

From The Pastor

As we reflected on last Sunday's gospel, we said that it was not the norm for people to come to Jesus all by themselves. Rather, we hear and see the faith of others and are in some way inspired to seek Jesus more deeply for ourselves. Maturing in faith and a deeper experience of Jesus will inspire us to respond in some way to God's call that will bring others to him.

In a similar way, God's call does not come in a vacuum that immediately evokes a life changing response. God's call comes in the rhythm and movement of our lives through our faith and desire for the person of Jesus. In this context, today's gospel can be quite confusing and one that throws off balance our sense of how God might reveal his call in our lives.

It is not the norm for people to immediately leave what they are doing in a specific moment and follow God's call. It has happened, but it is not the norm. Today's gospel could perhaps be understood as our introduction to the disciples who had come to know and commit themselves to the Lord. It is clear that much more went on between these men and Jesus before they decided to take leave of their present lives to follow him. As we are introduced to these first disciples, we can none-the-less see what might be expected of us if we were to accept the Lord's call to follow. Although their response is portrayed as being immediate, we know from the gospel that it was only the beginning of a process of faith and conversion that would ultimately transform their lives.

Call and conversion come together. To hear and accept a call from God is a response to something that has stirred deeply within us. It is not typically a quick response to an immediate request; a ride to the store, for instance, for someone who cannot drive. This as an act of kindness, and not of itself what we mean by a response to God's call. Call comes from the heart that reveals a new identity in a person inspired by something or Someone larger than them self. Fearing change and uncertainty such a movement is often resisted, ignored.

This is where the conversion comes in. Conversion is a movement or change of heart due to an inspiration of love, or the revelation of some truth. Lofty as this may sound, it tends to happen in a very earthy and daily sort of way. God's call and the conversion that is necessary is rarely smooth, or without turmoil and resistance. The first reading is a prime example.

God calls Jonah to serve him in the conversion of Nineveh. The sub plot is that, in this call, is the conversion of Jonah himself. As we know, Jonah was not a willing participant in this plan of God. At first, when called to go to Nineveh, Jonah jumps on a ship that goes in the opposite direction. He is subsequently swallowed by a large fish and spit out on the shore. He mopes around complaining about his hatred for the Ninevites, and wants no part of their healing and conversion. God persists. The call is not because God *needs* Jonah to do this work; it is because it will serve the salvation of both the Ninevites and Jonah. God's call includes conversion; a change of heart that frees us from ourselves and our agendas for the purpose of serving God's wisdom and will.

Conversion is often met with resistance. We may be willing enough to do God's will or answer God's call, but to do it on God's terms and not our own is much more difficult. Jonah tries several times to do it his way, and it simply will not work. Blest and happy that a gum tree should spring up overnight to shade him from the blazing sun, Jonah is satisfied. When the tree withers and dies as quickly as it rose up, he curses it and sits pouting, mad at the world. This man needs help. He is an image of every man\woman. God's call on our life is for our healing, happiness, and wholeness. In that, God's purpose is served. Freed from a bitter, vengeful, and unforgiving heart, Jonah finally surrenders to the Lord, moves to accomplish the task, and is met with amazing results.

When we answer God's call on his terms and not our own, amazing things can happen. The disciples of Jesus were the same. The first item of business after they said yes to the call was the work of conversion. They had to learn who Jesus was, what he was about, and what it was he was truly asking of them. It is clear they had their own ideas along the way that Jesus patiently redirected to his true purpose. Peter is the prime example. In another gospel, Peter catches a great number of fish, and is humbled to say, 'leave me Lord, I am a sinful man'. This was the beginning of a conversion that ultimately revealed a faithful and powerful love for Jesus.

What is God's call on your life? What resistance or fear stands in the way of your response? God will not ask you to give up your life and all you know and love. He will call you to something that will give you joy, healing, and freedom for your happiness and his purpose. You may have to change your way of thinking or acting like Jonah, but whatever is surrendered will be replaced with something infinitely greater. What is your joy and deep desire in this life? What is your greatest fear or place of unfreedom? These are the places God will most often call us from for our freedom and peace.