

Homily for the 3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Have you ever been in a situation before where you had to do something you just felt like you could never do? I remember one summer I was down with my family for a week of vacation on the eastern shore of Maryland. We rented this big old farm house right on an inlet to the Chesapeake Bay. Well, one day I decided to take a sturdy raft down the inlet out towards the Bay to see a nest of Bald Eagles. It was a beautiful trip out, gently oaring my way along. However, when I could see the opening of the channel leading out to the Bay filled with rapids, I thought my nice tour was now over – time to go home. Unfortunately, unbeknownst to me, the reason why it was so easy to paddle out, was because the current was moving out to the Bay, perhaps during low tide. So upon trying to turn around and paddle home, I got nowhere – other than further downstream. Now, of course, the first thing they tell you to do is NOT to panic – hmm – easier said than done. So, when the oars were doing absolutely nothing, I got myself to the side of the inlet, and pulled myself ashore with the help of sea grasses. Hoping for ‘terra firma’, I instead found goopy mud that smelled like rotten eggs, teeming with flies. But I had no choice, and so I began to walk. And although I could see the house from where I was, between the miserable conditions and the blazing sun, the going was so slow that I began to panic – wondering if I ever would get home. Fortunately, after 45 minutes of relentless, determined effort, I finally made it back – drained and a couple minutes short of heat exhaustion. Needless to say, a mistake I will (hopefully) never make again!

Now, if you would told me the exact conditions of what I would have gone through before I actually experienced it, I would have told you, there was no way I would have been able to do it – at all. But, during the experience of it all, I was just so desperate to survive, I knew I had NO other options.

I wonder if Simon Peter and Andrew, James and John, and the other first disciples of Jesus ever had a similar experience in the following way. These four men – arguably the closest Disciples of Jesus of Nazareth – were nothing other than plain old ordinary fishermen. That’s it. That was their training. That was their life. And yet, decades later, these un-educated, simple men would be the first Pope and bishops of the Church, travelling the known world, preaching the Gospel, and continuing the ministry of Jesus Christ. Had they known, at the moment when they first dropped their nets, and followed Jesus what they would eventually have been called to do – including giving their very lives for the faith they preached – would they have even been willing to do so?

The Son of God called them to be so much more and to do so much more with their lives – not just to catch fish in the Sea of Galilee for the bellies of their consumers, but to catch a bountiful harvest of men and women all over the world for God the Father. So sure, they could have kept sailing their boats around the lake, just like I could have kept paddling my raft upstream against the current – but, what an exercise in futility! Life is not about doing what we’ve always done because that’s what we’ve always done. It’s about being desperate enough to change for the better!

Desperation. If I wasn't desperate enough to try something else to get me home safely, I'm not sure I'd of made it. And if those fishermen weren't desperate for a better life – in particular for the eternal life that Jesus came to promise them – they would have joylessly continued on in their presumably unfilled lives. The same could be said of our lives of faith. Until we get desperate – realizing that Jesus is the ONLY Way, Truth, and Life – we will not really get what faith and church and religion is all about. Until we desperately surrender our lives to Him and give up trying to be children of this world and children of God at the same time, we will continue to be without the deep abiding peace that Jesus wants to give us. And until we get desperate enough to really become disciples of the Lord Jesus, we will largely remain spectators on the sideline with little desire to get more involved.

My brothers and sisters, perhaps as St. Paul says in our second reading today, “the time is running out” and “the world in its present form is passing away”. If so – and this is always the case in every age of history – then we should drop, not just our nets, but everything, to make growing in a real relationship with God a priority. God became man in the person of Jesus, taking on human flesh, so that we could have a real, personal relationship with God. He invites each of us to come after Him – to follow Him daily. Will we? We always can. But we only will when we become desperate enough. God bless you.