

The first month of 2020 has been filled with some big news stories: threats of war in the Middle East, an impeachment trial, natural disasters around the world, a deadly flu outbreak. Even with all that, the top news story for several days has been about this couple...

SCREEN: Harry and Meghan photo

and the news that Prince Harry and his wife Meghan Markle are quitting the royal family and renouncing their titles.

They will no longer be addressed as *'their royal highnesses'*.

But if he is still a prince and she is still a duchess, you might be asking, *"why is this news such a big deal?"*

Well, Harry and Meghan are making a statement; they're saying that going forward they want their lives to be different. And always being in the public eye, they both realize that titles matter.

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Anybody here ever been called "your royal highness"? (raise hand)

I was once as a kid, but I'm pretty sure my sister meant it sarcastically.

But all of us are referred to by titles and labels.

Some we give ourselves and some are given to us by others.

For example we all have labels as family members.

If I am out with my mom and she runs into a friend she'll say,

"This is my son Mike."

We are all someone's child or parent or spouse.

Some labels describe our work or how we spend our time.

Last Sunday at our parish gathering for new members I introduced myself as *'Fr. Mike Jones, pastor of St. Pius X Church'*.

With two words I told them I'm a priest and leader of the flock.

We use labels for where we live and worship:

I'm from Bowie, I belong to this parish.

So labels and titles are essential in life.

But is there one label that matters most?

SCREEN: 20/20 Vision main screen

This is week four of our message series titled, 20/20 Vision.

In this series we are reminded how God sees us.

The readings we've been hearing tell us that we are called children of God, beloved, servants with a mission.

In today's Gospel, Jesus gave some men a new label.

And it's a label that describes our identity as well.

And that label is disciples. Disciples.

In the gospel today, Jesus was beginning his ministry after being baptized by John at the Jordan River.

Jesus decided he needed some helpers.

Who were the first people he called?

Fishermen.

In Jesus's day, that label would have said so much about these individuals.

Fishermen did not have a great reputation.

They were considered rough and crude; not known for piety or holiness.

Why in the world would Jesus call them?

What did he see that no one else saw?

Well, think about the work of fishermen.

Every day was spent on the water searching for a catch of fish to sell to support their families.

It was hard work requiring dedication, persistence, and patience.

To be a good fisherman you had to be able to deal with disappointment and uncertainties, like sudden changes in the weather.

To succeed as a fisherman you needed passion and commitment.

Dedication, persistence, patience, passion, commitment...

these are essential qualities for followers of Jesus.

And Jesus knew this when he said to them,

“Come after me and I will make you fishers of men.”

What was their response?

Here’s what we heard in the Gospel today:

SCREEN: At once they left their nets and followed him.

At once: it was immediate.

They literally dropped their nets and followed Jesus.

And in following him, they were leaving behind not just their livelihood, but also their families and friends.

Their old way of life was over as they headed off in a new direction.

For the rest of their lives...and for the rest of time...

they would be known not as fishermen but as followers of Jesus.

You and I are also called to follow Jesus.

It’s what it means to be a disciple.

But it’s so much more than a label.

Being called a disciple implies a commitment; the greatest commitment in life.

And it’s one that I don’t think every Catholic understands.

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This weekend we’re beginning confirmation preparation for our eighth graders.

Some parishes conduct interviews with the students to determine

how serious they are about this big step in faith.

We’ve done them here.

And having done a bunch of these, I can tell you that a pretty standard question is to ask the student,

“Which weekend Mass do you normally attend?”

It’s not a trick question, it’s really just a conversation starter.

Several years ago in a confirmation interview a young man was asked,

“Which Mass do you attend?”

And he answered, *I’m an athlete.*

The answer was very honest.

He was saying, *“I don’t go to Mass on the weekend because I play sports.*

I’m an athlete. That’s my identity right now.”

Now, please understand, I’m not singling out kids who play sports.

Sports are great.

They help young people learn the value of commitment and discipline and being part of a team - all great things.

But I don’t think parents or coaches are saying,

“If you’re an athlete you can forget about church.”

My point is that how we identify ourselves - how we see ourselves - decides where we put our time, energy and resources.

Our identity determines our passion and commitment.

Every day Jesus says to us, *“Be my follower, be my disciple.”*

Saying “yes” implies a willingness to be different.

And certain things flow from that “yes”;

things like how you spend your week and your weekend.

It requires a commitment to worship and prayer, service and fellowship.

If other things in your life up until now have kept you from saying “yes” and making that commitment, hear Jesus today inviting you to follow him.

And know that it may entail you making some changes.

The fishermen in the gospel today left everything.

They left their families and friends, their jobs & livelihood -

literally ‘dropped their nets’ when Jesus said, *follow me!*

And they did it without knowing where the journey would take them.

They didn’t know that they would witness amazing miracles,

or see Jesus transfigured, or that he’d die on the cross.

The day they said “yes”, they couldn’t know he’d rise from the dead

then ascend to the Father.

They couldn't imagine that one day they'd take over his mission of preaching and healing.

And they had no idea that they would suffer and die for Christ and their faith.

All they knew that day at the seaside was that Jesus invited them on a journey, and they said "yes".

Every time I hear this story I am left in awe by their response.

They made a simple act of faith, took one step, and it made all the difference.

SCREEN: follow me

Today, Jesus is extending the same invitation to you: follow me.

And just like the fishermen in the Gospel, it begins when you take a single step.

It doesn't require perfect faith.

You don't need to have all the answers and you don't have to be perfect or sinless.

Remember as we've been saying all month:

the Lord looks at you with love because you are a child of God, redeemed by the love of Jesus.

All you have to do is 'drop your net' and take a step in a new direction.

So if you are hearing this message and considering taking a step in faith but aren't sure....maybe curious, but a little skeptical or doubting, its okay.

If anything in your life has you tangled up or weighed down, know that God sees and understands.

And seeing your struggles, your tangles and what's weighing upon you, Jesus is still calling you to follow him and take a step towards him.

SCREEN: 20/20 main screen

I want to give you two ways to take that step.

Today after Mass we will have sign ups for new adult small groups.

Why should you consider joining a small group?

First of all, in the Gospel today Jesus was beginning to form a small group of 12 individuals, the Twelve Apostles.

He did this not only to support him in his ministry, but so that when he was no longer with them they'd have each other.

And they would need each other for the challenges they would face.

What Jesus was doing was giving the Church a model for his followers.

We need others who will support us, pray for us, challenge us and keep us headed in the right direction.

You need others in your life.

Small groups are gatherings for 8-12 adults who meet weekly to pray together, discuss the scriptures and message from Mass and support each other in their journey of discipleship.

If you are looking for something to help you deepen your relationship with God, something to help you follow Jesus more closely, give small groups a try.

Sign up for a small group today in the entranceway after Mass.

That's the first step you can take.

And next weekend we will have a prayer of commitment to Jesus.

We'll have copies of the prayers in the pews and at the end of Mass you'll be invited to approach the altar and

offer a prayer to commitment or recommitment to Christ and your faith.

This week, think about this opportunity.

Ask God to help you see what changes you need to make, what priorities you may need to shift so you can respond openly.

Every day Jesus extends the invitation, says to us, "*follow me and be my disciple*".

All we have to do is say "yes".

All we have to do is drop our nets and take a step. Amen. +