



Third Sunday of Ordinary Time 21 January 2024

Reflection Mgr Daniel McHugh

“Whoever follows me will have the light of life” (John 8:12)

As you hear the Gospel of the Third Sunday you are struck by the total, the immediate response of the first disciples to the call of Jesus. Simon Peter and his brother Andrew were casting their net in the lake. Jesus said to them: *“Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.”* And at once they left their nets and followed him. Then it was the turn of James and his brother John. He called them at once we are told in the Gospel of Mark, and *“leaving their father Zebedee in the boat with the men he employed, they went after him”*.

Father Joseph Pollard in his book ‘Finding Fresh Light’ quotes the Scripture Scholar Wilfrid Harrington who says it is the *“mighty impression of Jesus on them”* there may be an unrecorded preface to it. Simon and Andrew may already have heard Jesus preach by the shore or in their village and may have been already under his spell. If this is true then they were predisposed to follow him if ever he should call them. In today’s Gospel the call is made and that is why it is immediately accepted.

My mind has gone back to the immediate, the total response to the call I felt to priesthood at the age of 15. After that the direction of my life changed. Pollard in his commentary writes: *“Today’s Gospel challenges us on our call and our response. We are ordinary people as Simon and Andrew were He has chosen us for a new way of living in this world and for the extraordinary destiny that follows it”*.

And he has called us to be *“fishers of men”* in our generation so that as many as possible may lose their insignificance and abandon their drifting lives. For, in the words of St Paul, *“it is God’s will that all be saved and come to the truth. The truth is that one is the mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as ransom for all.”* (1 Tim 2:4-6)

In the Communion Antiphon for the 3rd Sunday Jesus says: *“Whoever follows me will have the light of life”* (John 8:12). Having responded to the call of Faith in Jesus and following Him, we are conscious that we remain in need of His light on the journey whether the pathway is in the Priesthood or Consecrated Life or to a Lay and Family vocation.

This weekend we are invited by the Church to celebrate the “Sunday of the Word”: this points us in the direction of placing God’s Word in the Scripture and in particular the Gospel at the heart of our journey, as the light to our way. I have been blessed as a priest

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to have the opportunity to reflect on the Scripture each day as part of the celebration of Mass and to consider its relevance in relation to life. In a brief Homily after the Gospel I am able to share that with the Congregation: in that way the community is nurtured by the “Good News” revealed in Jesus’ life and teaching. In addition I am able to bring the example of the Saints who have lived out that Word to bear through the memorials the Church offers us. I am conscious too of the wonderful growth in Prayer Groups where people share with each other their Reflection on God’s Word in Scripture. The Church at Diocesan level frequently draws our attention to trustworthy sources for Prayer and Reflection on the Scriptures which people can use on their own as well as in groups. All of this helps us to continue our following of Our Lord, and indeed to see it grow in the context of a changing world.

There are many sources of support on our Faith Journey: one noted this week is Pilgrimage to privileged places of prayer. The Director of our Annual Diocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes has made contact about our Pilgrimage which takes place in the Spring Holiday week. Other Pilgrimages are being planned too, for example in my Deanery we have been circulated about an upcoming Pilgrimage to Walsingham in April, our National Catholic Shrine of Our Lady. Pope Francis in an Address to Participants in the Second International Conference for Rectors and Pastoral Personnel of Shrines last November speaks of Shrines as *“special places, where the holy faithful people of God gather to pray, to be consoled and to look to the future with greater confidence.”* It is a beautiful address: we are conscious that our commitment to following the Lord Jesus is often beset by bumps in the road. We are indeed in need of consolation at times as the Pope says, and forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation which is a feature of pastoral care offered at Shrines. The Pope speaks of Shrines as a place where we find renewed hope and can return home to look to the future with renewed confidence. He concludes: *“And may the intercession of the Mother of God be implored, so that, in these troubled times, many of our suffering brothers and sisters may find peace and hope.”*

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