

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.

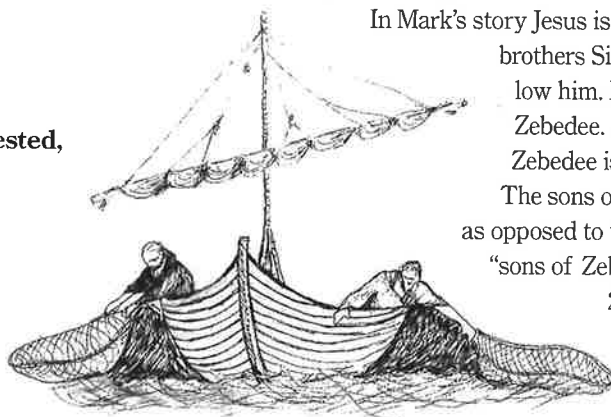
Then he called them.

So they left their father Zebedee in the

boat

along with the hired men and

followed him.



Reflecting on the Gospel

Cycle B means we are reading primarily from the Gospel of Mark, even though last week we read from the Gospel of John, and heard about the call of the first disciples, Andrew, and an unnamed disciple. This week we have a different version, Mark’s version, of the call of the first disciples. Though Andrew is still part of the story, we do not have the “unnamed disciple” from the Gospel of John.

There are some significant differences between last week’s story and this. For one, in last week’s story Andrew and his companion were initially followers of John the Baptist. After the Baptist pointed out Jesus, they began to follow him.

In Mark’s story Jesus is walking along the Sea of Galilee when he calls the brothers Simon and Andrew. They abandon their nets and follow him. He then calls the brothers James and John, sons of Zebedee. All four become Jesus’ followers that day, whereas Zebedee is left holding the net!

The sons of Zebedee are critical figures in the Synoptic stories as opposed to the Gospel of John. In fact, we only hear of the “sons of Zebedee” in the epilogue of the Gospel of John (chap.

21), but nowhere in the first twenty chapters. Even in John 21 we don’t learn their names. They are merely the sons of Zebedee.

But the image Mark paints for us is different. He gives us their names and depicts them

as giving themselves in complete dedication to following

Jesus. All is abandoned in their pursuit of him.

In this story we also hear something of the preaching of Jesus, which to a certain degree echoed that of John the Baptist. Jesus’ preaching will be developed and expanded throughout the Gospel of Mark, but at this early stage it is centered around the twofold command, “Repent, and believe.”

The story is certainly idealized for dramatic effect; we only need to look at the Gospel of John to see another version of Andrew and Peter being called by Jesus. But what is Mark telling us by narrating the story the way he does? Certainly that these first disciples left everything in a single-minded pursuit of Jesus. As such, they represent the ideal. Still, as we will learn throughout this gospel, the disciples did not often live up to that ideal. And perhaps this is another lesson of Mark’s story. Our beginnings can be filled with such idealism, promise, and pure-hearted devotion. Only later will “reality” begin to sink in and our failings and shortcomings become apparent, as they no doubt will with the disciples.

Living the Paschal Mystery

Think back to the first time you fell in love, not a crush, but a true love. The emotional, spiritual, intellectual connection was undoubtedly strong and probably seemed like it would last forever. That’s also the way the love songs often sing of it. Yet, those initial stages inevitably recede and the grind of daily life looms larger. At that point the love may have developed into something deeper, stronger. Or perhaps it died out altogether and is now only a happy memory.

Something similar often happens with a faith life, and the disciples were not immune to this. Today we hear the story about how they started out strong, abandoning everything to follow Jesus. We know that Simon Peter will eventually confess Jesus as the Christ. And later, Peter will deny three times that he even knows him. The relationship that starts out with such promise, even reaching soaring heights, can truly crash and burn. This happened with the disciples; it can happen with us.

Our faith life might start out strong. It might need to be rekindled from time to time. We might need to go to the well of that initial experience of falling in love to draw sustenance and inspiration. And yet, there may be times when we effectively hang it up or abandon it, as Peter did. In those times we know that Jesus still sought Peter. Peter was forgiven and brought back into the fold. There will be another example later in this gospel of a disciple who abandoned Jesus and did not seek forgiveness. His end was not like Peter's. Our living relationship with Christ is not a one-time exhilarating moment, but, like all relationships, it is a lifelong give and take, wax and wane, love and be loved.

PROMPTS FOR HOMILISTS, CATECHISTS, AND RCIA TEAMS

What "fishing nets" must we "abandon" if we are to follow Jesus?

Who are Jesus' most unlikely disciples among us today?

How have Jesus' teachings on forgiveness, compassion, and healing been the beginnings of new possibilities in your life?

What do you find to be the most difficult aspect of "following" Jesus?

Focusing the Gospel

Mark 1:14-20

Jesus began his ministry by calling simple fishermen to be his most trusted co-workers. Although the Twelve were hardly scholars or men wise in the ways of the world, Jesus saw beyond their gruff simplicity to call forth from them their faith, sincerity, and goodness. As Mark's gospel unfolds each Sunday this year, the first disciples will misunderstand Jesus (if not miss the point entirely), desert him, and even deny and betray him—but Jesus maintains his trust in them.

In this rabbi from Nazareth, the day of the Messiah has dawned; but newness demands change: a "turning away" (the original meaning of the word *repentance*) from business as usual to a complete trust in the life and love of God. Simon and Andrew's "abandoning" of their nets and James and John's "abandoning" of their father in today's gospel illustrate the total trust and commitment Jesus wants of those who would be his disciples.

Focusing the First Reading

Jonah 3:1-5, 10

At first, Jonah (of the three-days-in-the-belly-of-the-whale fame) wants no part of being God's prophet. When first sent by God to Nineveh, Jonah refuses to go, believing that the city deserved to be destroyed. He resents God's mercy to the hated capital city of Assyria. But, in his near tragic ocean voyage to escape God, Jonah comes to realize that any individual, tribe, or nation (not just Israel) can *turn* ("repent") to the Lord and be reconciled in God's kindness and peace—even the wicked Ninevites.

Focusing the Responsorial Psalm

Ps 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9 (4a)

We can imagine a repentant Jonah praying Psalm 25 in the wake of his disastrous attempt to escape God's call to be his prophet to the Ninevites. The psalmist prays for wisdom that he might humbly walk the path God has set him on. The psalm acknowledges (as Jonah comes to realize) that God extends his mercy and salvation to all who turn to him.

Focusing the Second Reading

1 Cor 7:29-31

Paul and the first Christians believed that Jesus' return at the end of time was imminent—they fully expected Jesus to appear in their lifetimes. For Paul and his contemporaries, time was growing short; much needed to be done to prepare for Christ's return. Despite the near alarmist urgency of today's second reading, Paul writes of the impermanence of our relationships and possessions in this world, a world that "is passing away."