



SECOND SUNDAY OF MATTHEW JUNE 26

THE GOSPEL READING

Matthew 4:18-23

[The First Disciples]

At that time, as Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left their boat and their father, and followed him. And he went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people.

THE SERMON

The Gospel reading describes how Christ calls Peter, Andrew, James, and John to follow Him. He calls the first disciples to leave their families behind, leave their work behind, and become fishermen of souls. As Saint John Chrysostom remarks that "He who casts his net into the water knows not what fishes he shall take, so the teacher casts the net of the divine word upon the people, not knowing who among them will come to God." Jesus takes the first disciples with Him as He teaches and preaches His Gospel, as He presents the Good News of God's plan for the salvation of the world, healing people along the



way.

What the Gospel is describing can seem rather strange to us. Leaving everything behind and following the Lord may seem disconnected from our daily reality, which is filled with family and professional responsibilities. There is, however, tremendous purpose in being presented with concrete examples of apostles who followed Him, who left everything behind to preach His word, the word of God. Some two thousand years later, we are also called to reflect on our *own* calling to follow Him. We are called to consider how we may respond to His invitation, and how we can participate in the mission of the Church.

It may be tempting to think that this call to discipleship does not really apply equally to everyone. Perhaps it relates only to those who are called to serve the Church in a more specialized capacity, such as priests or monastics. However, the call to discipleship is universal and applies to *all* of us, *without exception*. The Church often presents us, each one of us, with specific invitations to participate in the apostolic mission of the Church. We might mistakenly think that only clergy truly participate in the ministry of the Holy Church. That clergy are more valuable than the laity, a “higher class of Christians.” Nothing could be further from the truth.

Apostle Paul tells the Corinthians that “...there are varieties of services but the same Lord...” (1 Corinthians 12:5). We are *all* called to participate in the Apostolic ministry, not just the clergy. The clergy are those who serve at the Holy Altar as the leaders of the eucharistic community. But this does not mean the ministries of the Philoptochos, parish councils, religious education, youth, and so on are in any way inferior to the clergy. We are *one* laity, in the *one* Body of Christ. The very word, laity, comes from the Greek, laos (λαός), which means *people*. We are all the laos of God, both those who serve at the Holy Altar and those who serve in other capacities. In fact, in the word liturgy (λειτουργία in Greek), the first part is derived from the word laos (λαός). So Liturgy means *the work of the people* (λαός + ἔργον = λειτουργία).

Apostle Paul goes on to tell the Corinthians that “Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body” (1 Corinthians 12:14-15). He explains that we can not all have the same ministry in the Holy Church, because the Lord’s Church needs a variety of ministries to make it whole. Our Lord’s Church needs clergy, of course, *and* it just as equally needs each of us to participate in the ministry, in the service to which God has called us. Without the laity (laos), the people, the Body of Christ is not complete. Each of us is invaluable to the Church and God.

Just as our Lord called Peter, James, John, and Andrew, so He now calls each of us, all of us, to offer our talents to the Holy Church. Let us ask ourselves what we can do to participate in the Church’s ministry, to serve our parish? What are we good at professionally? How about academically? Or what hobbies do we excel in? The point is, the Church most definitely needs each of us, just as it needs the clergy, just as the Church needed the

Apostles. We, though many, are *one* Body in Christ, with diverse and critical ministries in our parishes so that the evangelization of the Holy Gospel can continue to grow unhindered.

God bestows everything to us. He provides for all of creation. Our very selves and everything around us come from God. Participating in the laity of Christ means reconciling ourselves with God. It means uniting ourselves to Christ. We are all called to ministry through the sacrament of baptism, through our initiation into the faith. We are all called not in general terms, but specifically. Some are called to serve in the altar as clergy and altar servers. Or to support the Church services as chanters. Others help run and grow the Church through the parish council, religious educators, and youth leaders. And we are all called to help those in need, through the Philoptochos. Christ calls everyone to a role. And if you are unsure how you can help, pray on it, ask your spiritual father, or speak with one of the numerous ministries in our Church.

Most importantly, God calls us to live our faith. Not only when in Church, but everywhere we go, with everyone we meet. To be shining examples, to be disciples of Christ. As Christ says, everyone will know you are My disciples because of your love for each other (John 13:35).

Finding our place in the Church means opening ourselves up to all the blessings and resources the Church makes available to us. Living in Christ is not only relevant for when we pass on from this life on earth. As persons created in the image and likeness of God, we are blessed with a certain potential. Christ came into the world to help us unlock this potential for our own benefit, for the benefit of those around us, and for the benefit of society. As we grow in the faith, we are called to help those around us do the same, and by doing so, we get even closer to reaching our own ultimate potential, which is to be with God, always and forever.

God is love, perfect love. Therefore, salvation cannot be viewed merely as a personal matter. It is difficult to reconcile salvation when people around us are suffering. But we are all in this *together*. Let us take the opportunity, let us make an effort, to better understand what the Church is presenting to us in terms of how we approach life, how we approach others, how we approach God Himself. Let us open ourselves to discerning our specific role in the Church's apostolic mission. Let us answer the Lord's call to follow Him just like the first disciples, to become *fishers of souls*, now and forever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.