

**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.

Going on from there he saw another pair of brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John; they were in their boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. At once, leaving the boat and their father, they followed him.

He went round the whole of Galilee teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the Good News of the kingdom and curing all kinds of diseases and sickness among the people.

**REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS**
*23 January, 2022*

The Gospel from today's liturgy (Mt 4:12-23) narrates the call of the first disciples who, along the lake of Galilee, leave everything to follow Jesus. He had already met some of them, thanks to John the Baptist, and God had placed the seed of faith within them (cf. Jn 1:35-39). And this is when Jesus goes back to look for them where they live and work. The Lord always looks for us. The Lord always draws near to us, always. This time, he extends a direct call to them: "Follow me!" (Mt 4:19). And "immediately they left

their nets and followed him" (v. 20). Let us take a moment to reflect on this scene: it is the moment of the decisive encounter with Jesus, one they would remember their entire lives and that would be included in the Gospel. From then on, they follow Jesus. And in order to follow him, they leave.

To leave so as to follow. It is always like this with Jesus. One can begin in some way to feel his appeal, perhaps because of others. Then the awareness can become more personal and can kindle a light in the heart. It becomes something beautiful to share: "You know, that passage from the Gospel struck me... That experience of service touched me..." — something that touches your heart. And this is what the first disciples might have done (cf. Jn 1:40-42). But sooner or later, the moment comes in which it is necessary to leave so as to follow (cf. Lk 11:27-28). And this is when a decision has to be made: Do I leave behind some certainties and embark on a new adventure, or do I remain where and as I am? This is a decisive moment for every Christian because the meaning of everything else is at stake here. If one does not find the courage to set out on the journey, the risk is to remain a spectator of one's own existence and to live the faith halfway.

To stay with Jesus, therefore, requires the courage to leave, to set out on the journey. What must we leave behind? Certainly, our vices and our sins, which are like anchors that hold us at bay and prevent us from setting sail. To begin to leave, it is only right that we begin by asking forgiveness — forgiveness for the things that were not beautiful. I leave these things and move forward. But it is also necessary to leave behind what holds us back from living fully, for example, fear, selfish calculations, the guarantees that come from staying safe, just getting by. It also means giving up the time wasted on many useless things. How beautiful it is to leave all this in order to experience, for example, the tiring but rewarding risk of service, or to dedicate time to prayer so as to grow in friendship with the Lord. I am also thinking of a young family who leaves behind a quiet life to open themselves up to the unpredictable and beautiful adventure of motherhood and fatherhood. It is a sacrifice, but just one look at a child is enough to understand that it was the right choice to leave

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behind certain rhythms and comforts to have this joy. I am also thinking of certain professionals, for example, doctors or healthcare workers, who gave up a lot of free time to study and prepare themselves, and who do good, dedicating many hours day and night, and spend so much physical and mental energy for the sick. I think of workers who leave behind convenience, leave pleasant idleness in order to put food on the table. In short, to live life, we have to accept the challenge of leaving. Today Jesus extends this invitation to each of us.

And with regards to this, I leave you with some questions. First of all: Can I remember a “strong moment” in which I have already encountered Jesus? Each of us can think of their own story — in my life, has there been a significant moment when I encountered Jesus? And, is there something beautiful and significant that happened in my life because I left other less important things? And today, is there something Jesus asks me to give up? What are the material things, ways of thinking, attitudes I need to leave behind so as to truly say “yes”? May Mary help us to respond with a total “yes” to God, like she did, to know how to leave behind so as to follow him better. Do not be afraid to leave if it is to follow Jesus. We will always find that we are better.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



**Head:** What does this Gospel teach us about what it truly means to “follow” Jesus — and why must it always involve leaving something behind?



**Heart:** When have you felt Jesus calling you to take a step of faith or let go of something comfortable — and how did that experience shape your heart?



**Hands:** What concrete step could you take this week to follow Jesus more closely — perhaps by leaving behind fear, comfort, or distraction — and trusting him more deeply?

## 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 (for example, “Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray”)
3. Offer 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 praying the ‘Glory Be’.