

Homily for January 24, 1999
3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle A

By Father Charles Bowes

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

To follow the Lord can sometimes bring about a love too deep for tears.

One Sunday morning some teenagers in a small church printed a sign in clear bold letters, and tacked it up over the main entrance of their church. The sign read *Servant's Entrance*. The people were mildly amused. It was clever. It represented youthful idealism. Beside that, it would only be there a short time. A few complained. The sign was inappropriate; it might be misunderstood, it ought to be taken down immediately. But the sign remains there today as a thought-provoker and to remind those who are to raise their eyes to read it as they walk into church to worship, that Jesus called disciples not merely to be his friends, but to be his associates in service to the world.

"Come after me and I will make you fishers of men," says Jesus in Matthew 4. "At once they left their nets and followed him. He walked along...and saw...James...and his brother John. ...He called them and

immediately they left their boat and their father and followed him."

St. Matthew presents the call of the first disciples a bit differently than the other evangelists, St. Luke and St. John. In this account, Simon, Andrew, James and John all meet Jesus for the first time and are in a position to make a quick decision that will dramatically effect the rest of their lives. The resulting message to Christians is that the Apostolate to which Christ calls someone requires the sacrifice of everything that has occupied them.

But there is another, a gentler way to read this story which conveys the challenging idea that if committed people sacrifice for Christ, their talents will be used for the glory of God and reach even greater heights (fishing for people as opposed to fishing of itself)...thus allowing the believer to be fully associated with the ministry of Jesus. In other words, the automobile mechanic doesn't walk away from his garage and family to follow the Lord. Instead, he becomes a good businessman - a model of justice and compassion...a force for good in the community. Or the home-maker doesn't desert family and spouse, but becomes a haven of welcome for the neighborhood, one whose home is a refuge, a place of peace for all who enter. St. Thomas Aquinas makes the point even more

forcefully in saying that Jesus chose not the educated and the noble to be his followers, but the “unlettered and the common” poor fishermen, who would endure poverty, persecution, even death, to make it clear that the salvation of the world could be attributed only to the divine and not to any human wisdom or power. In entering more deeply into the life we have, we share in the work of the Lord Jesus, share his service, and redeem the world.

That’s what makes us gather here – to be reminded of our mission to the neighborhoods and to the workplace and to be nourished by the Body of Christ we both receive and become at this table and through one another. For this we praise the Father.

Some of us of course may be called to leave everything and follow the Lord. Maybe there’s a vocation to the priesthood, the religious life, the diaconate – the diaconate is even being re-examined now to see the place of women more deeply within it. In a book by novelist Rumer Godden entitled, *God: A Thread of Stories*, there is a funny and a moving account of a young English girl’s last days with her family before entering a religious community. She quotes her parents as saying, “We can’t understand why you’re doing this to us.” How does one explain this kind of calling? Or maybe it can’t be explained to some. The mother asks, “What is it that draws you; what is it you see? I wish I could understand.” The young woman’s first effort to explain is a stumbling image. She says, “It’s as if instead of being blown about with life, with all the days and years, you are rooted in a whole place.” It’s not a bad image, but it doesn’t work with the parent. Finally, in some kind of an inspiration, she reminds the mother gently of how she taught her hymns as a child. She quotes one: “Loving Shepherd of Thy Sheep.” The mother is softened for a moment, she

does remember. “Didn’t you mean us to take it seriously?” Elizabeth asks. And the mother thinks, seriously, but not too seriously. She finally complains, “I never thought I should have to suffer by you’re being good.”

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