

2B 2021 SML
JN 1:35-42

Our Blessed Lord constantly appealed to our understanding. He pleaded for it as He frequently asked:

- ✓ “Do you not understand?” or
- ✓ “Have you no understanding?” or
- ✓ “Do you not yet believe?”

It was similar to the one who taught us how to swim, pleading there was no reason to be afraid. If you move your arms like this, and kick your legs like that, you will swim. Yet, we were afraid, until the moment we experienced for ourselves what we were told was possible. And at that moment, when we as first time swimmers did as we were told, if you were to ask any one of us “why” at “that” moment, we would not be able to answer “why” at “that” moment. We believed, and we were able to swim. In learning to swim, belief is not opposed to reason. What we needed to do was trust our instructor and do as we were told.

At the time of this evening’s/morning’s Gospel, everybody was talking about John the Baptist. People spoke of John as the prophet that had been denied them for 150 years. Keep in mind that prophecy had been part and parcel of Israel’s history.

At long last, after 150 years, the void had been filled. From all over the Judea and Galilee, they flocked to hear him speak. Today, we would say he was something akin to a pilgrimage.

- ✓ Another disciple and Andrew went to see him.
- ✓ Even Jesus went to hear him.
- ✓ And it is implied that John the Apostle went to see him since all this is recorded in his Gospel.

In this evening's/morning's Gospel, Our Blessed Lord stepped onto the public stage. He stepped onto the stage rather subtly, but as we read it from the first chapter of John's gospel, the event made quite an impact on the lives of those eventual disciples who encountered Him. They were living their life as they knew it, fishing for fish until the moment they met Our Blessed Lord. But after that moment, they lived their life for Him, fishing for men.

The stepping onto the stage occurred over a four day period. Three times, John adds "the next day" to Jesus' debut.

- ✓ Yada yada yada
- ✓ The next day, yada yada yada.
- ✓ The next day yada yada yada.
- ✓ The next day yada yada yada.

So let's attempt to fill in the dots between the bits and pieces John records over days three and four, the days Jesus called his Disciples, because somehow, somewhere along the line, His disciples realized Jesus was the Messiah. Andrew, Simon Peter, Philip, Nathanael, how did you know He was the Messiah? What did He say? What did He do?"

Two men went and stayed with Jesus that day. No mention of what happened while they stayed with Jesus, just the odd detail, "It was about four in the afternoon."

They were with Him long enough to forget it was evening, the hour when their companions were going out to fish and they should have gone with them. And they stayed and became certain that Jesus is the Messiah. But what happened? Jesus or they must have done something:

- ✓ Heard Him speak
- ✓ Asked Him questions
- ✓ Seen Him move about the house
- ✓ Watched His mother prepare a meal.
- ✓ Something that flipped the Messiah switch.

Again, all of this is guesswork with no evidence. What happened that day, we do not know. All we have is observing them "the next day (which is day 3)," on the beach, as they

wait for the return of the fishing boats and the others who went to work without them. One of the two men was Andrew and the first thing Andrew says to his brother who is on the boat is, “We have found the Messiah.” Again, we don’t have Simon’s reaction. All we know is Andrew takes Simon to Jesus. Jesus says, “You are Simon, son of John. You will be called Peter.” It was a Jewish custom to give people a nickname indicating their character. In looking over Peter, Our Blessed Lord captured Peter’s strong granite like character.

“The next day (which is day 4),” the fishermen were on the beach mending their nets. Jesus had decided to go to Galilee walking along the seashore. Simon and Andrew must have seen Him, and they must have said to the others, “There He is. That’s Him, the Messiah, walking by.” And one of them, Philip, takes a closer look. And Jesus says in His familiar way, “Follow me.” And Philip, like Andrew, feels he must tell Nathanael. “We have found the Messiah, the one whom Moses promised. His name is Jesus, from Nazareth.” Philip, how did you know?

Nathanael retorts, “Nazareth? Can anything good come from Nazareth?” Nazareth had a lousy reputation. When Jesus notices Nathanael arriving, He says, “Here is a true Israelite. He tells it like it is.” Nathanael says to Jesus, “You don’t even

know me.” And Jesus says, “O but I do. Before Philip called you, I saw you under the fig tree.” Unbeknownst to Nathanael, Jesus had given Nathanael a good looking over as he did Simon Peter. And Nathanael replies, “You are the Son of God. You are the Messiah.” Nathanael, that’s it? He said He saw you under the fig tree and that makes Him the Messiah?

As I said, what we have from John’s account neither explains nor describes. Everything is assumed. It does not record what we think should have been recorded in the annals of history, namely, what was it about Jesus that made Andrew, Peter, Philip and Nathanael realize Jesus is the Messiah? We just don’t know. But like learning how to swim required us to trust our instructor, so we need to trust our instructor this evening/morning, namely, John the Evangelist.

St. Augustine said about the Gospel of John, “I dare say, brethren, that perhaps St. John himself did not describe events exactly as they were but as he was able, because he was a man who spoke about God . . . but he was, nevertheless, a man . . . He only said what a man could say.”

Perhaps what it was could not be put into words and therefore could not be recorded on limited palm leaf with a

quill. What is recorded was well known for John but leaving obvious details missing for the reader.

Let's keep in mind that by 90 AD, the year John wrote his Gospel, the Church had been in existence since Pentecost, 33 AD, for almost sixty years. The Church had been Christ's extension for almost sixty years, as the Church is Christ's extension today for almost 2000 years. Fulton Sheen explains it this way.

A Church which is the extension of the Incarnate Life of Christ through space and time can express itself only in a living way, and the living way is by a tongue and not by a written word. As a matter of fact, no living thing can be comprised and expressed in a few sentences, because it is forever bursting the temporary, throwing off the shackles of the literary, and breaking the bonds of form. (The Mystical Body of Christ, p. 76)

Or, as St. Bede the Venerable put it, "the Lord has exalted me by a gift so great, so unheard of, that language is useless to describe it." (B1, p. 362)

In other words, what the first disciples experienced to know Jesus is the Messiah could not possibly be captured accurately and put down in words.

It would be like my very good priest friend once saying to me, “Dan, do you remember the day we entered the seminary together?” I don’t remember everything about that day, but I do remember talking a walk with him around the seminary grounds, and thinking he, this seminarian, this someday priest, could very well be a friend of mine for life.” That could be the point of John’s bits and pieces. John can’t put his finger on it, but after spending that day with Jesus, they knew, they just knew Jesus is the Messiah.

In the certainty of having found the Messiah, everything would seem to have reached its conclusion. But this is only the beginning. John’s second chapter tells of His first miracle, changing water into wine, and illustrates how the certainty of finding the Messiah develops, how the first perception evolves, and by the end of the Gospel, we all have found the Messiah.