

Homily, Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A

Not long after I arrived at St Francis of Assisi, and seeing the fraternal love among parishioners, I came to the conclusion that the people of the parish are of one family and one love. Please remain that way. Let not what St Paul lamented in the second reading be found among us. At that time, the Corinthians were very disunited and divided into different opposing camps. Some claimed to belong to Paul, some claimed to belong to Apollos, some claimed to belong to Cephas, and some claimed to belong to Christ. The camps competed for superiority against one another.

These sayings are true: United we stand but divided we fall. United we progress but divided we retrogress. United we achieve and win but divided we lose. In unity is strength but in division is weakness. When we are united, anguish flies away, and darkness is dispelled. In disunity are gloom, distress and unhappiness. When we are united we see great light. When united, every yoke or burden can be managed or handled well; because there are strength and support in unity. We need to know this as a parish. We need to know this in our families. We need to know this in our communities. We need to know this in our country, especially nowadays there seems to be fear of all kinds of division. Jesus warns us in Matthew 12:25, "Every kingdom divided against itself will be laid waste, and no town or house divided against itself will stand."

According to today's Gospel reading, the first four of Jesus' disciples were fishermen: Peter and his brother Andrew; and James and John, sons of Zebedee. Why didn't Jesus call his disciples, at least the first ones from scholars of the Scriptures or from learned men or from men of reputable professions or from the influential political class of that time? Rather, he began with poor and humble fishermen. Jesus wants to teach us something: The work of evangelization and call to discipleship are not determined by class or paper qualification or human thinking, but determined by the Holy Spirit in the individual. For men and women, might is power, but for Jesus, Holy Spirit is power. It is also symbolic that Jesus called fishermen first because the work of evangelization and call to discipleship are like the traditional way of fishing and all the hazards involved. Just like traditional fishing is a tough work that requires tough people, that is the way the work of evangelization and call to discipleship is a tough work that requires tough people. The humble and poor fishermen were, no doubt, tough men filled with the Holy Spirit. Their toughness is even reflected in the nicknames Jesus gave three of them. Jesus called Peter 'rock' (Matthew 16:18); and he called James and John 'sons of thunder' (Mark 3:17). I wonder whether Jesus has a nickname for me! What qualities do I have to merit a nickname from Jesus?

Jesus says, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men." Jesus is saying, "Do you want to be an effective evangelizer and an effective and true disciple? You have to have some of the qualities of good fishermen." Some of the qualities are:

- Fishermen are people who persevere and not easily discouraged. Fishermen are also patient people. One can only persevere if the person is patient. They cast their net and wait patiently. They keep trying, again and again. A disciple, like the fishermen, must not be discouraged in times when there seems to be little or no result. James 1:12, "Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised those who love him."
- Fishermen are courageous people. While others are resting and sleeping, they spent nights in the waters, many times under very bad weather. They are not afraid of darkness, storms, tide and water creatures. They take many risks. Anyone who is not courageous and fearless, and who is not able to risk his life cannot be an effective disciple.
- Serious fishermen fish in the deep waters. They go beyond the shallow area. In Luke 5:4 Jesus said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." Jesus is inviting us to get serious. But we can choose to remain at the shallow level year in year out.

To conclude, Jesus looking down on me now, will he see some of these qualities of fishermen? Again, what nickname will Jesus give me: unity or disunity; white or black, or child of God; light or darkness; patience or impatience; courage or discouragement; perseverance or low energy; fearless or fearful; shallow or deep?

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