

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time A2023

The Gospel of this Sunday starts with a statement that says, “He (Jesus) withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and went to live in Capernaum by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali...”

We know by the Bible that it was at the Sea of Galilee that Jesus started his public ministry. The question we can ask is this: Why there? Why not to start the ministry by Jerusalem or Nazareth or Jordan or Bethlehem? Here is the point of today’s readings.

At the time of Jesus, indeed, Galilee was a crossroad cultural region that had Greek and Roman influence. The people living there had largely accepted the Hellenized Roman culture and the Greek way of doing things. They were mostly considered as “Gentiles”.

The Jews largely lived apart from the Hellenists and looked at them as outsiders and corrupt people who were pagans. It was scandalous for a Jew to even be there. The description we have in the book of Isaiah is about them: “degraded land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali” ...”walking in darkness and living in gloom”.

Why is Jesus starting his public ministry there? In order to bring them light of the Kingdom of heaven, to lead them to God, to help them embrace salvation. Jesus, an orthodox Jew, chose to live there to fulfill Isaiah’s prophesy: “The people who sit in darkness have seen a great light; on those dwelling in a land overshadowed by death light has arisen”.

Jesus is the light the Father has sent to illumine us so that we do not live in darkness of death and perdition. Jesus is the one who brings us to God where we are saved. That is the mission of Jesus for which he preached and for which he gave his life. That mission has not changed; it is the same today as it was in the past.

It is for that mission that Jesus called his first disciples. He wanted them to live in communion with him, sharing in his life and his ministry. The call to discipleship belongs to each one of us for the 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.

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. It would be a mistake, when a problem occurs in a Parish, to think that it is just the priest’s problem and not yours.

Those called are ordinary people, but they are called to do extraordinary things, that is, to become companions of Jesus and, like Jesus, to bring God’s salvation to others. To succeed in that mission, 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 other words, those called have to be the first to change before inviting other people to change and embrace God.

Change is constitutive of Christian life and at the heart of what it means to be Christian. The Gospel calls it “Repentance” and the Church “Conversion”. 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. 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 Gospel puts 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 tempted 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.

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.

Those Jesus called as disciples were not extraordinary people or heroes. They were just simple fishermen who had nothing of particular to draw attention to. They were just like you and me. 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. 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! 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 22, 2023
© 2022 – Fr Felicien I. Mbala, PhD, STD
Contact: www.mbala.org
Document Name: 20230122homily