We don’t have to go overseas for those extreme adventures. Remember the two rock climbers, Tommy Caldwell and Kevin Jorgeson, who climbed El Capitan in Yosemite National Park a few years ago. The duo were free climbing, which means they only used their hands and feet to get up the rock, but they do have ropes attached as a safeguard to prevent them from falling to their deaths. Those familiar with rock climbing said that what they did is widely considered the most difficult free climb ever attempted. In speaking about how these two adventurers could have accomplished this amazing feat, a fellow climber said it has nothing to do with adrenaline. He said: They know what they are doing — they have an objective. They are focused. We’re so lucky to be able to dream and dare to do the exotic and the extreme. Life holds so many exciting possibilities for us, especially if you’re young and open to adventure.

The disciples whom Jesus encountered at the Sea of Galilee would not have had a “bucket list.” Their lives were pretty well set in place. The gospel says it quite simply: They were fishermen. They had a daily routine which they followed religiously, with no deviation or change. They did what their fathers did, and their father’s father, and their father’s father, back for generations. The ordinary folk couldn’t fathom changing jobs or changing locations. Life was a series of sun-ups and sun-downs, with lots of back-breaking labor in between. So what would have caught the attention of these fishermen and motivated them to do something so drastic, even leaving their poor father holding the bag (or the net, as it were)?

“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” At once they left their nets and followed him.

We don’t know what there was about Jesus that led Simon, Andrew, James, John, and others to leave their homes and families to follow him. This may not have been the first time they saw Jesus. Like a patient fisherman, Jesus may have had his lure out trying to catch them for a while. Or perhaps, through the gossip of the town, they heard about this itinerant preacher and what he was doing. The astonishing feature of the story is that they followed Jesus with no idea of where it would lead. There was something remarkably compelling about him to cause these and others to follow him into an uncertain...
future. That call from Jesus to follow him has resonated in the hearts of people for two thousand years, and it still moves our hearts today.

I recall the surprising title of an article in U.S. Catholic Magazine I once read entitled: “Do you find Jesus Boring?” I’m afraid many people in our culture today, especially our youngsters, might answer “Yes.” We’ve centered our lives so much on highlights – the next news-breaking story, the great vacation we’re planning, the latest fashion or fad or electronic device, the next extreme thrill on our bucket list -- that this simple man of Galilee, whose story is told in a book two thousand years old, doesn’t hold an attraction for us. Yet, this is the person, Son of Man and Son of God, to whom we have given our lives as Christians. At our baptism, when we received a candle lit from the Light of Christ, we were told that we have been enlightened by Christ and are to walk always as children of the Light, keeping the flame of faith alive in our hearts. This is our daily challenge – to make our faith in Jesus something alive and vital, to let him inform our decisions and our choices, to include Him in our conversations and our deliberations. There are no limits to his call, no specifics, except for making people more important than anything else we do. The first followers of Jesus began their discipleship by adopting the value system of the one who called them. People were now to be at the center of their lives. With that challenge, like anyone called to be another Christ, they responded totally and immediately.

So what prevents you and me from responding wholeheartedly to the call of Christ each day? Is it apathy or boredom? too many distractions? being buried in our work? excessively concerned about money and material pleasures? anger over something from the past? the pain and depression of illness? anxiety or fear? What nets do we have to leave behind if we’re going to live out our faith as an adventure with the Lord?

Wednesday, January 24th, is the Feast Day of St. Francis De Sales (1567-1622). Most of you know that my religious congregation -- the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales (OSFS) -- follow his spirituality. Often called the “gentleman saint,” I think you would have liked to meet him. He was a bishop and a scholar, a great writer and spiritual guide. A very intelligent man, yet he was completely down to earth in his understanding and appreciation of the human condition, the emotional life, the complexity of relationships, the frustrations of daily living. He said: Be patient with everyone, but above all with yourself. He gave practical advice to ordinary people in trying to help them live our their Christian vocation. He said: The opportunity to do extraordinary things doesn’t present itself very often; however, the opportunity to do ordinary things extraordinarily well is always before us. He accepted people as they were and told them: Be who you are and be that well.

I’d like to refer you to a prayer that St. Francis de Sales recommended. Like the two climbers on El Capitan in Yosemite who could do that amazing feat because they had focus, this spiritual practice is a way of
putting a simple but effective structure to our daily living, and keeping our faith and our God before our eyes. It’s a prayer called the “Direction of Intention” and the children in St. Perpetua School begin each day reciting it. St. Francis recommended that a person start off the day praying:

My God, I give you this day. I offer you now all of the good that I shall do, and I promise to accept, for love of you, all of the difficulty that I shall meet. Help me to conduct myself during this day in a manner pleasing to you.

By beginning the day in prayer, offering yourself and the day to God, the events of the day take on a new meaning. They become part of the adventure of following Jesus. Even when troubles and difficulties, problems and frustrations beset you, St. Francis de Sales recommended to keep yourself in peace by being united with God’s love, and he offered this prayer to help:

Be at Peace
Don’t look forward in fear
to the changes of life;
rather look to them with full hope
as they arise.
God, whose very own you are,
will deliver you from out of them.
He has kept you hitherto,
and He will lead you safely
through all things;
and when you cannot stand it,
God will bear you in his loving arms.
Do not fear what may happen tomorrow;
the same everlasting Father
who cares for you today
will take care of you then and everyday.
He will either shield you from suffering,
or will give you unfailing strength to bear it.

Be at peace,
and put aside all anxious thoughts
and imagination.

May example and inspiration of St. Francis de Sales help us all to follow Jesus whole-heartedly.

John Kasper, OSFS