

# Sunday Homily

## THIRD SUNDAY BEFORE ADVENT

7 NOVEMBER 2021

YEAR B

“And Jesus said to them, ‘Follow me...’  
And immediately they left their nets and followed him.”

Mark 1:17-18

### Illustration

Many of us will be familiar with the business of moving house. Perhaps the reason was a change of job, financial necessity or the need for more or less space. Moving is always a stressful time, but it can be exciting looking forward to new spaces and new opportunities. Equally, however, we may be leaving behind a much-loved home which holds precious memories. We cannot keep the old and the new; we have to make our choice.

### Gospel Teaching

According to today’s passage from Mark’s Gospel, John the Baptist has just died, and as his work comes to an end so Jesus’ ministry begins. But this very clear positioning in time, plain for anyone to see, is echoed by Jesus’ words, “The time is fulfilled...” Jesus looks beyond the march of purely human history to God’s timing, which has now come or “is fulfilled”. So as he walks by the Sea of Galilee he carries a sense of divine destiny and calls certain fishermen to “follow” him in his mission.

Since Jesus and the fishermen were all local boys, it seems likely they already knew each other, though the passage does not actually say so. Perhaps Mark expresses it as he does to emphasise the authority of Jesus’ call and the immediacy and willingness of the men’s obedience. But to appreciate the significance of this response we must consider not only what they are taking on but what they were prepared to leave behind.

Since the Sea of Galilee was well known for its fish, which were sold far beyond the local region, these fishermen probably had a stake in prosperous family firms, yet they were prepared to abandon them to follow Jesus. Mark tells us that the brothers Simon and Andrew leave their nets and so turn their backs on a major business investment. Meanwhile James and John respond in a similar way, leaving their “father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men”. For them Jesus represents a cause for which it is worth disrupting both business and family. How Zebedee felt about his sons’ departure we are not told, but could the presence of only “hired hands” with him suggest that all his hopes for the continuation of his

business within the family had rested on James and John? Their decision must surely have created waves, if not rocked the boat!

What was it, then, that Jesus was calling these new disciples to do? The expressions “fish for people” and the traditional “fishers of men” fit in with the narrative, but both have a rather uncomfortable feel of entrapment in English. The meaning, however, is plain: they were to join Jesus in calling others into the kingdom of God. Theirs would be an evangelistic role, drawing women and men to Christ and his kingdom in a way that firmly established the faith and the Church and enabled it to hold fast and develop over the last two thousand years.

## Application

While those fishermen were called to a unique foundational ministry, some Christians today are called to devote their lives to evangelism, and all believers should be ready to give account of their faith to whoever may take an interest. But we should not be too surprised if God calls us into areas that we never imagined: serving the Church in some capacity in a country other than our own, for example. Or we may sense that God wants us to use our professional or trade skills in new ways, perhaps teaching the underprivileged, or setting up a community project.

No matter what the challenge may be, the question is how we will respond. The first disciples had to make decisions which would to some extent loosen the ties that had secured their lives thus far – the “network” of family and business. In the same way, our response to God involves the same decisions over family and money and probably other factors as well. In spite of Mark’s picture of this move as a quick and impulsive one, we must doubt that it really was; more likely it was the product of extended heart-searching, a heart-searching that we too may have to experience at some point in our Christian lives.

One thing we can be sure of is that the fishermen of Galilee would have been amazed at where their decision took them in later years, and although some of them had a very tough death they certainly had exciting and eventful lives, and the knowledge that their work took place within God’s time. Are we ready for the challenge?