

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Mark 1:15

R/. Alleluia, alleluia.
The kingdom of God is at hand.
Repent and believe in the Gospel.
R/. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Mark 1:14-20; L68B

After John had been arrested,
Jesus came to Galilee
proclaiming the gospel of
God:

“This is the time of fulfillment.
The kingdom of God is at hand.
Repent, and believe in the
gospel.”

As he passed by the Sea of
Galilee,
he saw Simon and his brother
Andrew casting their nets
into the sea;
they were fishermen.

Jesus said to them,
“Come after me, and I will make you
fishers of men.”

Then they abandoned their nets and
followed him.

He walked along a little farther
and saw James, the son of Zebedee,
and his brother John.

They too were in a boat mending their
nets.

Then he called them.

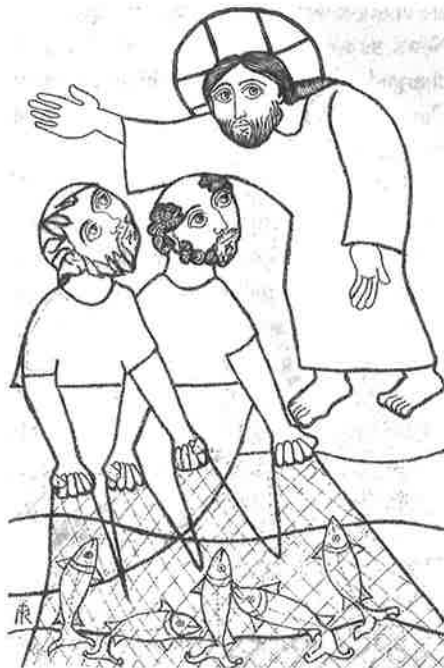
So they left their father Zebedee in the
boat
along with the hired men and
followed him.

Reflecting on the Gospel

In the wilderness Jesus has withstood Satan’s temptation, and, strengthened in spirit by this personal combat, he comes into Galilee, the “springtime” place of first preaching, first ministry, first calling of disciples. Yet there has also been a winter: the arrest and imprisonment of John the Baptist, which add

urgency to Jesus’s first spoken words in Mark’s gospel. The time of God’s reigning presence is at hand, and this Good News of God demands a response. “Repent, and believe in the gospel” may have been repeated as an early Christian baptismal call to the catechumens (the elect) as they descended into the Easter waters to rise up as God’s new creation. At infant baptism our parents and our faith community made this response for us; the challenge is for us to say our own continuing adult “Yes” to this call and grow in our discipleship.

Urged on by his sense of mission, Jesus passes along the lakeside, the Sea of Galilee. He “saw” Peter and Andrew, with a seeing that penetrates to their deepest selves and their future potential as his disciples whom, with all their successes and failures, he will make fishers of people to draw others into the kingdom. All that Simon and Andrew will become will be because of Jesus and, with contagious gospel urgency, “they abandoned their nets”—the source of their income—and follow him. A little further on an-



other two brothers, James and John, sons of Zebedee, are called while they are involved in their fishermen’s task of mending nets. Once again the call and response is immediate and the dispossession is radical when they follow Jesus. It is significant that the first disciples whom Jesus calls are people who must leave what is indicative of their success in a brotherly and family venture: boats, nets, hired servants, parent. They follow Jesus, not hoping for a better lifestyle, but urged by his words to an unconditional obedience to him. From the beginning of his ministry, Jesus gathers a community around himself in a relationship of “brotherliness” that the call of two sets of brothers may also suggest.

Whereas our consumer society has to package and market every commodity, every offer has to have a good sales pitch, even in some megachurches and by some TV evangelists, Mark’s narrative of Jesus’s call is stark and unadorned. Like any relationship, this is the “honeymoon” period (the terminology of Joel Marcus in *Mark 1–8*, The Anchor Bible 27). Much of what they understand at this moment they will progressively forget, and compromises, obtuseness, status-seeking will replace following until, on the eve of Jesus’s passion and death, the disciples leave everything to run away from him (Mark 14:50-51). The traditional prophetic calling accounts, such as that of Samuel or Elisha’s call by Elijah (1 Kgs 19:19-21), are transformed because now it is Jesus who calls. Jesus does not issue orders to his followers like a charismatic military leader (e.g., Judg 3:28; 1 Sam 11:6-7); he offers no rallying call to a revolutionary war (1 Macc 2:27-28), but he does make promises. Do we live as though we believe these promises? How constant, how radical are we in our following of Jesus to

which we are invited by our baptism? How discerning of its demands are we in our contemporary society, and has Jesus priority in our lives? Do we continually try to launch out into a shared mission with Jesus that will transform us from day to day and draw other people into a relationship with him, or do we cling to the safe and familiar?

Focusing the Gospel

Key words and phrases: “Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men.”

To the point: Jesus approaches his first disciples, Simon and Andrew, with an interesting proposition: leave your fishing nets and lives by the sea and turn your attention toward catching people in the net of God’s love. In some ways, calling fishermen to his work seems like an odd choice and yet the skills needed for catching fish (patience, perseverance, hard work, ability to weather storms) would likely come in handy when fishing for people. Within the gospel, Jesus chooses ordinary people with everyday occupations to be his closest collaborators. Though they were not the obvious choices for founding his church, in following Jesus the disciples gained the knowledge, wisdom, and understanding to carry forth Jesus’s mission after his death and resurrection. Today, Jesus continues to call ordinary, everyday people to be “fishers of men.” How will we respond?

Connecting the Gospel

to the first reading: In the gospel, Jesus begins his public ministry by calling the people to “[r]epent, and believe in the gospel,” and in the first reading we find an extreme example of repentance. The book of Jonah has been considered many different genres including satire, parable, and fable. In this story, many surprising things occur that would have startled and shocked the original readers, including that Nineveh (the ancient enemy of Israel) responds to Jonah’s lackluster preaching with such total and immediate repentance that even their animals join in, dressed in sackcloth and ashes (4:7).

to experience: There are many different messages that can be gleaned from the book of Jonah. One could be that repentance (even for those we consider our greatest enemies and who have committed the most intolerable evil) is always possible.

Connecting the Responsorial Psalm

to the readings: God’s loving compassion is affirmed by the psalmist who proclaims, “Good and upright is the Lord; / thus he shows sinners the way.” This truth can be comforting when we apply it to ourselves and our own sinfulness, but challenging when we consider this boundless compassion enveloping those who have hurt us. Though the first reading offers only a portion of the book of Jonah, we know how this story ends. The Ninevites, who had crushed the northern kingdom of Israel and then ravaged Jerusalem in 701 BC, repented of their evil ways and are forgiven by God. Although this tale is fiction, it would have been difficult for the Israelites to swallow. We could place ourselves in this tale by thinking of the Ninevites as a nation or ideological group that has waged war or acts of terror on our own nation or members of our religion.

to psalmist preparation: Our responsorial psalm asks, “Teach me your ways, O Lord.” One of these ways is God’s unconditional love and forgiveness. How can you live deeper into this attribute of God this week?

PROMPTS FOR FAITH-SHARING

The responsorial psalm implores, “Teach me your ways, O Lord.” Who have been the spiritual mentors and guides who have helped you learn the ways of God?

St. Paul tells the Corinthians, “[T]he world in its present form is passing away.” What are the greatest changes you see within the world at this moment? How are we called to respond to these changes as people of faith?

Jesus calls Simon and Andrew to follow him and become “fishers of men.” How does your parish community live out this call?

In today’s gospel the disciples are called in pairs and together they leave their livelihoods and families to follow Jesus. Who are your closest collaborators and partners in living out the Christian life?