

THE CALL
Third Sunday in OT, January 24, 2021
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Today, we rejoice in the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. John the Baptist has been arrested, his mission is complete and he fulfills his words, "I must decrease and he must increase." Sounding very much like The Baptist, Jesus commands us to "repent and believe in the Gospel." More so, he proclaims the "kingdom of God is at hand." It's not coming next week, next month or next year, Jesus is telling us that the Messiah has arrived and is in front of our very faces.

In his next verses, St. Mark tells us Jesus is walking along the Sea of Galilee. The Sea of Galilee is actually not a sea but the lowest fresh water lake on the earth. The Jordan River flows through it from one end to the other. It is about 13 miles long by 8 miles wide. The Sea of Galilee and its abundant fish provide an important livelihood to many Jews. Numerous towns are dotted along its shores and many of Jesus' most important talks, like the Sermon on the Mount, occur along the banks of the lake.

This is where Jesus encounters Simon, who he later names Peter, and his younger brother Andrew. As I'm sure they did each day, the two are hard at work following their profession as fisherman. Jesus says to them, "Come after me and I will make you fishers of men."

Now I'm not much of a fisherman but I suppose to a layman fishing looks pretty easy... how hard can it be? Get a stick, tie on a line, a hook and worm and, voila, you're fishing. But that's not quite so... to those who love to fish, they know the best place, the best time, the right bait to catch the right fish... and, you have to perfect lure. Jesus intends to teach the two brothers what they need to know to touch the souls of thousands... to be fishers of men. A little further up the shore, Jesus calls to James and John, also fisherman who I suspect knew Peter and Andrew.

To me, two astonishing things stand out in our scripture for today. The first... Jesus doesn't *ask* the first four apostles... he almost orders them... "Come!" Jesus says. And their response? They leave everyone

they know and abandon everything they own – they just leave it all behind! Wouldn't you like to know how much Peter, Andrew, James and John knew of Jesus before this encounter? Had they heard Jesus preach and are moved to follow him? Do they recognize the long awaited Messiah is literally standing in front of them? Or do they simply trust and follow a complete stranger. Whatever it was, they respond to Jesus' call with gusto and conviction, without hesitation!

An often-asked question of priests, deacons, nuns, brothers and other religious is, "How did you know you were supposed to be a priest? How did you know that God was calling you?" The answer is a highly personal one and answers from clergy to clergy vary significantly.

For me, it wasn't an actual call... you know... "Hello Robb... this is God... I'd like you to be a deacon." It wasn't a message like the popular TV show, "God Texted Me." I didn't hear God's words as Abraham did, see a burning bush like Moses, hear like Samuel a voice in a dream, have an angel visit like Mary or hear a voice from the sky as Paul did. My call was a long, almost vague, constant, tugging... a pulling, a

longing. And, as I learned by saying many times to God, “Nope... you’ve got the wrong guy,” our lord is very persistent! For me, it was as St. Augustine wrote, “My heart is restless until it rests in thee.”

It is important to remember that God has a special purpose for every single person, a vocation or a calling... that call may be to a certain profession, to religious life, to complete a mission, to the married or the single life – the calling is for all, not just religious people. Of course, our first calling is to love and worship God and beyond that number one, our mission should be “What does God want me to do with my life?” But how does one get an answer, how does one even know the phone is ringing and Jesus is on the other end?

Firstly, pray! God speaks in prayer. God clarifies in prayer. That restlessness St. Augustine speaks about... pay attention to that... that agitated feeling can be a sign that God is calling you to something new or different. Peace follows when you’re doing what God wants. Watch for signs that may confirm or verify God’s call... is there a friend, family member or co-worker encouraging you? Often those close to us see

something in us that we cannot see ourselves. Is the vocation leading you to be more loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, generous, faithful, gentle and controlled? If so, that is movement towards Christ.

When Joseph and Mary presented Jesus in the temple, they were consecrating Jesus to God, acknowledging that the Lord has a special purpose for this infant. Our baptism does the same... it seals us as a child of God, a beautiful person that has a unique and special purpose in the Almighty's grand plan. Baptism, the other sacraments, attending Mass, educating oneself about our faith, spending time in prayer... these are all lures in our soulful tackle box. It is up to us to wade out into the stream or take a boat far from the shore and along still, quiet waters talk to Jesus and to listen... to hear what mission Christ calls you.