

3A 2020 SML  
MT 4:12-23

The setting for this evening's/morning's gospel is "Capernaum by the Sea" (of Galilee), which was one of my favorite places in the Holy Land. Why? Because, today, no one lives there. Capernaum today consists of the ancient foundations of the synagogue, where Jesus taught and prayed, and the foundations of the homes surrounding the synagogue, including the home of Simon Peter, and a church erected over it. The foundation of Peter's house (which is all that's left) was larger than his neighbors, which, according to historians, indicates that Peter had a relatively successful fishing business. He wasn't rich, but he did better than his neighbors. And from Capernaum, there is a beautiful view of the Sea of Galilee, hence the name, "Capernaum by the Sea."

Matthew tells us in today's gospel that Jesus "went to live in Capernaum by the Sea." So the question is, "Why isn't Capernaum connected in the Christian mind with the life of Our Blessed Lord in the same prominent way:

- ✓ as Bethlehem, where He was born,
- ✓ as Nazareth, where He was brought up,
- ✓ or Jerusalem, where He died and rose from the dead?"

We ought to fix Capernaum in our memories side by side with these, as Capernaum was His home. So when I'm teaching the students in school or in PREP, I ask them:

1. Where was Jesus born? Bethlehem
2. Where did Jesus grow up? Nazareth
3. Where did Jesus die? Jerusalem
4. And where did He get his own place? Capernaum!

When Our Blessed Lord called His first three disciples on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, He probably had a good idea of who He was getting:

Peter:

- ✓ who was called to a post where the keys of heaven would swing from his cincture,
- ✓ who when his eyes were gazing Christward, walked on water
- ✓ who was slow on the uptake as he needed parables explained to him
- ✓ who made promises he did not keep
- ✓ and who tempted Christ from His cross

James:

- ✓ who was always mentioned with his brother John
- ✓ whom the Lord would take to the daughter of Jairus, Tabor and Olives

- ✓ who was called a son of thunder
- ✓ who had the high aspiration of sitting at the Lord's side in His glory
- ✓ of whom our Lord asked if he could drink from the cup of suffering

and John:

- ✓ who was closest to Our Lord, given the title the "beloved disciple,"
- ✓ who was capitalistic enough to have hired men,
- ✓ who enjoyed the exclusivity of being a disciple,
- ✓ who was also a son of thunder
- ✓ yet had the privilege of resting on the chest of Our Blessed Lord, inches from His Most Sacred Heart

They were not men:

- ✓ of great scholarship,
- ✓ or influence,
- ✓ or wealth
- ✓ or social background.

They weren't dirt poor, but rather were simply ordinary working men without a past, and certainly, without a future. It was these ordinary men that Our Blessed Lord called.

In choosing fishermen for His first disciples, Jesus knew that He was choosing fishermen whose qualities would make

them good “fishers of men,” that is, good disciples. First, a wise fisherman must have patience to wait until the fish takes the bait. A good disciple must learn to wait for results if indeed they ever come.

A good fisherman must have perseverance, continuing to push on even when odds for success seem low, just as good disciples of the gospel must always be ready to try again.

The fisherman must have courage. He might face sudden storms at sea, even shipwreck or drowning. Likewise, a good disciple must have courage as there is always danger in telling the truth.

A fisherman must also have an eye for the right moment, knowing when to cast a line or drop a net, but realizing that if you never cast a line or drop a net, you’ll never catch a fish. The good disciple knows that there is a time to speak and a time to be silent.

The fisherman must fit the bait to the fish, knowing that the same lure will not work for all circumstances, much as the same approach will not work with all people in spreading the gospel. Jesus understood that these were some of the strengths He could expect from Peter, James and John.

But in choosing these men, Jesus was also aware that He was selecting men prone to the faults that many of His latter day disciples would have:

- ✓ anger,
- ✓ confusion,
- ✓ pride,
- ✓ selfishness,
- ✓ and especially doubt.

And they carried with them a host of physical, emotional and spiritual limitations. Not for anything, but the Gospels show Peter, James and John as embarrassingly dense, particularly when one remembers that they had the benefit of constantly being in the presence of Jesus. Over and over, the Apostles, having just seen some miracle or another –

- ✓ someone raised from the dead
- ✓ a crowd fed
- ✓ a sick woman cured
- ✓ a paralytic restored
- ✓ a blind man healed
- ✓ a sin forgiven
- ✓ a storm stilled

and they still seem to misunderstand the point of Our Lord and His mission. It's easy to imagine Simon Peter:

- ✓ companion of Jesus
- ✓ prince of the apostles
- ✓ leader of the early Church
- ✓ and traditionally, the first pope

saying to himself on a fairly regular basis, "Man, what a loser I am! I'm always getting things wrong after getting things right . . ."

Anyone who reads even a few Gospel stories will encounter what could be called the "historical Peter." He is headstrong, doubtful, confused and impulsive. Yet the reader will also discover that Our Lord loves Peter and loves him with abandon. Jesus is constantly offering him forgiveness and placing His trust in him.

Peter is among the greatest saints of the Church because of:

- ✓ his humanity,
- ✓ his shortcomings,
- ✓ his doubt
- ✓ and his deeply felt understanding

of all these things. But only someone like Peter, who understood his own sinfulness and the redeeming love of Christ, would be able to lead the infant Church, and lead others to Jesus. Only someone as weak as Peter could do what he did. And those the likes of Peter lower the discipleship bar just enough so that those the likes of us can grab it!

Sheen, Those Mysterious Priests

Martin, SJ, My Life with the Saints