

HOMILY

The Third Sunday of Ordinary time

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Four men, fishermen by trade, were toiling at their nets beside the Sea of Galilee when they received a wake-up call from Jesus. And their whole world was turned upside down.

I'm sure many, especially men, think it would be great to earn their living doing nothing but fishing. In a way, it helped form their identity. To this day, even though he spent most of his life leading the Church, we think of Simon Peter as the "Big Fisherman."

I wonder how many of us define ourselves by the work we do. We're told that leisure is becoming a thing of the past for many people in our society. Many of us are working harder than ever—and we're not sure why. A recent study indicates that it is so we can keep up with the Joneses. If Neighbor Jones can provide the latest toys for his kids, then we've got to find a way to provide them for our kids. Heaven help us if our offspring should discover that they can't have everything everybody else has. So we work harder and harder and we wonder why something is missing in our lives.

Could it be that work was never meant to be at the center of our lives? Could it be there is something more? How did it happen that these four men made such a radical change in their vocations...from being fisherman to being disciples, and then apostles? Is there anything we can learn from them?

First of all, they had an encounter with Jesus. They didn't attend a seminar on how to find a better job, though such seminars can be helpful. No, they encountered Jesus and it changed their lives, and even changed their vocations. I pray that our church can be a place where people encounter Jesus. We're not called to be just

another social organization, a club or fraternity. All have their place in society, but the church ought to be something different. This ought to be a place where people meet God.

Each time we gather, the very word of God is proclaimed. We witness the story of God present with his people. We hear about the life and ministry of Jesus and the early Church. This is not dead history. This is a very real picture of what God can do in individual lives. God is here. God is waiting to come into our lives and to make us what God created us to be. Miracles happen every day. God can do such great things through our lives.

In the second place, the disciples had an encounter with Jesus and they responded to his call. They did so immediately. They didn't procrastinate. They didn't make excuses. Jesus said, "*Follow me.*" And they did just that. Very few people actually make that kind of commitment.

A year ago, on February 2, President Bush hosted the annual National Prayer Breakfast. The event draws hundreds of politicians, clergy and guests to the White House. The speaker that day was the rock star known as Bono, lead singer of the group U2. Bono had something to say:

"A number of years ago, I met a wise man who changed my life. In countless ways, large and small, I was always seeking the Lord's blessing. I was saying: You know I have a new song; look after it. I have a family; please look after them. I have this crazy idea And this wise man said, 'Stop! Stop asking God to bless what you're doing. Rather, ask God to show you what God is doing and join in.'"

Bono believes God is calling him to be an advocate for the poor. He said to the National Prayer Breakfast, "Well, God is with the poor. That, I believe is what God is doing. And this is what God is calling us to do."

All Christians should be committed to helping the poor, but it may not be our chief emphasis. There are people in the medical field who feel called by God to help in the healing of bodies. Some in teaching or coaching believe their calling from God is to build character in youth. A plumber can be a Christian plumber, doing honest work, helpful work, and sharing a positive Christian influence with everyone he serves.

Not everybody receives the same calling from God. Some of us believe God has called us to teach religious education. Some have been called to serve as ushers or greeters or cantors or altar servers. The point is, God is calling each of us in our own way to his work in the world.

One final thing. In answering Jesus' call, these disciples chose being real as opposed to being respectable. Let me explain what I mean. Some of you will remember Andrew Young. He is a former U.S. congressman, former ambassador to the United Nations, and former mayor of Atlanta, Georgia. His is also an ordained minister. One day, Andrew Young's daughter came home from college. She said to him:

"Daddy, I heard a missionary talking about a ministry in Uganda. I've done a lot of praying about this and I think God wants me to take a year and go to Uganda as a missionary."

"Well, honey," her father replied, "you know that's all well and good, but there are a lot of poor people right here in Atlanta that need you."

"Daddy, I know that, but I believe that God is calling me to Uganda."

"Honey, it's dangerous over there in Uganda. You could get hurt."

"I know that Daddy, but I could also get hurt right here."

"But honey, you could be killed there."

"Daddy, I could be killed at any time, anywhere. I really believe God is calling me to go the Uganda."

Andrew Young thought and prayed about it and finally he gave her his blessing. He later said:

"When my daughter walked onto that airplane, I realized that in baptizing her and raising her, what I said I wanted most for her was that she would become a respectable Christian. But I wasn't prepared for her to become a real one."

Do you hear what Andrew Young is saying? There is a difference between being a respectable Christian and a real one. Pollster George Gallup calls it the difference between being a “believing” church member and a “belonging” church member. Anybody can belong to a church. That’s different from believing in God’s purpose in the world and seeking to be part of achieving that purpose.

Let me ask you a question. Are you a believer or simply a “belonger?” That’s an important question, isn’t it? Here’s another one. Are you satisfied with being a respectable Christian or are you a real one? I can’t answer those two questions for you. Only you and God know the answers.

I know about Peter and Andrew and James and John. These men were believers, not merely “belongers.” They didn’t settle for being respectable Christians. They were real ones. They encountered Jesus and immediately they responded to Jesus’ call. May the same thing happen to you—and to me—this very day.