

The Gospel story of the call of the first disciples by Jesus is both inspiring and vexing-- inspiring, because of the decisiveness and immediacy of the response of Peter, Andrew, James and John; vexing, because it seems to set the bar so high. Leave everything...to follow an itinerant preacher into an unknown future...immediately. I come away asking myself—if it were me that day on the shore of Lake Galilee would I have immediately gotten up and follow Jesus? I know what I'd like to think my response would have been, but, I must confess, I can't say with certainty that I would have jumped up, left everything of my life up until that time behind, and followed someone unknown to me on a journey into a future I had no idea where it would end. What about you?

Most of us, truth be told, would find it difficult to leave work, family and friends and all the rest and venture into an uncertain future. If this describes any of us, we need not feel ashamed. Our first reading is part of the story of someone who also was hesitant, who in fact ran away from God's call. After experiencing God's call to him, the prophet Jonah actually set out in the opposite direction of where God called him to go. We know the rest of the story, fish and all. In the end, initially reluctant Jonah coughed up on the shore wins the people of Nineveh over to God. He ends up a successful disciple! If we doubt or question God and God's call to us, it does not mean that we are failures as Christians or we are less faithful than Peter, Andrew, James and John. (Given the rest of St. Mark's Gospel I don't think we have to fear. Of all the gospels, St. Mark has Jesus over and over again rebuking the disciples for their lack of understanding, their “wishy-washy” commitment, and in the end, it is these very disciples who end up disappointing and denying and abandoning him, but history also records, are the very ones after Pentecost and the outpoured gift of the Holy Spirit who set the world on fire for Jesus.

In giving us this story, what lesson does St. Mark intend for us? By the time St. Mark wrote his gospel, I doubt that Mark imagined people following Jesus in the same way as these first four disciples. That event had come and gone. Perhaps St. Mark's lesson for his first century readers, and we twenty-first century readers, was about still following Jesus as his disciples, but applying the response in a different way.

Perhaps that other way of following the call of Jesus for us is exemplified in the life of St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Mother Teresa recounted her experience of a still more complete following of Jesus as hearing what she termed a “call within a call.” She was already a nun ministering as a teacher when, on the way to a retreat, she heard Jesus ask her to abandon her present mission and take on the mission of ministering especially to the poor, abandoned, the dying left on the streets of Calcutta which, we know she did, and for which today she is held up as a saint-model for us.

That, I think, is the point. Whatever our particular vocation—single, married, ordained; our particular career—teacher, student, full-time homemaker, researcher, medical care-giver, factory laborer, office worker, financial advisor, legal professional, volunteer, whatever, it is within and through our daily life that Jesus calls us to “Come after me.” In the course of our daily lives we can, indeed must, follow Jesus by imitating him—trying to treat others with the same regard, love, patience, mercy, compassion, forgiveness as he did, and by advocating for those among us who are the voiceless and powerless. An example would be to continue to advocate for an end to abortion and to work to creating a culture in which every human life at every stage from conception to natural death is protected, valued and affirmed as we observe the 46th anniversary of the Supreme Court Roe v. Wade decision in 1972 which legalized abortion in our country. Another example is to join with our bishops in support of those among us known as DREAMERS and advocating for an immigration policy that both protects our borders but also provides a way for those who come to our country fleeing persecution or dire poverty safety, shelter, and a homeland.

Jesus calls and chooses each of us as he did Peter, Andrew, James and John. He used them to accomplish great things. He will do the same in us if we get up and follow him.

Fr. Jim Secora