

Homily 3rd Sunday Ordinary Time 2024

I have a friend who is an ex-police officer and detective. In conversation I recently asked him what was the most frustrating aspect of his job? His response, after a few moments of reflection, wasn't pay and conditions, but his frustration at conflicting witness statements at a crime scene and at road traffic accidents. He added, 'It's absolutely amazing how different observers describe the same incident. The details of their accounts can be so varied that it's sometimes very difficult to establish the facts of what actually happened. Eventually, after long deliberations, you are usually able to get to the essence of the incident and establish the 'naked truth'

This week's call of the first disciples (Mk1:14-20) is similar to but also very different from John's version of events (Jn 1:35-42) contained in last Sunday's Gospel (Second Sunday in Ordinary Time).

The differences are:

1. In Mark, John the Baptist is already in prison when Jesus calls the first disciples whilst in John it is The Baptist who introduces Andrew and an anonymous disciple to Jesus as, 'The Lamb of God'
2. In Mark Jesus is himself already preaching repentance and the closeness of The Kingdom of God whilst there is no mention of this in John
3. In John it is the disciples who take the initiative based on The Baptist's instructions and follow Jesus but in Mark it is Jesus who actively calls the disciples
4. In Mark Peter is with Andrew when they are both called whereas in John, Andrew goes and tells Peter the next day that he has met The Messiah
5. In John, Jesus asks the disciples, 'What do you want?' but in Mark there is no mention of this nor of an invitation to 'Come and see.'
6. In Mark Andrew and Peter are called whilst they were fishing yet in John they are not at their nets
7. In John when Jesus meets Simon he tells him, 'You are Simon, son of Jonah and from now you will be called Cephas meaning rock.' whilst in Mark Jesus tells both, 'Come follow me and I will make you fishers of men.'

So how do we explain these differences? First of all I would say that the differences are not significant in the callings themselves. Secondly, I would suggest that the nuances have something to do with the audiences for which each Gospel is written, Mark for a mainly Jewish audience and John for a wider Hellenistic Greek speaking audience. Thirdly, both Evangelists were writing with different theological aims in mind. Finally, the essence of the calling remains intact - and the similarities in both accounts support this:

1. John the Baptist's presence and preaching have influence on the people both prior to and at the beginning of Jesus public ministry
2. The named disciples Andrew and Peter are consistent in each version though John and James are also called by the seashore in Mark and Philip and Nathaniel in John
3. The calling of the disciples demands a radical life-direction change and an unqualified option for the poor
4. The Calling in both accounts coincides with the advent of The Kingdom of God which the followers of Jesus are called to proclaim it in a special way

Today we are called by name to discipleship. We are being asked, 'What do you really want from Jesus?'. We are invited to 'come and see' and learn from Jesus' example. We are called to follow 'The Lamb of God who takes upon himself the sins of the world.' We are urged to encourage others to join us in the mission of Jesus. We are expected to leave our old ways and focus on the most vulnerable, lifting 'heavy burdens' from their shoulders. We are called to preach The Kingdom of God and in the words of St Francis of Assisi, 'If you must then use words!'

The Two Accounts of The Calling of The First Disciples

(John 1:35-42)

'We have found the Messiah'

As John stood with two of his disciples, Jesus passed, and John stared hard at him and said, 'Look, there is the lamb of God.' Hearing this, the two disciples followed Jesus. Jesus turned round, saw them following and said, 'What do you want?' They answered, 'Rabbi,' – which means Teacher – 'where do you live?' 'Come and see' he replied; so they went and saw where he lived, and stayed with him the rest of that day. It was about the tenth hour. One of these two who became followers of Jesus after hearing what John had said was Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter. Early next morning, Andrew met his brother and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' – which means the Christ – and he took Simon to Jesus. Jesus looked hard at him and said, 'You are Simon son of John; you are to be called Cephas' – meaning Rock.

(Mark 1:14-20)

'I will make you into fishers of men.'

After John had been arrested, Jesus went into Galilee. There he proclaimed the Good News from God. 'The time has come' he said 'and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News.'

As he was walking along by the Sea of Galilee he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net in the lake – for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you into fishers of men.' And at once they left their nets and followed him. Going on a little further, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John; they too were in their boat, mending their nets. He called them at once and, leaving their father Zebedee in the boat with the men he employed, they went after him.