

John 1:35-42, January 14th, 2018, 2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Our readings today speak to us about the ideas of mission and discipleship and how God is continuously calling us into a deeper relationship with Him. The Gospel today gives us the story of how Jesus begins to gather His first disciples, and I believe it tells us a lot about Him, and a lot about how he is calling His people to come to know Him better, and to participate with Him, in His great work of building up the Kingdom of God.

The first person we meet in our Gospel story today is John the Baptist. John is a pivotal figure in salvation history. John is the bridge between the Old Testament and the New. He is the last of the Old Testament prophets, and as Jesus tells us, *“Among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist (Matthew 11:11).”* John’s mission is to be the “Pre-cursor” or the “Herald” of God’s promised one, the heir to David’s throne, the one whose kingdom will never end. We know from Luke’s Gospel that John was of the tribe of Levi¹, because his father, Zechariah, was a temple priest, and that John would have been trained in that vocation. Instead of being in the temple, we find John out in the wilderness, on the banks of the Jordan river, proclaiming to all who will listen that they need to repent, and to make straight the way of the Lord. We also learn that John has disciples, people that have been drawn to him and to his message.

John looks up, sees Jesus, and says, *“Behold the Lamb of God.”* We are used to hearing this phrase, because we hear it at every Mass, but to his First Century, Jewish audience this phrase would have been stunning. It would have immediately brought to mind some powerful ancestral and salvific connections. Connections like the “Passover Lamb” from

¹ Ponessa, S.S.D and Watson, Ph.D., “Come and See Catholic Bible Study”, p. 11

Exodus 12, by which Israel was delivered from slavery in Egypt, when the Angel of Death struck down the firstborn of Egypt and “passed over” the Israelite’s homes that had been marked with the blood of a sacrificed, unblemished, lamb. It would have also brought to mind the prophecy of the “Suffering Servant” described in Isaiah 53, the just servant that would make righteous many, by bearing their iniquity, who would be like a lamb led to the slaughter. Identifying Jesus as the “Lamb of God” is the completion of John’s mission. He has proclaimed his testimony, he has prepared the way, and now he carries out his priestly task by identifying the unblemished lamb destined to be sacrificed for the sins of the world.

The two disciples, that up to this time have been following John, now begin to follow Jesus. As they do, Jesus turns to them, and the first words that we hear from Him, the first words that He speaks, in John’s Gospel, are, “*What are you looking for?*” This is not just any question, this is one of the great questions of life. What is it that you are seeking? What is the deepest desire of your heart? We base the first evening of our Alpha program on a form of this question, “Is there more to life than this?” We do that for the same reason that Jesus does it here in the Gospel, because it makes us think about what is important in our lives. What is it that we are building our lives on. This question makes us assess where we are in our lives, and most importantly, where we want to go. Certainly, this question has always resonated with me. I have always been, at least somewhat aware, that the things of this world are passing, and whatever happiness or joy or pleasure there was associated with a particular thing, it never lasted. However, I was never sure that this feeling was universal, that everyone experienced it. But the more that I have thought about it, the more time I have spent in ministry, the more time I have spent at the Laboratory, and the more stories I have heard about people, who seem, at least to me,

to have it all, but really are just as broken as everyone else, the more I realize that, yes, this desire for more, is something all of us share.

St. Augustine provides the key to understanding this very human dilemma. In his book, “Confessions”, he makes the famous statement, “*You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.*”² St. Augustine understood the deepest desire of our hearts is for God. That is the way He made us, that is the way we are wired. I just came across another great way to express this fundamental truth of our existence. Magnificat magazine has published a book written by a priest, Fr. Richard Veras, who is a member of the Catholic movement, “Communion and Liberation”, entitled, “The Word Made Flesh”. In this wonderful book, Fr. Veras discusses how the first creation account in the Book of Genesis says we are created in the image of God, and how our being created in God’s image, explains our “*limitless aspirations and our insatiable need for love. God is infinite being and we are infinite need*” He goes on to say, “*...our limitless need is the perfect echo to His limitless love.*”³

Jesus knows that the Father has placed this infinite desire in our hearts, and it is almost as if He is checking to see if the two disciples realize this is what they are really looking for, and He wants them to express their desire. The best they can do is ask, “*Where are you staying?*” They know that they want to be near Him. Jesus recognizes this, accepts it for what it is, and then invites them to enter into a relationship with Him by saying, “*Come and See.*”

The Gospel tells us that the two disciples do go and stay with Jesus that day. We are told it was four-o’clock in the afternoon, and that probably means that they spent the night with Him. We don’t know what was said between them, and I think that this is one of those scriptural

² St. Augustine of Hippo, “Confessions”

³ Fr. Richard Veras, “The Word Made Flesh, Foreshadowed, Fulfilled, Forever”, Magnificat

episodes that we can take to prayer. We can imagine them sitting around a campfire and sharing a meal. Did Jesus enjoy their company? Did he laugh with them? Did he ask them more about what they were looking for? Did He ask them about the deepest desire of their hearts? Did Jesus break open the Scriptures with them? What would you have talked about if you were there? We don't know what happened, but whatever it was, we do know that one of the disciples, Andrew, left from there totally convinced that he had found what he was looking for. He was so sure Jesus was the promised Messiah, that the first thing he does is to go and tell his brother Simon, and he doesn't just tell him, he brings Simon to meet Jesus for himself.

What does this reading say to us today? I believe that we can follow the example Jesus gives us today, of calling people into a relationship with Him. Discipleship in Christ begins with people who are seeking truth. God has placed a desire for the infinite on our hearts, and people are looking for answers. The next step in the journey is for the seeker to somehow encounter Jesus. Some people may have an extraordinary experience of God acting in their lives, like Samuel did in our First Reading. But the normal way for people to encounter Christ is through other disciples, those who have had their own experience of Christ, like Simon Peter does through his brother Andrew, or today through those who have been touched by the Holy Spirit. Jesus is not walking bodily on the earth today, as He did 2000 years ago. But before He ascended to the Father, He promised, *"You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth"* (Acts 1:8). A disciple is someone who has been touched by the Holy Spirit and is now Jesus' witness to the world.

The next step in the path of discipleship is critical. The seeker needs to spend time with the Lord. This is time spent getting to know Jesus, like the time the disciples spent sitting around

the campfire, just a time to be with Him, a time to experience His friendship and His love. There are many different ways a person can experience Christ, as many ways as there are seekers. Certainly, through the Holy Spirit, one can continuously encounter Christ in the Mass, in the Eucharist, in the Confessional, or in the Adoration Chapel. One could go on a retreat. Getting away from the busyness of our daily lives is helpful. Silence is very helpful. Reading Scripture, studying the Bible, or exploring the material on the “Formed” website are some other great ways to spend time getting to know Christ. IHM offers a number of various groups that can provide community, fellowship, and support in your journey. The last step in the journey of discipleship is to go out and share, with others, what one has found. To be that witness to the world. Of course, this isn’t the end of the journey, a disciple has to continuously go back and encounter Jesus to be strengthened and consoled before going out again and again.

I believe that this Gospel reading shows us the way Jesus used to build up His Church, how He made His first disciples. He shows us an effective model that we can use today, to continue to carry out the mission of the Church, which is to, ***“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations”*** (Matthew 28:19). This mission is just as important now as it was then. It is also just as difficult now as it was then, but we are all called to participate in this great story of salvation. This mission we share is an essential element of our faith, and frankly it is something our world terribly needs. Every one of us know people in our lives, who need to hear the Gospel message of hope and life. My hope for all of us here today is that we will, like Andrew, all have a profound encounter with Jesus Christ, and from that encounter, like him, be able to boldly proclaim, to those who desperately need to hear it, ***“We have found the Messiah! Come and See!”***