

3rd SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (Cycle A)

January 23, 2011 -- Deacon Bill Nourse, Ed.D.

INTRODUCTION

I've often thought about how difficult it must be to be in the Witness Protection Program. You have to turn your back on everything in your life and walk away into a new identity, and never have any contact with anyone or anything in your past life ever again. I don't see how a person could do that.

Now, that's not exactly what Simon and Andrew, and James and John did. But they did all leave their boats and their fishing equipment and careers on a moment's notice and take on new identities. They never went back to being fisherman again.

They were called. Jesus wasn't looking for people with "human eloquence," as Paul calls it. But he does look for people who respond when he calls.

I guess most of us listen to the Sunday readings – at least I hope we do – but we often don't make much connection with the readings from last Sunday, and next Sunday, and how they all sort of fit together, build on a theme.

For the last couple of Sundays, faith and service to others has been the message of Scripture. Last Sunday, Isaiah said,

The LORD said to me: You are my servant,
Now the LORD has spoken
who formed me as his servant from the womb,
It is too little, the LORD says, for you to be my servant,
I will make you a light to the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.

We even agreed to it – or at least we said we did. In the Responsorial Psalm, we sang,

Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will.

On the Sunday before last, Isaiah said,

Thus says the LORD:

Here is my servant whom I uphold,
I, the LORD, have called you for the victory of justice,
I have grasped you by the hand;
I formed you, and set you
as a covenant of the people,
a light for the nations,
to open the eyes of the blind,
to bring out prisoners from confinement,
and from the dungeon, those who live in darkness.

God calls us all by name. We are all called individually by God for some particular vocation. From the Latin word “vocare” – to CALL. If we’re unhappy or uncomfortable or unfulfilled in our state of life, maybe it’s because there’s a CALL we’re not listening to.

Maybe the apostles had it easier than we do. Jesus Himself, in the flesh, looked them in the eye and called them by name. Our call comes in a different, more subtle way.

I think it’s interesting that Jesus didn’t look at resumes. He didn’t have anyone fill out job applications. He didn’t check references. He didn’t invite the best and the brightest to become His disciples. He didn’t choose men with experience in the hierarchy of organized religion. He didn’t set any qualifications involving education or experience.

And He didn’t turn anyone down.

So . . . before we say, “. . . It’s too difficult,” – “I can’t do it.” – “It’s not for me” – “I’m not really qualified” – think about who Jesus called in our Gospel today.

He chose a motley crew who constantly misunderstood what He was trying to do. The one He trusted most denied Him. One betrayed Him. When He was about to die, most of them abandoned Him. After He was dead, most of them had no idea what had just happened.

Jesus chose people a lot like you and me. They turned out to have gifts they themselves didn't recognize. They were just as imperfect as we are, they had the same faults, the same sins. But still they said "yes" to God's call.

He didn't turn anyone down.

You have to wonder, though . . . how many turned Him down? How many people did He call who politely declined because they had something more important to do? And we're told of at least a few who followed Him for a while, then left when the going got rough.

"Come after me . . ." is NOT a command, not a summons – it's an invitation.

We're ALL called. We're called to have faith in God and to serve the needs of others. That's what gives meaning and purpose to our lives.

Sometimes we might be called in subtler ways. A call might come as a suggestion from another person . . . "Did you ever think you might want to . . . ?" Sometimes it's a call planted deep in our hearts by God. In fact, I think it's ALWAYS a call planted by God – but sometimes we have trouble hearing it.

The disciples heard the call, and they responded immediately and unconditionally. They never went back. Once we really hear, once we really SEE – it's the same for us. There's no going back.

Think about what the disciples did. They immediately stopped what they were doing, put down the tools of their trade, left their families, left their old lives behind. Can you imagine the courage and faith that must have required? It was a complete change of direction.

It seems to me that such a response has to be founded on hope – trust in the promises of Christ – confidence in his Kingdom and in his final victory at the end of time.

For us, that change of direction takes the form of repentance, along with a commitment to leave our old lives behind to follow the Lord.

Well, once again . . . so what?

Lent begins in a few weeks. I guess most of us used to “give up” something for Lent. For many years, I gave up Rye whiskey and Cuban cigars, and was pretty successful at keeping to that. Now we try to do something more positive. Maybe read the whole New Testament. It’s not that long.

Christ turned fishermen into fishers of men. If you think about it, being a commercial fisherman requires certain skills – patience, teamwork, persistence, not giving up in the face of temporary setbacks – skills that are good for disciples to cultivate, things that fit well with Lenten discipline and penance.

It’s good to take a few minutes from time to time to give ourselves a “discipleship checkup.” How are we doing? Are we making progress in our spiritual life? Do we see conversion as a process, not as an event? Are we always aware of the need for constant repentance, for the need to deal with our own shortcomings and the shortcomings of others? This Lent might be a good time to cultivate the practice of a nightly examination of conscience to help us keep our goals in view.

Then there’s the matter of our call. We are called by name. We talk about “laborers in the vineyard” – but sometimes it seems like we want to be “vineyard supervisors” and let others do the labor. But that’s not the job we’re called to. We are called to be disciples – followers.

READINGS

Reading 1

Is 8:23—9:3

First the Lord degraded the land of Zebulun
and the land of Naphtali;
but in the end he has glorified the seaward road,
the land west of the Jordan,
the District of the Gentiles.

Anguish has taken wing, dispelled is darkness:
for there is no gloom where but now there was distress.
The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom
a light has shone.
You have brought them abundant joy
and great rejoicing,
as they rejoice before you as at the harvest,
as people make merry when dividing spoils.
For the yoke that burdened them,
the pole on their shoulder,
and the rod of their taskmaster
you have smashed, as on the day of Midian.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 27:1, 4, 13-14

R. (1a) The Lord is my light and my salvation.

The LORD is my light and my salvation;
whom should I fear?

The LORD is my life's refuge;
of whom should I be afraid?

R. The Lord is my light and my salvation.

One thing I ask of the LORD;
this I seek:

To dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,

That I may gaze on the loveliness of the LORD
and contemplate his temple.

R. The Lord is my light and my salvation.

I believe that I shall see the bounty of the LORD
in the land of the living.

Wait for the LORD with courage;
be stouthearted, and wait for the LORD.

R. The Lord is my light and my salvation.

Reading II

1 Cor 1:10-13, 17

I urge you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree in what you say, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and in the same purpose. For it has been reported to me about you, my brothers and sisters, by Chloe's people, that there are rivalries among you. I mean that each of you is saying, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with the wisdom of human eloquence, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its meaning.

Gospel

Mt 4:12-23 or 4:12-17

When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and went to live in Capernaum by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali, that what had been said through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled:
*Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,
the way to the sea, beyond the Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles,
the people who sit in darkness have seen a great light,
on those dwelling in a land overshadowed by death
light has arisen.*
From that time on, Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

As he was walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew, casting a net into the sea; they were fishermen. He said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him. He walked along from there and saw two other brothers,

James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John.
They were in a boat, with their father Zebedee, mending their nets.
He called them, and immediately they left their boat and their father
and followed him.
He went around all of Galilee,
teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom,
and curing every disease and illness among the people.

or

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