

JANUARY 21, 2018

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1 [JON 3:1-5, 10](#)

Responsorial Psalm [PS 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9](#)

R. (4a) Teach me your ways, O Lord.

Reading 11 [1 COR 7:29-31](#)

Gospel [MK 1:14-20](#)

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 [*amphiblastron*] 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 [*diktuon*] 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 [*diktuon*]. Then he called them. So they left their father Zebedee in the boat along with the hired men and followed him.

HOMILY:

It has been exactly 30 years and two weeks since I quit my job as an engineer. The work, designing cast iron parts for General Motors cars, was done at an iron foundry in Saginaw Michigan at which I was employed for nearly five years. Anyone who has worked in a foundry knows that it can be hot, dirty and hard work. Besides the heat and dirt, there are some very specific details that I recall about the job—which have nothing to do with engineering. The details: **7:00 am**: Starting time; **10:00 am** First coffee break, 15 minutes long, but often stretched to 20 or 25 minutes; **11:45 am**: Lunch break; **2:00 pm**: Afternoon coffee break; **3:30 pm**: Quitting time! Besides knowing when I needed to be at work, is it not telling that the other times that are seared in my memory are times when work ceased? Apparently, we looked forward to *not working*, to our breaks! I don't think this is uncommon. For, since the beginning, as suggested by the biblical image of Adam, work has been seen as toil and drudgery. For Adam, once he has sinned and eaten of the tree of knowledge, is sentenced to a life of drudgery in work, when the Lord says to him after the Fall: "cursed is the ground because of you, in toil shall you eat of it all the days of your life . . . In the sweat of your face you shall eat your bread . . ." (Gen. 3:17b, 19a) Too often, even from the beginning of time, work is not the source of joy, but rather a drudgery, something to be endured out of necessity.

How much of your average day is dedicated to work? Whether it is for pay or not, it is a great deal of the precious gift of life that has been given us. And so often, because this work is done for merely some practical purpose, it lacks joy and life. It can be a drudgery. How can our faith touch our work lives and redeem them? Today's gospel holds the clue: to see our life's work as given to us by the Lord, who calls us to serve others and give God glory through our work. In doing so, work is redeemed and delivered from drudgery to joy. A closer look at the gospel text is necessary to open up how Jesus intends to redeem our work.

If you will bear with me a bit, we need to look behind the English words that we have heard proclaimed to the words in the original version of the gospel, which were in Greek. For in any translation from one language to another, special nuances of meaning and emphasis are necessarily sacrificed, in that another language is not capable of translating perfectly the rich meanings intended

in the original language. And, in this case, there is more meaning behind the gospel than might first meet the eye. In this gospel that we have just heard, the implement of the disciples, the net, is mentioned three times. [Turn to pg. 63.] **First**, we hear that Jesus saw “Simon and Andrew casting their *nets*. [pg. 63] **Second**, we hear that “They abandoned their *nets* and followed him.” [pg. 63] **Third**, we hear about James and John “in a boat mending their *nets*. [pg. 64] Surprisingly, the original Greek word behind each mention of a net is not the same in each of these. The second two are the same, while the first is an entirely different word. In English, we really have only one suitable word for this thing used to catch fish, but the gospel writer Mark found two different ones in Greek. And the choices seem entirely intentional. While the second and third instances use a rather commonplace and generic word for a net, it's that first one that ought to catch our attention. There, the gospel writer uses an uncommon word for a net that suggests a surprising meaning. Besides a net to catch fish, the very same word in Greek refers to chain or anything else that is thrown around a human body to stop its movement, like the chain that holds a slave captive. So, while Simon Peter and Andrew are clearly at work using their “net” to catch fish, there is also a nuance that suggests that their work the net also enslaving them, as if their work has become a drudgery, like a chain binding them. It is from this net that Jesus calls them away to spend their lives’ service fishing *for him*, to become fishers of men, catching not for themselves, but rather using their fishing skills for the sake of Jesus and the glory of God. By dedicating their fishing to the glory of God and His calling, they at the same time cast away the net that was strangling their lives with drudgery. Their following Jesus and serving Him in his way is also gives a new freedom.

Subtly then, behind this gospel text, two things are happening. The disciples’ work, which had trapped them in drudgery, is cast aside, while at the same time their skills as fishermen, given to God’s glory, are used in a new way and for God. For, when any work is offered for the glory of God and the good of others can become a sweet and pleasing offering to the Author of all talents and life. No matter how boring and tedious it once was, with this perspective, that it is done for God’s glory makes all the difference! Cleaning the house, shoveling snow, preparing meals, washing dishes, when done to give God glory, makes a burden light and gives it new meaning. This redemption of work, giving it rich new meaning when it is offered for the glory of God, is well-described by the famous English theologian C. S. Lewis, who said, “The work of a Beethoven, and the work of a [maid], become spiritual on precisely the same condition, that of being offered to God, of being done humbly ‘as to the Lord.’ This does not, of course, mean that it is for anyone a mere toss-up whether he should sweep rooms or compose symphonies. A mole must dig to the glory of God and a cock must crow.” C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*. The key, then, is to see every act of work, however big or small, as an offering to God and an expression of love for others, to show them the love of God through our care and kindness.

Watching the clock leads to drudgery. But, with eyes on eternity and offering our God-given talents to serve God and neighbor can free us from the drudgery of the clock and redeem our work. For, when done with eternity and God in mind, work can become about something more than this world—it becomes a praise of the God who gave us our talents and the gift of work. That we might have the faith and vision to see work in this way, may this liturgy, this holy work by a holy people in praise of a Holy God become, by God’s grace, the pattern of all our life’s efforts. For when our lives are offered in praise of God, work is no longer about putting in our time, but putting all our time and efforts to the service of God and God’s people. When this happens, quitting time loses all its appeal.