

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

The beginning of Jesus' ministry is marked by His baptism by John and His anointing with the Holy Spirit. Of course, last Sunday's Gospel followed right on the heels of Jesus' baptism — the next day—with John proclaiming Jesus as "*the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.*" Jesus would still have to be led into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil before we get to today's Gospel.

Today, then, Jesus begins His ministry **in word and deed**. We're told that He was going about Galilee "*teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.*"

Indeed, we're told that John was now in prison. He had decreased. Jesus, whom John preached, whose way John prepared pointing to Him as "*the lamb without spot or blemish*" (1 Pet. 1:18-19) whose blood was the ransom payment for the world's sins, has now increased. The friend of the Bridegroom has given way to the Bridegroom Himself (John 3:29-30). Nevertheless, when Jesus preached, it was not a new message. "*Repent,*" Jesus preached, "*for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*"—identical to John's. And, we know that this kingdom—or as St. Louis seminary Professor Gibbs says, the reign of heaven—has come in the person of Jesus. Yes, Christians, even in democratic America, have a king: King Jesus.

This preaching of repentance, announcing the coming kingdom, is really a call to discipleship. When we pray in the Lord's Prayer: "*Thy kingdom come,*" we're praying for disciples. Luther teaches us to ask: "*How does God's kingdom come?*" And we answer: "*God's kingdom comes when He sends us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy word, and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity.*" That is a prayer for disciples, believers, followers of Christ.

That's what Jesus does. He calls disciples unto Himself. We heard a bit about that last week, with Andrew seeing and hearing Jesus, staying with Him that day, and then telling his brother Simon Peter about Him. Here was grace given; here was the Holy Spirit at work creating faith in these two brothers. But this faith was nascent. Peter and Andrew didn't follow Jesus then. They must have gone back to Galilee to their day jobs.

So, in today's Gospel, Jesus approaches them as they were fishing and calls to them. "*Follow me,*" He says to these fishermen, "*and I will make you fishers of men.*" And miraculously, they cast aside their nets and followed Jesus.

"*Immediately*"—that's the miracle word. "*Immediately they left their nets and followed him.*" Likewise, the sons of Zebedee, James and John — Jesus called them, and "*immediately, they left the boat and their father and followed [Jesus].*" Did Zebedee protest? We don't know. Matthew doesn't say. He does say that they left their father. They simply dropped the nets that they were mending, the ones

they would cast into the sea to catch fish, in order to pick up the nets of the Gospel, that they might cast them and catch men...what Jesus would later say is making “*disciples of all nations.*”

You see, Matthew has a point as he presents this call of the first disciples, for he omits the part about Jesus providing for these fishermen a miraculous haul of fish (Luke 5:1-11). He wants to make it clear that “no one becomes Jesus’ disciple by his own initiative” (Gibbs, 216). It is always God’s work—He does it. He calls disciples. He makes “*a people for His own possession*” out of “*not a people.*” He calls “*people walking in darkness*” “*out of [the] darkness into his marvelous light*” (Is. 9:2; 1 Pet. 2:9). When it comes to Jesus, it’s not the disciple that chooses the teacher, but the other way around, as Jesus would later teach His disciples: “*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit*” (John 15:16). “*I will make you fishers of men.*”

These disciples did begin to follow after Jesus and learn from Him. They had heard His preaching and had begun to believe, even if their faith did not have full knowledge of what their change of focus would mean. Surely these Galilean fishermen would not have been able to imagine what they would see and hear from this rabbi from Nazareth—miracles and teaching. Surely, they had no conception that following Jesus would mean watching Him be betrayed into the hands of sinful men and put to death. Surely they could not even guess that they would witness their leader rising from the dead. Surely, they had no idea that following after Jesus meant taking up their own cross, too.

You see, although knowledge is necessary for faith, understanding the whole counsel of God is not a prerequisite for faith. There are disciples young in their faith with budding knowledge of His ways. There are mature disciples who know much more and have experienced much more. Both young and mature are disciples: a faintly burning wick or a burning torch. Here, our disciples had “begun to acknowledge their *need* for conversion, their *need* to be saved, and they [had] begun to believe that through Jesus, the promised kingly saving deeds of God [had] broken into Israel’s history.” They had “begun to repent and believe” (Gibbs 216). They had begun to trust in Jesus — after all, they “*left everything and followed*” Him (Matt. 19:27).

So it is for us, whether we were called to be Jesus’ disciples as an infant through the waters of Holy Baptism, or later in life through someone proclaiming the marvelous words and deeds of Christ, there is God, as we pray, giving us the kingdom. Through these means, the Holy Spirit is working in our lives by His grace, to give birth to faith and strengthen it—for our life of faith is one of beginnings and growth in knowledge; it’s one of faltering and repenting and being restored in the forgiveness of sins; it’s one of enduring in faith, hoping in Christ, and rejoicing in the reign of Him who is near us.

Yes, this is God taking action in our lives, converting us and preserving us in the faith. It is, in the words of Martin Franzmann, God “confiscating man for Himself.” That’s what Jesus does with these disciples in the text and that’s what He does for us still today.

Therefore, let none of us boast. For I may preach today; and Rev. Zimmerman did last Sunday. But we point you to Jesus, to His cross, to His blood shed. And though the flesh may say, “*Folly,*” (1 Cor. 1:18), God by His Spirit gives us an “*Amen*” to say, for He takes the message of the cross and gives us His saving power through it. We are made disciples as we hear this message and understand it, as we give assent to it, and trust in Him who is the object of it all: Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Discipleship, faith, trust ... let us follow Jesus, assured that in that trust, we will be given boldness in our access to God, peace in our conscience, and joy in the Spirit. Our hearts will rest in “the promise of mercy even under the cross, in temptation, and finally even in death, holding fast the hope of the glory of God” (Chemnitz, Examen, 1:578).

So, rejoice, you disciples of Jesus: not in your own brilliance or wisdom or power, but in the power of God to save and convert you, to give you repentance and faith. “*Come; follow me,*” Jesus says to us still. Cast aside your earthly nets. Follow Him. In this life, we may not know where He will lead us, but we know the end. We know He will lead us at last to Himself in heaven and we will reign with Him in His kingdom, which has no end.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.