

***The Second Sunday of Ordinary Time  
Homily ~ January 15, 2012***

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Day by day they arrive in the mail. We call them invitations. A new store is opening for business and you are invited to see. A friend is getting married and you are invited to share in the celebration. Your class is having a reunion and you are invited to attend. Hardly a day passes but someone requests the honor of your presence.

We all like to get invitations. Even if we can't go, we feel good that somebody thought enough to send an invitation.

Today the Word of God is also about invitations.

Curious about Jesus, Andrew follows Jesus and asks, "*Where are you staying?*" Jesus invites Andrew "*Come, Andrew, and you will see.*"

Andrew sees and in turn invites his brother, Simon, soon to become Peter, to come and see. The next day Jesus invites Philip with equally simple words, "*Follow me.*" And Philip in turn invites Nathaniel. That's how it all began. That is how it continues.

Was there ever an invitation more profoundly simple and simply profound?  
*Come and see.*

George Barna, in his book entitled "Marketing the Church," says, "The most effective means of getting people to experience what a church has to offer is having someone they know who belongs to the church simply invite them to try it. Call it whatever you wish—word-of-mouth, personal invitation, friendship evangelism, this is indisputably the most effective means of increasing the church's rolls."

One man came out of his house on his way to church on Sunday morning just as his neighbor came out with his golf clubs. "Hey, Henry," the neighbor called, "come play golf with me."

The man said, "Sorry, it's Sunday and Sunday means church."

After a moment of silence, the golfer quietly said, "You know, Henry, I've often wondered about your church, and I have admired your faithfulness. You know I always invite you to play golf with me, but you have never invited me to church with you."

The lesson for you and me in true stories like this is that we do have to ask! We have to learn from Andrew; we have to extend an invitation. In a survey of 22 major congregations in three major cities, newcomers were asked, “What brought you to this church?” The responses: 2%, an advertisement; 6%, an invitation by the pastor; 6%, an organized evangelistic outreach program; and 86%, an invitation by a friend or a family member. That is more than four out of five.

Why do we not do it? Do we like our church? Sure, or we would not be here ourselves. Do we have anything worth inviting folks to? Of course, there are great things always going on. Do we care about people? Absolutely! We have good reason to ask people to come and join us.

- ◆ We have to remember that the Gospel is an invitation not an admonition.
- ◆ It’s an invitation to grace and mercy not ammunition for judging others.
- ◆ It’s an invitation to a life-giving relationship with the Son of God not condemnation that separates us from each other.
- ◆ It’s an invitation to a new life in Christ and not castigation for an old lifestyle.
- ◆ It’s also more than just an invitation to the dance. It’s an invitation to dance with the Lord of the dance, Jesus, the Son of God.

So, how about if you become an Andrew? Permit me to offer a few suggestions:

- ❖ First, pray about your inviting. Ask the Lord to help you identify those who would be most receptive to your invitation. There are plenty out there who are waiting for a chance, even an excuse, to get back to church.
- ❖ Second, do not be content with offering a general invitation, “You should come to church sometime.” That’s the same as saying, “Come see me sometime or let’s do lunch.” Instead, make your invitation specific, perhaps to a particular service or special event.
- ❖ Third, offer your invitation in times of special need. Times of stress, times of change, times of loss are all moments when people are longing for some good news in the midst of all the bad. We have the Good News, the news of a Savior who knows our needs and responds to us through a heart of love.

- ❖ Fourth, invite your friends to come with you. People will be much more inclined to come if they know in advance that they will not be lost and alone in a sea of unfamiliar faces. Arrange to bring them or meet them at church and sit together.
- ❖ Lastly, be persistent, keep the door open.

Do not be discouraged. The Holy Spirit will take it from there. The Holy Spirit is part of the bigger program, too.

As you go about your busy week this week coming our way, become like Andrew, think about your coworkers, your friends, your neighbors. Take the initiative, invite someone. And if you're here this afternoon and no one has ever invited you, then I invite you now. In Jesus' own words I say to you, "*Come and see.*"

