.ebay.com/str/StsCH-Orthodox-Bookstore/
Eight Day Books: https://www.eighthdaybooks.com/
Holy Cross Book Store: https://holycrossbookstore.com/
Holy Trinity Store: https://www.holytrinitystore.com/
Holy Transfiguration Monastery Store: https: //www.bostonmonks.com/
Saint Vladimir Seminary Press (SVS): https://svspress.com/

Books can also be purchased through online sites such as Amazon, etc…

Homily for the First Sunday of Luke by Fr. Fadi Rabbat
Cathedral St. Nicholas, Sidon - Lebanon.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Beloved in Christ,

Today, on the First Sunday of Luke, the Holy Gospel brings us to the shore of Lake Gennesaret. There we see Simon Peter: tired, disappointed, and empty-handed. He had worked all night. He was not lazy. He was not careless. He had done everything he knew how to do. Yet after all his labor, his nets were empty.

How many of us know this feeling?

There are nights in the soul when we work, pray, worry, struggle, and still seem to catch nothing. We try to save a relationship; we try to raise our children well; we try to overcome a sin; we try to find peace in our hearts. We have toiled through the night, and the morning comes with empty nets.

But it is exactly there—beside the empty boat, beside the washed and useless nets—that Christ comes to Simon.

The Lord does not wait for Simon to become successful before entering his boat. He does not wait until Peter has something impressive to offer Him.

Christ enters the boat when it is empty. He enters the life of Peter when Peter is exhausted.

This is the hope of the Gospel: Christ is not ashamed to enter the boat of our weakness. He comes not only into our joyful days, but also into our failures, our disappointments, our hidden tears, and our long nights.

St. John Chrysostom says that Christ called the fishermen "by their art of fishing." He met them in the very place of their ordinary labor and used what they knew to reveal His divine calling.

The Lord does the same with us. He meets us where we are: in our homes, our work, our sickness, our struggles, and our daily responsibilities. He takes the little boat of our lives and makes it a place from which His word may be heard.

After teaching the people, the Lord says to Peter, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch."

Peter could have refused. He was the fisherman, after all. He knew the lake. He knew that night was the time for fishing. He knew he had already worked without success. He could have said: "Lord, You teach the people, but let me take care of the fish."

Instead, Peter says words that every Christian should keep in his heart:

"Master, we toiled all night and took nothing; but at Thy word I will let down the nets."

Peter does not deny his failure. He does not pretend that the night was easy. He says openly, "We toiled all night and took nothing." But then he speaks the words that open heaven: "But at Thy word."

This is faith—not denying the pain, but placing the pain under the word of Christ.

Perhaps someone comes to church today carrying an empty net. You may be tired of praying for a child who has wandered away from the faith. You may be struggling with a sin that returns again and again. You may be carrying grief, loneliness, financial pressure, illness, or fear for the future.

You may say, "Lord, I have tried. I have toiled all night. I have nothing left."
The Lord does not condemn you for saying this. He knows your labor. He knows your tears. But He says gently to you: "Put out into the deep."

Do not remain only at the shore of fear. Do not remain in shallow faith. Do not remain imprisoned by what you can see and measure. Put out into the deep—the deep of prayer, repentance, forgiveness, patience, and trust.

St. Ambrose explains that Christ says to Peter alone, "Put out into the deep," because the true depth is "the knowledge of the Son of God." The deepest place is not simply the deep water of the lake; it is the deep mystery of Christ Himself.

The world tells us to stay on the shore, where everything is controlled and safe. But Christ calls us into the deep, where we must depend on Him.

Peter obeys. And the nets become so full that they begin to break. The boats are filled almost to sinking.

What changed? The lake did not change. Peter's boat did not change. His nets did not change. What changed was this: the word of Christ entered into Peter's labor.

St. Cyril of Alexandria says that this miracle was a sign that the apostles' future labor in preaching the Gospel would not be fruitless. The net of the Gospel would gather people from every nation into the life of Christ.

But this miracle also speaks to us personally. Without Christ, we may work much and remain empty within. We may have activity, money, success, and many responsibilities, yet still have no peace.

But when Christ enters the boat, even the ordinary work of our lives can become blessed.

The Lord is not asking us to become someone else before we come to Him. He asks us to offer Him what we have: our boat, our nets, our tired hands, our wounded hearts, and even our failures.

Give Him your emptiness. Give Him the night in which you caught nothing. Give Him the problem you cannot solve. And say with Peter: "At Thy word, Lord, I will let down the net."

Sometimes the miracle will be visible. Sometimes the answer will come quickly. But often the deeper miracle is that Christ gives us strength to continue, peace in suffering, humility in success, and hope when all seems lost.

When Peter sees the great catch of fish, he falls at the knees of Jesus and says:
"Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

Peter sees more than fish. He sees the holiness of Christ. And in the light of that holiness, he sees the truth about himself.

This is what happens when a soul truly encounters God. We stop comparing ourselves with others. We stop defending ourselves. We stop pretending. We begin to say, not, "I am better than this person," but, "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner."

St. Cyril says that Peter remembered his former sins, trembled, and felt unworthy before the One who is pure. Yet the Fathers do not present Peter's fear as hopeless despair. It is a holy fear—the beginning of repentance.

And then comes one of the tenderest words in all the Gospel. Jesus does not depart from Peter. He does not say, "Yes, Peter, you are sinful, so stay away from Me." Instead, Christ says:
"Do not be afraid."

Beloved in Christ, these words are for us.

Do not be afraid to confess your sins. Do not be afraid to return to the Church. Do not be afraid to begin again after a fall. Do not be afraid because you feel unworthy. No one comes to Christ because he is worthy. We come because Christ is merciful.

St. Ambrose says, "Say you also, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord,' that God may answer, 'Fear not.' Confess your sin, and the Lord will pardon you."

The devil says: "You have sinned; hide from God." Christ says: "You have sinned; repent, come to Me."
The devil says: "You are too far gone." Christ says: "Do not be afraid."
The devil says: "Your net is empty." Christ says: "Let it down at My word."

Then Christ tells Peter: "From now on you will be catching men."

The net of Peter will no longer bring fish from the water; it will bring human beings from darkness into light, from death into life, from despair into hope.

As St. Ambrose says, the apostolic nets do not kill the fish they catch; they preserve them and lift those who are struggling in the waves up toward life.

This calling belongs in a special way to the Apostles, bishops, priests, and all those who preach the Gospel. Yet every Christian is also called to help bring others to Christ.

We do this not only with words, but by the witness of our lives.
When we forgive someone who hurt us, we cast a net for Christ. When we refuse to gossip, we cast a net for Christ. When we pray in the midst of suffering, we cast a net for Christ. When we bring our children to church and teach them to make the sign of the Cross, we cast a net for Christ. When we visit the lonely, help the poor, speak truth with love, and live with humility, we cast a net for Christ.

Finally, the Gospel says that Peter, James, and John "left everything and followed Him."

They left the boats. They left the nets. They even left behind the greatest catch of their lives. For they understood that the gift was not greater than the Giver. The fish were abundant, but Christ was everything.

St. John Chrysostom marvels at their obedience: though they were engaged in their work, they did not delay when Christ called. They left all and followed Him.

May we also leave behind whatever keeps us far from Christ: our pride, our anger, our unforgiveness, our attachment to comfort, our secret sins, and our fear.

And when the Lord says, "Put out into the deep," may we answer with Peter:
"Lord, we have toiled all night and taken nothing; nevertheless, at Thy word, we will let down the nets."

To our Lord Jesus Christ be all glory, honor, and worship, together with His eternal Father and His all-holy, good, and life-creating Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.