

### **Third Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2014**

The readings of this Sunday talk about God's salvation and the election of the first disciples as aides to Jesus in his mission to the world. They show us that discipleship is a participation in the very ministry of Jesus himself. They invite us to prolong that ministry by our life within the Church as a community of believers.

The first reading of Isaiah describes a difficult situation in which Israel found itself at one time in the history of their nation. It shows that the misfortune of division and degradation that the country went through was a consequence of the sin of the people. It shows also that God in his mercy and bounty did not leave them in that misery forever. On the contrary, he let his light shine on them and brought them joy beyond any telling.

What is behind this text is the idea that sin always has a consequence on the people who rebel against God and ignore his instructions. However, God does not leave people in their sins and aberration. He rather forgives them and visits them in their distress by bringing them joy.

This text allows us to understand the importance of Jesus' mission and the election of his first disciples as proclaimed in today's Gospel. First of all, the Gospel starts with the mention of the arrest of John the Baptist. It says that after having heard that news, Jesus went to live in the regions surrounding the Sea of Galilee in fulfillment of the prophecy of the prophet Isaiah.

After that, the Gospel reports on the beginning of the ministry of Jesus, how he was preaching about repentance for the kingdom of heaven. Then, the Gospel describes the way Jesus chose his first disciples when he was walking by the sea by calling those he met to follow him. Unanimously, they all left everything behind them and followed him. Finally, the Gospel reports on that journey about what Jesus did in teaching and curing the sick.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today I want to talk about the vocation to discipleship. In fact, in today's Gospel, Jesus calls his first disciples, that is, a group of persons he wanted to be living in communion with him, sharing in his life and his mission.

The call to discipleship, indeed, belongs to each one of us because that mission has been passed on to us so that we, too, share in what has been started from the beginning of the Church by Jesus and the first disciples. In that sense, the vocation to discipleship has an individual dimension as well as a communal dimension. We are called as an individual, but also as a community of believers. Both dimensions are tied together; if we separate them, it is just for the need of explanation. That is why it would be a mistake, when a problem occurs in the church, to think that it is just the priest's problem and not yours.

Now, let us talk about vocation? What is a vocation? In general, a vocation is an occupation to which a person is drawn to or for which he is suitable or qualified, etc. In religious sense, a vocation is a divine call to serve God or to lead a type of life which is in God's manner. In order to pass from one to another, a change or a transformation of life is needed. If the change does not happen, it is difficult to be a good disciple of

Jesus. That is the reason why the Gospel insists on the necessity of change by saying that those Jesus called were fishermen, but he wanted them to become fishers of men. In that perspective, the change has to start with those who have to preach it to others, because it is impossible to give to others what one does not possess.

This element of change is constitutive of Christian life and at the heart of what it means to be Christian. Without a permanent desire to change and reform our life in order to adjust it to the values of God's Kingdom, it is very difficult to be a good Christian and disciple of Jesus. That is why the opening of the public ministry of Jesus contains an invitation to change: "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand", meaning reform your life; let it be transformed so that you are able to welcome the Kingdom of God in your life.

Why did Jesus call the disciples? The reason why he did was that they become his associates and aides in the mission of salvation. That goal has not changed since the beginning of the early Church to nowadays. The readings of this day put it in a very simple way, namely to be the light for the people who live in darkness and to cure every disease and illness among the people. Perhaps, we can be attempted to say that we do not have the charism of healing in order to cure sickness, but we should never forget that the essence and the power of what Jesus intended is in us.

That is why as disciples of Jesus, we are called to make a difference in the lives of our fellows so that those who are struggling with problems may find comfort from us, those who are in pain may find relief from us, those who are mourning may find words of consolation from us, those who are discouraged of life may find words of hope from us, those who live in isolation may find solace from us. This task is as urgent as our vocation to discipleship.

Now, let me ask this simple, but vital question: Were the disciples Jesus called extraordinary people or heroes? Not at all! They were just simple fishermen who had nothing of particular to draw attention to. They were just like you and me. In fact, Jesus did not call them because they were special or because of the quality of their life, but for what they would become under his guidance. In truth, they were ordinary people, but called to do extraordinary things.

That clarifies our own vocation to discipleship. Jesus calls us, not because we are extraordinary, but because he wants us to work for him and with him in spite of our limitations. Therefore, we should not be afraid of our insufficiency and inadequacy. We have to trust him that he is capable to work with us for the good of his people and his Church. What we need is to let ourselves be transformed by him who is capable of doing more than what we can imagine or hope for. May he be blessed from ages to ages and may he bless each one of you according to your needs!

**Isaiah 8: 23-9:3; 1 Corinthians 1: 10-13, 17; Matthew 4: 12-23**



Homily Date: January 26, 2014

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Document Name: 20140126homily.pdf