

Go Forth...

A SERVICE OF U.S. CATHOLIC MISSION ASSOCIATION

MISSIONARY COMMENTARY

JESUS' INVITATION TO FELLOWSHIP



SUNDAY READINGS:

Isaiah 8:23-9:3

Psalm 27:1, 4, 13-14

I Corinthians 1:10-13, 17

Matthew 4:12-23

CALLED TO DISCIPLESHIP

Remarkably, there are few events in Jesus' life that are recorded in all four Gospels; however, Jesus' call of his disciples is one of those special events found in every Gospel (Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20, Luke 5:1-11; John 1:35-51). Discipleship emerges from God's initiative; we do not do the choosing as noted in John 15:16; Jesus says: "I chose you." We seek to respond to God's choice in committed faith.

Coincidentally, today is January 25, and our Sunday celebration replaces a significant feast in the Church's calendar: the Conversion of Saint Paul. Yet, there is an intimate connection between today's Gospel and Paul; both include the concept of vocation. Like the first disciples, Paul, an arch-persecutor of the Church, receives Jesus' call. He becomes the first great missionary to preach the Gospel to those outside the Jewish world in which Jesus lived.

A Personal Invitation. Jesus' followers are called by name; their names are provided in the New Testament (see passages given above; add Mark 3:13-19). Then we read in Acts 9:4: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" Subsequently, in Acts 13:9, Saul becomes known as Paul. In short, every disciple-apostle is personally known to the Lord. The Lord uses our unique person and identity to serve the preaching of the Gospel.

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A further dimension of discipleship is revealed when one realizes that it is a continuous relationship. We are to be intimate “constant companions” of Jesus. An authentic friendship develops and grows; see: John 15:14-15; 15:4-8; 15:13. In this sharing of life, the disciple encounters Jesus in numerous ways: personal prayer, scripture, sacraments, and the service of others, especially the little, least, lost, lonely, and last of our neighbors.

Called to Listen and Learn. The English word “disciple” comes from the Latin word *discens* (learning, listening). The humble disciple seeks to imbibe the teaching and perspective of Jesus (e.g. Importance of the Kingdom; God as Father; Centrality of Love). The 1973 song, *Day by Day* from the musical *Godspell*, captures the disciple’s attitude well. “Oh, Dear Lord, three things I pray, to: See thee more clearly, Love thee more dearly, Follow thee more nearly.”

Jesus’ disciples are ordinary persons in various roles (Matthew the tax collector; Peter the fisherman; Luke the doctor). Yes, disciples are mothers, fathers, teachers, farmers, drivers, nurses [we add our own name here]. In addition, “ordinary” also means not being perfect (weak faith, blind, argue, seek honors, jealous, sinful); see Matthew 20:20-28 (Zebedee’s Sons).

Renewing Our Commitment. Jesus’ disciples were not perfect; they failed their master; they abandoned him in the crisis moment of his passion. Yet, after the resurrection, Jesus lovingly comes to them and speaks of peace and reconciliation. They transmitted their profound, transforming experience to the Church’s memory. We can gain strength and renew our dedication, recognizing both our weaknesses and the overpowering, forgiving love of Jesus. Yes, we are called to become “ordinary saints,” “Christ’s beloved,” who recognize our personal sinfulness and yet possess a profound awareness of God’s love and grace.

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NOTES ON THE SUNDAY READINGS:

First Reading - Isaiah 8:23-9:3: The marvelously talented prophet Isaiah (Eighth Century, BC) supplies our first reading today. The reading comes from that section of his book where Isaiah speaks of the coming savior, “a great light” that will bring “abundant joy and great rejoicing.” The land of Zebulun and Naphtali, a territory occupied by Assyria, will be glorified by Emmanuel.

Responsorial Psalm - Psalm 27:1, 4, 13-14: This psalm selection speaks of the Lord as our light and salvation. He disbands all fear and brings rejoicing. This allows people to dwell in the house of the Lord and gaze on his loveliness. This experience encourages the faithful to stoutheartedly wait for the Lord with solid courage.

Second Reading - I Corinthians 1:10-13, 17: Today's reading from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians addresses the local church he founded during his eighteen-month stay in that city. He addresses the divisions that had emerged in this community, bluntly asking: “Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you?” Fostering unity is an important task for all of Christ's disciples.

Gospel - Matthew 4:12-23: Our Gospel today from Matthew describes Jesus beginning his public ministry by calling his first disciples, four fishermen. They were to leave their regular occupation and become “fishers of people.” It is remarkable that they left both their labor and even their loved one, their father. Undoubtedly, following Jesus requires faith and often demands making hard choices—even for a future that is not crystal clear.

Notes and Commentary by Maryknoller James H. Kroeger, who has recently published Walking with Pope Francis: The Official Documents in Everyday Language (Orbis Books) as well as Exploring Vatican II Treasures: Actors, Events, Insights and A Joyful Journey with Pope Francis (Faith Alive Books).

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