

*Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net thrown into the sea . . .*

The closest I ever came to ocean fishing was a long time ago. I was home on vacation from the seminary and my baptismal godfather – who liked to fish – took me with him to one of the inlets near Atlantic City, New Jersey. Inlets were lagoon-like bodies of ocean water that crept through openings in the frontage beaches of the Jersey coast. You rented a motored row boat, bought some minnows for bait and went out about a mile to anchor and cast your lines – and then sat there all day in the sun and quiet, ate lunch, occasionally hooking a sea bass or even a flounder to take home. We caught six sea bass that day and almost a flounder, a large one that yanked my godfather around – but then broke loose.

Upon arriving back in West Philadelphia that evening my godfather tried to impress his wife with the size of the flounder that escaped. He asked me to confirm the event. But I creased my brow and said, *A large flounder? Pulled you around? I don't recall that. We just spent the day – nothing unusual.* And his wife displayed a wry smile to her husband and said: *Yeah, like all those other fish stories you tell.*

So this Sunday we have, among other parables, a fishing parable – one that the lectionary would allow us to skip since it plays upon our fears – the fisher's catch pulling up good fish and bad – alerting us not to suffer the fate of the bad. But we are lucky to have another version of this fishing parable. It's to be found in the Gospel of Thomas, discovered in 1945 – a collection of sayings of Jesus traceable to the 100's AD. It goes: *The Man is like a wise fisherman who cast his net into the sea; he drew it up from the sea full of small fish; among them he found a large (and) good fish, . . . he threw all the small fish down into the sea; he chose the large fish, without regret.* In this age of modern media offering opinions, ideologies of every kind, books being published by anyone who has anything to say, “publish or perish” being the requirement of so many in academic life . . . and how much of it saying the same things in different dialects! So many little fish to distract us from the Gospels about the big Fish, Jesus – whom the early church summed up in the Greek phrase: *Iēsous Christos, Theou Yios, Sōtēr* [Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior] - the first letters of which become *Ichthus*, the word for fish – so that Jesus became symbolized



as a very big fish that swims deep and can introduce you to the deeper regions of your mind – the deeper meaning of your existence and destiny.

