

3rd SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

St. Mark 1:14-20

The word “repent” is a translation of the Greek word “metanoia,” which literally means to “turn your mind around.” “Metanoia” or “repent” means to change your mind and your heart, that is, your disposition, the way you stand before God. In other words, and as St. Paul writes in the second reading in his letter to the Corinthians, turn yourself away from that which tears down to that which builds up; away from the kingdom of man to the kingdom of God. Conversion, repentance, reconciliation inaugurates the possibility of the kingdom of heaven for us, the result of which is seen in the close of this Gospel; the restitution of the sick to health, of the blind to sight, of the dying to living. Everything that sin destroys and tears apart is restored and made new again in the kingdom of God. Just as the prophet Isaiah described the exiled Jews as walking in darkness because they were away from their homeland, so sin exiles us to a land of darkness. And just as Isaiah prophesied the great light that would restore to the Jews their homeland, Christ is that great light that restores us to our true homeland—heaven, our union with God.

The urgency of this message is found in the response of the fishermen, St. Simon and St. Andrew, St. James and St. John, who “immediately” left their nets and left their boat to follow Christ. To say immediately means to say “straight away”—that is, without hesitation. What it meant here, practically speaking, was that these men, who were to become Apostles of Christ, in an instant left behind the tools of their livelihood. St. Simon and St. Andrew left their fishing nets on the ground for anyone to take, St. James and St. John not only left their boat but their father as well. This urgency we hear at the dismissal of the Mass: “Go forth, the Mass is ended.”

God asks a great deal of us. He asked a great deal of these four fishermen when he asked them to leave behind their livelihoods and families. As with Christ's proclamation to "repent" so it is with his "immediate" call to those who will be Apostles; there is no subtlety, no softening of His message, no leeway. But what God asks of us is no more than He Himself was prepared to bear and did bear in Jesus Christ. This Gospel follows on from the Lord's forty-days in the wilderness and the temptations of the devil. He left His livelihood and His family to serve God, His Father. He was tempted, and suffered, and endured difficulties and so is not asking of us anymore than that which He has lived through Himself and nothing for which He is not prepared to grant the necessary grace.

The incarnation of God in Jesus Christ is the absolute entrance of God into human lives. Now God approaches us in our circumstances, giving rise to our best abilities and greatest possibilities; so much so that fishermen could become Apostles.

"Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven has come near." In Lent we will hear this call often, but remember, it is not a call for later, but for now, and not to smallness, but to greatness.