

Homily

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time

February 6, 2022

Who has ever been fishing? Who likes to fish? My dad took me fishing when I was a boy. And I took my boys fishing when they were young. It was a great way to spend time together and, if we were lucky, catch our dinner.

Now, who fishes for a living? Professional fishing isn't as common as it was in Jesus' time. Today, the most common professions are cashier, food prep, cleaning, bartender and food server. Odds are, if you aren't employed in one of these professions, you probably were at some point in your life, and you know someone in many, if not all, of them.

Two thousand years ago, besides fishing, the most common professions were blacksmith, coppersmith, carpenter and mason. These are building trades, working with their hands. And it is believed that, although Jesus and His earthly father were called carpenters, they actually worked with all types of building materials, such as stone and metal in addition to wood.

These common professions, whether two thousand years ago or today, are what keep the world moving, providing everyone with products and services we need to live full lives.

Seven of the twelve apostles were believed to be fishermen. Jesus chose men of everyday character, familiar to each of us, relatable because of the similarities we each have to all of them.

Peter was passionate and impetuous, speaking freely from the heart and often without thinking. We all know people like this; some of us may even be like this.

John was the One Whom Jesus Loved. In fact, he was loved by all, the only apostle who wasn't martyred because no one was willing to condemn him, exiling him instead to the island of Patmos. We wish more people could be like John; maybe you are like John, a good shoulder to cry on, someone who is easy to spend time with.

Thomas doubted, wanted proof, to see things with his own eyes. If Thomas lived today, he would have lived in Missouri, the Show-me state.

Paul was no exception; although not one of the original apostles, he was chosen, I believe, because of his tenacity, his drive, his determination. Paul got things done. If here today, we would stand at attention knowing he was going to say something profound and important, just as he did in today's second reading. We know people like Paul – maybe we are like Paul, commanding respect and attention.

We all can related to each of these men; we all know people like them; some of us are them.

I believe this is why Jesus chose them. Jesus didn't choose existing leaders of the Jewish people; he chose common folk, everyday people, people we can relate to.

We relate to them not only because of their personalities or their professions, but because of their failings and their goodness despite these failings. We all can relate to this.

One thing today's Gospel message does not show us are the people who didn't follow Jesus.

It's not shared with us in the Books of the Gospel how many people Jesus invited to follow Him. It's not shared with us how many people refused or rejected His invitation. I would imagine there were many. Just as John's Gospel tells us in the Bread of Life discourse, "...many of His disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied Him," there were many who never accepted His invitation to start with.

But we have that opportunity today. In fact, we have that opportunity every moment of every day. We have the opportunity to listen to the Word of God. We have the opportunity to love God and our neighbor as ourselves. We have the opportunity to receive and accept the gifts God has given us and produce good works. We have the opportunity to embrace the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist; to receive the God of the Universe right here, right now, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity.

And we have the opportunity to reject God's invitation. That is the beauty and the bitterness of God's greatest gift, the gift of Free Will. We choose. Every moment of every day, we choose.

However we choose, God still loves us. No matter how often we fail, God still loves us. Just as Peter failed before the Passion, Jesus loved him and Jesus loves us. Even when Peter warned Jesus in today's Gospel, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man," Jesus chose him and loved him. Even when we come before our Lord and Savior, heads bowed low, knees bent, knowing our faults and failings, Jesus chooses us, loves us, craves to be with us.

Jesus said to Peter in response, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." And Jesus says to us, "Do not be afraid; I am with you."

Still, it is up to us. No matter how much Jesus loves us, He loves us too much to go against our Free Will. It is up to us to say, "Yes," to Jesus. I believe that is the message of today's Gospel; say yes to Jesus, follow Him, know Him and He will do the rest. Surrender to Him. Pray that God will align our will to His and we can rest assured He will be with us for eternity.