

GOSPEL

MATTHEW 4:12-23

Hearing that John had been arrested Jesus went back to Galilee, and leaving Nazareth he went and settled in Capernaum, a lakeside town on the borders of Zebulun and Naphtali. In this way the prophecy of Isaiah was to be fulfilled:

‘Land of Zebulun! Land of Naphtali! Way of the sea on the far side of Jordan, Galilee of the nations! The people that lived in darkness has seen a great light; on those who dwell in the land and shadow of death a light has dawned.’

From that moment Jesus began his preaching with the message, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand’. As he was walking by the Sea of Galilee he saw two brothers, Simon, who was called Peter, and his brother Andrew; they were making a cast in the lake with their net, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, ‘Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.’ And they left their nets at once and followed him.”

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

Today’s Gospel passage recounts the beginning of Jesus’ preaching in Galilee. He leaves Nazareth, a village in the mountains, and settles in Capernaum, an important centre on the lakeshore, inhabited largely by pagans, a crossroads between the Mediterranean and the Mesopotamian inland. This choice indicates that the beneficiaries of his preaching are not only his compatriots, but those who arrive in the cosmopolitan “Galilee of the Gentiles”: that’s what it was called. Seen from the capital Jerusalem, that land is geographically peripheral and religiously impure because it was full of pagans, having mixed with those who did not belong to Israel. Great things were not expected from Galilee for the history of salvation. Instead, right from there — precisely from there — radiated that “light” on which we meditated in recent Sundays: the light of Christ. It radiated right from the periphery.

Jesus’ message reiterates that of the Baptist, announcing the “kingdom of heaven”. This kingdom does not involve

the establishment of a new political power, but the fulfillment of the Covenant between God and his people, which inaugurates a season of peace and justice. To secure this covenant pact with God, each one is called to convert, transforming his or her way of thinking and living. This is important: converting is not only changing the way of life but also the way of thinking. It is a transformation of thought. It is not a matter of changing clothing, but habits! What differentiates Jesus from John the Baptist is the way and manner. Jesus chooses to be an itinerant prophet. He doesn’t stay and await people, but goes to encounter them. Jesus is always on the road! His first missionary appearances take place along the lake of Galilee, in contact with the multitude, in particular with the fishermen. There Jesus does not only proclaim the coming of the kingdom of God, but seeks companions to join in his salvific mission. In this very place he meets two pairs of brothers: Simon and Andrew, James and John. He calls them, saying: “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men”. The call reaches them in the middle of their daily activity: the Lord reveals himself to us not in an extraordinary or impressive way, but in the everyday circumstances of our life. There we must discover the Lord; and there he reveals himself, makes his love felt in our heart; and there — with this dialogue with him in the everyday circumstances of life — he changes our heart. The response of the four fishermen is immediate and willing: “Immediately they left their nets and followed him”. We know, in fact, that they were disciples of the Baptist and that, thanks to his witness, they had already begun to believe in Jesus as the Messiah.

We, today’s Christians, have the joy of proclaiming and witnessing to our faith because there was that first announcement, because there were those humble and courageous men who responded generously to Jesus’ call. On the shores of the lake, in an inconceivable land, the first community of disciples of Christ was born. May the knowledge of these beginnings give rise in us to the desire to bear Jesus’ word, love and tenderness in every context,

even the most difficult and resistant. To carry the Word to all the peripheries! All the spaces of human living are soil on which to cast the seeds of the Gospel, so they may bear the fruit of salvation.

May the Virgin Mary help us with her maternal intercession to respond joyfully to Jesus’ call, and to place ourselves at the service of the Kingdom of God.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What do you think of when you hear the word repent – does it evoke positive or negative images or feelings in you?
- As Jesus starts his ministry he preaches repentance. He does throughout the Gospels, and then charges the apostles and the Church to do the same at his ascension. Why is it so central to the Christian life?
- Do you have any nets you need to abandon, or let go of so you can ‘follow’ Jesus and more deliberately, and proclaim the kingdom of God, and what Jesus has done for you?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. “Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray”)
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others’ prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the ‘Glory Be’ or similar prayer.