

Homily on Mark 1,14-20

January 22, 2018

Intro: Mark's gospel has no story of the miraculous conception of Jesus, nor of his birth in Bethlehem, nor of his exile in Egypt. Nor does it, like any of the New Testament, say anything about his more than twenty years as a common day laborer in Galilee. It begins with Mark's title for his work: "Beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God." After that comes his baptism at the hands of John the Baptist, his temptation in the desert, and then the briefest of all summaries of his preaching: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the good news." That's all the background his disciples get for their calling to mission by Jesus.

Mark: *I want you to close your eyes and imagine Mark's scene.* It's very early morning. There's a slight chop on the water as you beach your boat with a good catch of fish. Now all that's left is turning your fish over to the women, then cleaning and mending the nets. It's a good life: the lake is always full of fish and you know every hole and lurking place in the lake. Your father taught you as a boy, as his father had taught him, back for generations.

Suddenly a man approaches your boat. You recognize the carpenter from Nazareth, the disciple of John the Baptist who is now preaching the Reign of God coming to earth. It's an exciting message for all who have heard the prophets in the synagogue and so have waited so many generations.

Now the man calls out to you, "Come, follow me, and you will be catching humans!" You think: Follow him on his preaching tour? That means giving up a job you know for a job for which you have no gift—preaching. It means leaving your wife and children for months at a stretch, giving up a secure job for an uncertain future. You have to think about it.

But you have always been thinking about it---the glorious triumph of God's messianic reign over the world. The call touches a deep longing; it is urgent: It is God calling, and you have to go. And so you leave your boat and nets and family and follow. *Open your eyes.*

The Meaning for us:

Did you feel the uncertainty, the momentous nature of the call of Jesus? Were you ready to respond? Unlike Peter and Andrew, James and John, or even unlike Mark's readers 40 years later, we know Jesus is the Son of God and that he has already brought to earth the Reign of God. And so the call of Jesus the King is that much more certain and urgent for us.

We are all called by our baptism to bring Jesus' reign to fullness on our earth. Some are called to devote ourselves to his ministry of preaching and healing. They leave a future wife and family. Some become priests or religious; others also leave family and serve God as single persons in this world. These are people for whom Jesus' person and mission is all consuming---their reward is the love of Jesus, and is expressed often in the love of those whom they serve, for whom they are fathers and mothers. We ought to hold out this exquisite vocation as a possibility for our children in our families and here in this parish. Do we ever have an evening to talk about priest's and sisters' vocations?

You may say I am too old; my life is set. Don't be too sure: I know of a woman in her late 60s who, after her husband died and children were settled, joined the Jesuit Volunteer Corps and served God in Alaska for years. And a woman who, after her husband died, joined a religious community, which her two daughters also joined. We never know what God has in mind for us next. All we know is that when God calls we must answer, and so receive a greater gift of God's love.

But most of us are called to live the life of Christ in what we have been doing, whether it's selling handkerchiefs, selling life insurance, landscaping, scraping boats, litigating, legislating in Congress, or being mayors of cities. We need to awaken each day and offer our day to the Lord, asking that God be present in every action of our day. We need to greet each person at work as we would Christ, which in fact each person is. We need to nourish our spouses and children with our own faith and receive from them the nourishment of their faith, hope, and love.

In short, God is calling us, now, wherever we are and whatever we are doing. Ask the Holy Spirit to be alert to his call. If we dedicate this year to falling in love with Mark's Jesus Christ in our Sunday gospels and in our daily reading from Mark, we will hear and we will be blissfully happy.

Jesus is the good news.