

January 21, 2018

1 Sm 3:3b-10,19; 1 Cor 6:13c-15a,17-20; Jn 1:35-42

What is God calling you to do? We should know that we are all called to the general vocation of the Christian to be holy, to follow God's law, to love God and neighbor as ourselves - but what exactly is Jesus asking of us in a more specific way. What are the specific ways to use the talents that God has given us? You may be a younger person who is questioning what specific vocation in the Church God may be calling you to, you may be an older person trying to figure what the next step is in participating in the plan of God. Our readings today show responses to the call of God - and they help us reflect on the very human ... and very real ... things that can get in the way of us following that call.

In the Gospel, Jesus walks up to a few fishermen and gives them the strange invitation: *Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men* - really fishers of "people" because in this sense the word "men" does not refer to gender. *Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men*. What is he calling them to do? Well first, to follow him. To walk with him on the path, to be Holy as God is Holy, to follow his teachings - to love God and neighbor as themselves. But he is also calling them to something more than a personal holiness, he is calling them to draw others to him, he is calling them to fish for people, he is calling them to use the goodness of their life like bait to draw people to encounter Jesus. Our call as Catholic Christians follows this same pattern, be holy and follow Jesus and draw others to him, as Jesus will say later: *let your light shine before all, so they may see the good that you do and give glory to God*.

Although we are all called to this, we are also called to do so within a specific state in the Church. This may be the vocation to marriage where two join into one to form a family that can show the world the unity and love of God. The married couple forming a family adds to the community of the Church. They help each other to grow closer to God and teach children to know and love God and to love and care for neighbor. One can also be called to priesthood or religious life where one is called to dedicate their life in a different way to the spread of the Gospel, to service to the members of the Church, and to grow in holiness with those they serve. In the Gospel Jesus chose individuals who would become the first Bishops of the Church. He called them to service, to leadership, and to action. The call to follow him he gave to all he spoke with, but to some, like the Apostles, he gave specific calls to office. God has always called some to specific roles (like Elisha, King David, Moses, and Paul). It can take some time to figure how God might have called us in this specific sense - it can take time to figure it out.

Talk about taking some time to figure it out! Let's look at the story of Jonah from our first reading. This was the second time that God had called Jonah to this specific mission. God calls Jonah earlier in the story to preach to the Ninevites so that they will be saved - and Jonah takes off. Nineveh was East from where he was - he went West - heading to the city farthest from Nineveh. Why? Because Nineveh was the capitol city of Assyria, Israel's enemy. God was calling him to go and prevent his enemy's capitol from being destroyed and Jonah essentially said "heck no! Let 'em die!" As long as he tried to deny the call God gave him, as long as he tried to go in the opposite direction, as long as his motive was prejudice and hate, everything was a mess. He boards a ship that is caught in a terrible storm and almost sinks, the people on the ship throw him overboard as a human sacrifice to who they thought was the god of the sea - not a great trip to the west! God protects him by having him swallowed by the fish - he is in darkness, he is not going anywhere. Do you know where the fish spits him up? — back where he started. Then God calls him again: *Set out for the great city of Nineveh, and announce to it the message that I will tell you.* This time he goes, and a whole city is saved from destruction.

Jonah following God's call leads to goodness for him, it furthers the mission of God, it helps the sinful and idol worshiping Ninevites gain a faith in God - actually breaking down barriers to developing peace with Israel. Following the call allows Jonah to be an instrument in the hand of God bringing life, bringing peace, and bringing others to God. *Come after me* [and not in the opposite direction] *and I will make you fishers of men.* However, Jonah still holds on to his hatred for the Ninevites and this causes him more pain and suffering as the story continues. Jesus gives us the recipe that Jonah needed to learn: Follow the call of God in the specific mission you are called to, not out of duty alone, but change your heart and follow out of love for God and others - it's the clear motive that brings the follower peace.

It can be difficult to discern these missions. Some of you younger people are being called to priesthood or religious life, others to marriage. Others here are trying to figure out whether or not God is calling you to a specific activity. Pray about it and listen - you may need some help figuring it out - please feel free to talk to a wise individual or to myself or Fr. Ramos or one of the Deacons. Whether it is to discern our specific vocation, or to figure out the current ways in which God is calling us to serve God and neighbor in love, we should look to follow these with the same sense of abandon we heard in the Gospel. They were called by Jesus and just dropped their nest and went. Don't delay like Jonah. Don't let motives of wealth, fame, false security (remember Jonah tried to get to a more secure place going West) don't let all that stand in the way. Don't let bigotry, prejudice, or hate get in the way. All these things in the world are temporary, as we heard in the second reading: *I tell you, brothers and sisters, the time is running out ... the world in its present form is passing away.* As Jesus says elsewhere: *behold, I stand at the gate and knock.* Let's discover that call and walk with Jesus to victory.