

## THE CALL OF CHRIST

The Liturgical Year of the Catholic Church has four distinct periods: Advent, the preparation for and celebration of Christmas, Lent, a forty day retreat preparing for the most important feast of Easter, the Easter season, a solemn seven week celebration of Christ's resurrection and finally thirty four weeks called for lack of a better term, Ordinary Time. This Sunday is the fourth Sunday in ordinary time which this year follows the Gospel of Luke. On this particular Sunday Luke gives us the story of how Christ chose Simon to be one of his special followers. All the other Gospels simply state that Christ said to each future Apostle, "Come, follow me." But Luke gives us a much more detailed description of the call of Simon. He is destined by Christ to be his chosen head of the Apostles. Sometime after Simon became one of his followers, Christ changed his name of Simon to Peter but this is somewhat incorrect and gives a wrong idea of what Christ really meant. In Matthew we read that as Christ was walking with his twelve apostles, he asked them "Who do people say that the son of man is?" They answered that some think he is John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah." But then Christ asked: "Who do you say that I am?" Simon immediately answered: "You are the Messiah, the son of the living God." Jesus responded: " Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah. Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my heavenly Father. And so I say to you, you are Rock and upon this rock I will build my church." The Latin word for Rock is Petrus, from which the name Peter comes. Thus, the usual translation says "you are Peter and on this rock I will build my church. But this really misses what Jesus really said. Later in the Acts of the Apostles we read that Paul came to Jerusalem to consult with the Rock. (or they might use the Aramaic word Cephas for Rock which again in my opinion just confuses things. The simple fact is that Christ nicknamed Simon as "the Rock", the solid foundation of his Church.

Luke in his Gospel gives a more realistic picture of the call of Simon. Simon was a hard working commercial fisherman making a living by selling what they caught. When Christ came upon Simon and his fellow fishermen cleaning their nets, he simply got into Simon's boat and asked him to pull out a bit from the shore so he could continue talking to the crowd without them pushing him into the lake. When he was finished speaking, he told Simon to put out into deeper waters and lower his net. Simon had been doing just that all night long and had caught nothing. But then he simply said to Jesus, "at your command I will do as you say." The result was such a huge catch of fish that they needed help to pull in the nets. This was simply overwhelming to Simon, and knowing that he was an ordinary man with ordinary faults, even some sins, all he could say to Jesus was for him to leave him. He was just not worthy. But Jesus had other intentions and he quietly said to Simon: "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." It was at that moment that Simon suddenly realized his calling, and he dropped everything and simply followed Jesus from then on. And two of his fellow fishermen, James and John did likewise. The rest is history.

When one thinks about all this, one cannot but be amazed at the type of men Jesus chose to be his closest followers, the men who would ultimately be the foundation with Simon of his church. They were not really educated, Matthew possibly being an exception because of his profession of being a tax collector, and none of them were in any way leaders of their community to say nothing about being leaders of Israel. They were all ordinary men with talents and varying abilities as well as with virtues and faults. But they were also men who

were open to Jesus, willing to learn from him, and honest and loyal by nature, willing to give up everything to follow him. Over the next two or more years, they would gradually develop a deep love for Jesus, and after the Resurrection, they were all to a man willing to die for him which in fact was their destiny with John being the sole person to die naturally.

We admire these men in their response to the call of Jesus. But do we realize that the call of Christ is still ongoing to each and every one of his followers? It was not just a one-time call to his Apostles. For most Catholics and Christians, the call was answered in their Baptism but for most it was answered by their parents. However, there is a time, generally around age twenty, when one then personally ratifies what happened at their Baptism and then makes it their own decision. (It is at age twenty that the Judgment center in the brain finally matures!) This acceptance of one's baptism is very much determined on how one was raised. If the faith and its practice is important to parents, then it will be important to their children as they mature. A person is much more formed through example than by words.

But this moment of acceptance as one reaches maturity is not quite the end of what God has in mind for everyone. The truth is that from the very beginning God planned to have his human creation be very much a part of the world they would be born into. God created the universe and everything in it to the tiniest of detail and it is indeed something wonderful, mysterious, and filled with beauty along with so many ongoing surprises. But God also wanted the humans he would create to be able to put their own personal stamp on his creation. Every person born has many talents and abilities, each varying in degrees and complexity, no two ever being exactly alike. Only an infinite God could manage this with the number of humans he has created and continues to create. His intention is that every single person put their stamp on his creation, be it ever so small or ever so great. The result will be that at the end of time, we will all actually see where we each had a hand in God's ongoing work of creation. And each of us will be totally surprised to find that our contribution, small as it may be, was and is absolutely essential for the final work.

But there is also more to the ultimate plan of God and of his Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus is still very active in our world and in many ways he calls individuals to come follow him in a more intimate way, just as he invited the original twelve. This intimate way can best be described as a way of love. Jesus wants us to understand his infinite love for each of us and he in many ways seems to really beg us for our love in return. But then isn't this one of the attributes of love? Love never can be static; it is always dynamic. It is by its very nature interactive and for it to be true it must somehow be manifest. All this may sound like one must constantly have great feelings and emotions. But that is not possible. Rather, true love must be a conviction of one's own and of another's love and a certainty that it is not only genuine, but true and very human. All this can be summed up in one having a very personal relationship with the Lord. This is manifest in prayer, talking with one's lover, with the Lord. This is deeply personal and impossible to relate. But this openness in prayer leads to a full life, married or single, working or retired, rejoicing or sad, with a conviction that one is never alone. Listen carefully. Christ is calling. He is urgent, but not pushy. Open your door. Discover your destiny. It is the Lord Jesus!

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