

Homily for January 27, 2002
3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

By Father Charles Bowes

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

God calls us into a body, a collective, a people.

Jesus did three things when he heard that John the Baptist had been arrested. First of all he left Nazareth forever. He chose a new home, his new headquarters at Capernaum. The second thing he did was start to preach, and his message was short and clear: the kingdom of God was very, very near – in fact it was here now. And, according to today's gospel, Matthew chapter 4, Jesus did a third thing. He left Nazareth, he started preaching, and he decided not to remain alone.

He decided to associate, to unite himself with others. He called Simon, he called Andrew, he called James, he called John, and afterwards so many others. In our day, he even calls us, you and me – through our baptism, certainly, but the call is not to us just as individuals to remain individuals in the following. In fact, the Spirit of Jesus makes it possible for us never again to be alone, isolated never again. It means inviting, asking the Lord to be with us. And the point of contact? The point of contact is whatever need,

whatever feeling we have at the moment. For example: “Lord, here I am standing before all these people at Our Lady of the Rosary Parish – did you have to face a lot of folks? What was it like for you? Were you scared? Confident? Did you invite your Father to be with you?” And as we ask the question, we listen...we listen for God to answer. And as in any deep relationship, if we do not or are not able to hear a response, we ask another question: “Lord, what is keeping you from answering me? What is keeping me from hearing you?” And again, we listen...for anything – an image, a thought – a memory – and so the dialog continues – us and God. And we will never be alone, for Jesus never stops being human, but reveals the holy within everything that is human – every thought and feeling and idea – is fertile ground for contact with God.

What is more, Jesus showed us the way to associate with like-minded people – a church, a group, a body who likewise dialogs with God within and with one another about the things of God.

Nothing is less suited to Christianity than the notion that one can be a Christian in isolation from others or from God's Spirit within. It simply can't be done. The form of the Church's liturgy is dramatic in this fashion – we, the body, are the ministers of welcome and blessing under the leadership of the

presbyter, the priest. Our prayers are in the plural – “we” give thanks to God.

It was normal for Jesus to gather folks around him – normal for anyone who wants to change anything in this world or even to exist in this world. When you want something to be done, you associate, come together, network, unite, and do it – even just to survive. That’s what Jesus did.

When his family heard what he was doing, they came to tell him to come back home with them to Nazareth. “You are out of your mind,” they said. “You cannot carry that load, you cannot change the world, leave history to be history; come down with us. The coffee is ready.”

Jesus decided not to give in. He decided not to take their advice. He decided to stay in Capernaum. He left them and their fruitless talk, but he also took that other resolution, not to remain alone. That is why he picked Simon and Andrew, John and James, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, you and me.

It was in that community that they went out and preached and healed and brought light where there had been darkness.

There is much we can learn from all this. In fact, it is all so obvious that it hardly needs any further explanation.

We, his followers, are not alone either. We need merely invite God to draw near and God does so in Jesus instantly – but the listening is essential – listening as individuals, listening as a church, as a body.

We, his followers, are asked to associate ourselves with him and with one another in an organized and efficient drive to chase away the evil that terrorizes our societies; to maintain, against all odds, the conviction that death is not the end of life ever. We are called together not only to pray and to sing “Alleluia,” and “Praise the Lord.” We are called together to heal all the areas of life where we live and work – to be God in Jesus to the world we touch, beginning with ourselves, with our own interior darkness – to invite God to visit, to companion right where we feel and think, no matter what the feeling, no matter what the thought.

Now this isn’t done instantly as dramatized in our gospel. People just don’t jump up and follow a leader willy-nilly. When Matthew said Simon and Andrew at once abandoned their nets, and that James and John “immediately” left the boat and their father – the evangelist makes the point that our response to Jesus is to be immediate and whole hearted – not literal as though we would abandon spouse and family and present responsibilities. Together God will change the world.

Let us pray. Oh good and gracious God, you never cease to make new the world you create and forever call disciples to minister to what you have created. Make us into your people, united in the spirit of your Son. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

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