

The Third Week in Ordinary Time
January 22, 2017

In our Gospel reading today we hear how Jesus began his ministry in Galilee at Capernaum.

Matthew even gives us a quote from the Old Testament so that we are reminded that Jesus' coming was predicted by the prophets and in particular by Isaiah. The prophecy he quotes is about *where* Jesus was to begin his ministry, which was on the banks of the Sea of Galilee.

The author of Matthew's Gospel, having an excellent understanding of Jewish prophetic tradition, was careful to point these things out to his readers who were themselves Jewish.

His interest in continuity with the past and the prophets was designed to help the Jews in the region of Antioch to receive Jesus favorably. So Matthew portrays Jesus as being obedient to a Divine plan already laid down in scripture.

This plan also included calling people to take part in His ministry. We've just heard about the call of Peter, Andrew, John and James.

Fisherman. Ordinary guys. Because God has a wonderful habit of calling the most ordinary people to do extraordinary things.

And understanding that is the very heart of what it means to live out our Christian responsibility to be authentic disciples.

Think for a moment about some of the great heroes in Scripture: Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Peter, Sarah, Mary, David and Daniel.

Each of them came up with excuses when they were called upon or prompted to get up and take action – but of course to their credit they all respond in the end.

Moses said he couldn't speak in public, Isaiah said that the kind of speech that had passed through his lips were too impure to be a prophet, Jeremiah said he was too young, In the Gospel of Luke Peter claimed that he was too sinful, and Paul believed that he was unworthy.

Sarah claimed that she was too old to have a child. Mary thought that she was too young because she had not yet known a man.

Teenagers like David aren't supposed to be able to slay a giant and hungry lions are supposed to tear apart what looks like a free and easy lunch in the person of Daniel.

In all of these stories we learn that nothing is impossible with God because it 's clear that God does what God wills and He uses the most unlikely persons to make it all happen.

With the exception of Mary, each of those people that God chose to be his instruments of justice, mercy, love and compassion were colorful, earthy and undeniably sinful individuals.

And even with all of those examples to inspire us, we often underestimate ourselves -- and Satan loves this gag -- of consistently disqualifying ourselves from ever

considering ourselves worthy enough to be called by God to be His disciples. We may understand *intellectually* that God has chosen many people like ourselves to be his workers; but sadly, it tends to end there.

So aside from Jesus coming up to us in the flesh as he did Peter, Andrew, James and John and telling us what to do, how do we know, *how can we be sure*, that we are doing what God wants us to do?

Well, it's not hard. It's simply a matter of seeing ourselves always and everywhere as an instrument of the love and goodness of God.

Here's how it works: Our Faith teaches us two important facts. First, God is love. Secondly, God gives us all good things.

Now, if you buy into those two premises -- and we certainly should -- then it follows that anytime we have an impulse to love or to do something good, we recognize that it comes from God.

Every tugging, pulling, pushing, and little voice in our heads prompting us to do something loving and beautiful for another person is in fact a call and every prompting to share something good is a call. It's that easy.

And we shouldn't be discouraged by the fact that we're sinners. In fact we should be encouraged because Jesus went through a whole lot of trouble to give us the great gift of the Sacraments so that we may have all the strength and graces we need to answer God's call and to be His physical presence here on earth.

If you want to know the secret to happiness...and who doesn't...this is it. Jesus calls each of us by name to follow Him so that we might share in the Light He has brought to our darkened world. That's the reason when you were confirmed the bishop looked you straight in the eye and said your name because at that moment it was Christ who was calling you by your name.

When we learn to follow Christ's simple way of following the Father's will with the strength, courage and wisdom of the Holy Spirit to guide us, we'll find that the real happiness we seek can be found in the peace of knowing that our will and God's will are one and the same.