



Bringing Home the Word

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

January 26, 2020

His First Followers

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

We began the Church year with the foundations of our Christian life. We focused on our baptismal call to preach the word of God. Now we focus on the call of the first apostles.

The last part of today's Gospel reading, about Jesus calling his first disciples, is displayed in a painting in the Sistine Chapel, *Calling of the Apostles* by Domenico Ghirlandaio. In the artwork, The Sea of Galilee spreads out behind Jesus, who is front and center. Several towns line the shore and remind us of Capernaum, where Jesus lived and near the area where he called his first followers.

Two apostles kneel in front of Jesus; another pair stand behind him. Their gestures and postures reveal their interior attitudes. One apostle crosses his arms in acceptance while another prayerfully looks up at Jesus. The third apostle, behind Jesus, has his hand at his chest as if to say, "Are you sure you want me?" The fourth seems to look away. Many others surround Jesus, but not all of them are called to be apostles.

The call of Jesus is real. He may not ask us to leave behind our business or family, but he does ask for the same totality of trust and following. The result of fully saying yes to this call is what the first reading proclaims: "You have brought them abundant joy / and great rejoicing; / They rejoice before you as people rejoice at harvest..." (Isaiah 9:2). The Joy of the Gospel that Pope Francis proclaimed in his 2013 apostolic exhortation is exactly this: that joy that comes from a sincere and generous yes to Jesus' call to be a disciple. +

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A Word from Pope Francis

It deeply troubles me when I see a timetable in a parish: "From such a time to such a time." ...Don't worry about the timetable: have the courage to look past the timetable. In this way, dear deacons, if you show that you are available to others, your ministry will not be self-serving, but evangelically fruitful.

—Jubilee of deacons, May 29, 2016



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Jesus asks us to leave all and put him first. How can I do that better this week?
- Am I listening for God's call in my day-to-day life?

Sunday Readings

Isaiah 8:23—9:3

The people who walked in darkness / have seen a great light.

1 Corinthians 1:10—13, 17

Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

Matthew 4:12—23 or 4:12—17

From that time on, Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Elected By God

By Richard Rohr, OFM

God is always selecting people in the Bible, but in disconcerting ways. There seems to be no previous preparation or proven holiness—often not even willingness among those specially chosen.

Biblical chosenness does not seem to mean that we are anything special; instead, it reminds us of the specialness all creatures share. It is seldom saying we are especially good; it is always saying God is good. It is never saying that we are inherently qualified for chosenness but that God wants

to give us an experience of unearned chosenness or “beloved” status. That way we can know what chosenness really feels like and can better communicate that experience to others.

Starting with the Chosen People themselves, beloved status prepares them to communicate it to the whole world. God chose the Jews not because he loved them better than anybody, but to lead them through a forty-year training exercise so they could be a transformative template that would challenge all religion in every age.

Yet the history of religion is that most of us refuse to go on the full journey and, instead, stay deadlocked at early-stage superiority. We somehow believe that we are chosen, right, saved. But often, this

belief does not progress into a generative journey for others—a sympathy for others’ journeys or a belief in the beauty of other religions.

Biblical election is an inclusive chosenness because it is dealing with an infinite God in whom all things cohere. Egocentric chosenness is always exclusive and arrogant, as if there wasn’t enough to go around.

Mary: Archetype of Chosenness

All the chosen figures I know from the Bible—Moses, Jacob, Joseph, Esther, Judith, Peter,

Paul—are flawed individuals unprepared for God’s call. They are chosen in their lowliness. There is only one case where the pattern is seemingly different, although it is not really different as much as distilled, concise, and utterly clear.

Mary, the Mother of Jesus, is the archetype of chosenness. The Greek word that is used when Gabriel visits Mary (Luke 1:29) is a rare verb form that could be translated: “Hail, Chosenness Itself!” Favor says much more about the one doing the favoring than the one receiving the favor. All we can do is receive chosenness. All we can do is accept that we are accepted, which is harder than we think! This becomes the central biblical theme of grace.



WEEKDAY READINGS

January 27–February 1

Monday, Weekday:

2 Sm 5:1–7, 10 / Mk 3:22–30

Tuesday, St. Thomas Aquinas:

2 Sm 6:12b–15, 17–19 / Mk 3:31–35

Wednesday, Weekday:

2 Sm 7:4–17 / Mk 4:1–20

Thursday, Weekday:

2 Sm 7:18–19, 24–29 / Mk 4:21–25

Friday, St. John Bosco:

2 Sm 11:1–4a, 5–10a, 13–17 / Mk 4:26–34

Saturday, Weekday:

2 Sm 12:1–7a, 10–17 / Mk 4:35–41

Ideal Vessel

Until Mary, most of the central chosen Bible figures were men. In Mary we have the ideal vessel, who personifies the state of perfectly received favor from God. There is nothing in the biblical text that says she was worthy, prepared, or had earned this favor. It is given by God, and her glory is that she accepts being used as a “handmaid.”

Mary knows her Jewish tradition, and knows how God works. She knows how Yahweh, the God of Israel, consistently chooses an enslaved race, forgotten sons, barren women, and unprepared laypeople so they can revel in their totally gratuitous election. And God gets all the glory! Mary knows that it is always a statement of God’s goodness, not ours. As some later mystics put it, it is almost as if God was waiting for a perfectly receptive bride—and God found her in Mary of Nazareth. She receives the Divine Kiss, and swoons in gratitude and fertility: Jesus. That is all. That is everything.

“The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name” (Luke 1:49) becomes her motto. Mary looked at God’s goodness and refused to be preoccupied with her own. +



Lord, you are the source of peace and unity. Fill me with the desire and courage to be your instrument of peace and love.

—From *Peaceful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time*,
Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney