

3rd SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME YEAR B HOMILY ESSENDON 2021
JESUS CALLS THE FIRST FOUR DISCIPLES IN PAIRS, NOT YET APOSTLES

Mk 1.14-20 Jonah 3.1-5,10 1Cor 7.29-31

Did you notice last Thursday was the **21st day of the 21st year of the 21st century**? It's just that I like to play with figures or numbers! Now, let's not get too serious or excited about the Second Reading to the Corinthians today. Paul is obviously having a bad hair day, with nothing positive to say. Perhaps he's envious of those who have wives, but his bit about not having a laugh is a step too far! The end was not that near, given that we're still here well over 2,000+ years on!! So let's get on with it, and with a good sense of humour, and acknowledging the reality of the need for mourning and shopping too. We need to support business, what's more, especially at the present time, as we move hopefully and carefully out of a rather dark period of shutdown or lockdown!!

Now, who said this? *“At a time when the grave crises facing our human family call for farsighted and united responses, I pray that your decisions will be guided by a concern for building a society marked by authentic justice and freedom, together with unfailing respect for the rights and dignity of every person, especially the poor, the vulnerable and those who have no voice. I likewise ask God, the source of all wisdom and truth, to guide your efforts to foster understanding, reconciliation and peace within the United States and among the nations of the world, in order to advance the universal common good.”*

Here's an 84 year old Pope Francis (now Pope for longer than his still surviving predecessor, Benedict!), wishing a 78 year old, President Joe Biden, well in critical times, calling for healing, peace, good will and the common good of all. Two old men, and faithful disciples of Jesus throughout their lives, offering hope for a better future, despite the problems the world faces, with climate change, racism and rampant nationalism, among others, with patriotism being often the refuge of the scoundrel, as we've seen. Gospel values have come to the fore, fortunately and thankfully. Well, we might ask what can these old men offer? Hope, for one, and the wisdom of experience for another, and the importance of a lived faith in life.

The new president didn't need to have the way cleared with tear gas, waving a Bible down the street outside a church, but quietly attended morning Mass with family and friends, prior to his inauguration, and they say he carries his rosary beads in his pocket. With relief and gratitude, a new tone is set, with hopefully positive outcomes, of reconciliation, healing and addressing of injustices, not to forget addressing the problems of the pandemic in a manner guided by scientific knowledge, all in due course. The values espoused certainly fit well into the tradition of Catholic Social Teaching.

Further to that, who said this? *“When day comes, we ask ourselves where can we find light in this never-ending shade? The loss we carry, a sea we must wade. We've braved the belly of the beast (fits the Jonah First Reading's theme today!). We've learned that quiet is not always peace, in the norms and notions of what just is isn't always justice. And yet the dawn is ours before we knew it. Somehow we do it. Somehow we've weathered and witnessed a nation that isn't broken but simply unfinished. We the successors of a country and a time where a skinny black girl descended from slaves and raised by a single mother can dream of becoming president only to find herself reciting for one... So let us leave behind a country better than one we were left with... The new dawn blooms as we free it. For there is always light. If only we're brave enough to see it. If only we're brave enough to be it.”* Words of hope and encouragement, in an astounding and powerful reflection, read out by the composer and poet, 23 years old, young and hopeful Amanda Gorman, also Catholic. (Check out the full poem.)

Last week, we had John's account of the first call of Jesus, with Andrew and an unnamed friend (possibly John himself?), moving from John the Baptist's circle to that of Jesus, Andrew the next day summoning Peter to join the happy trio. Today's account is a little different, in that it is Jesus who calls them directly, after he encounters them in the workplace, by the Sea of Galilee where they are fishermen. It would have put a dent in the family workforce, as Simon Peter and Andrew are brothers, as are James and John, sons of Zebedee, who gets left behind in his boat to mend the nets himself. One could understand him being a bit miffed, all the work still to be done. (So we can feel a bit sorry for poor old Zeb!) It's then on to Capernaum, a diverse sort of place, to meet Peter's ailing mother-in-law and drive out evil, and offer healing and peace along the way.

It's a bit of a telescoped account, as we see a return to fishing at different times in the course of the Gospels, primarily focussed on Jesus' teaching and preaching, healing and outreach, all the way through the ongoing journey. It takes until Chapter 3 of Mark's Gospel for the official Twelve apostles to be designated by Jesus, from the larger growing group of disciples, Judas among them. Interestingly, Jesus never refers to them as *apostles*; that title comes later, from others like Paul, the *Johnny Come Lately de facto* apostle, so to speak!

Whatever about him, Peter is seen as leader from the start, with all his faults and failings, strengths and weaknesses, a personality with whom you and I can surely relate. As Jose Pagola reflects on his role: "*Certainly Peter stands out among the Twelve... as a spokesman and leader of the disciples in general, and the Twelve in particular... The Christian sources give an impression of Peter as a spontaneous, honest man, decisively and enthusiastically committed to Jesus, and at the same time capable of doubt, helplessness in crisis and fear.*" He gives firm affirmations of faith, and yet, under pressure, even denies knowing Jesus too. The call of Jesus is radical, as Jesus points them in a new direction: "*He pulls them out of security and launches them into an unpredictable experience.*" Do they leave home, and family and work responsibilities for good? We might doubt it, but the primary focus of the Gospels is on a positive response to the person of Jesus in word and deed, as he himself demonstrates in his relationships with all whom he encounters.

And that's where you and I are in the midst of our environment at home, at work, at school, in retirement, in our local world which we inhabit and influenced by our presence, hopefully for the better, as faithful disciples of Jesus, called to continue the journey, following his way of love, justice, good will, truth, hope and peace.

john hannon

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