

Bishop's Reflection – Third Sunday

When it comes to God, we often put him on hold, “not now God, I’m busy” – “later, perhaps, at the end of my day” or, even, “when the end of my days are near.” Jesus’ opening words in Mark’s Gospel may stand out in stark contrast, “Now is the time... This is the moment”. Jesus is laying claim to the present!

And what does he tell us? “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” And, just in case we do not understand what repentance or believing requires of us, the Gospel of Mark presents us with two clear examples: the response of Simon and Andrew, and the response of James and John.

Notice how Jesus’ call to them requires a change in their lives, a change that is immediate and life altering. They need to leave things behind, so that what they are presently doing is transformed. Their encounter with Christ changes their lives; they can no longer go back to their former ways, no more than an adult can return to being a child.

Most of us, on hearing this Gospel, conclude, “it has nothing to do with me.” Surely, God is not asking me to leave my profession, my role as spouse, parent or member of this community, and start over. Sure, this might be asked for in exceptional circumstances, but not as a general norm. And yet, if we understand Christ’s invitation as a call to re-orient our lives as a spouse, parent, professional and/or community member, to be focused on people and not on things, on the kingdom of God and not our own little fiefdoms, then we, too, may have to leave some things behind, including the temptation to run in the opposite direction, as was Jonah’s initial response.

Notice how Jesus never told them to leave their fishing nets; they do this instinctively, as if they knew. The same is true with us; we don’t have to be told what we need to leave behind, it is self-evident. It is that one thing that holds us back, that prevents us from offering our particular work and ministry to the service of God’s kingdom and the people entrusted to our care.

You can put on all the sackcloth you want, as in our First Reading, and fast as if there was no tomorrow, but you would still miss the point. So often we think it is a matter of taking on a greater spiritual rigour or putting on a greater display, when it is rather a matter of leaving behind what has become an obstacle and refocusing our hearts on the kingdom of God.

What is the end result? Christ-centered marriages, families as schools of discipleship, parishes witnessing Christ’s love to the community and an increased focus on prayer, healing, service, generosity and sacrifice when considering one’s call from God and one’s specific ministry in the community.

Jesus continues to walk by workplaces, schools and each of our homes today. The time is now, the kingdom of God is near at hand, let us not dilly-dally, as if it has nothing to do with us, but let us heed the call, let us follow him, let us let go of that which holds us back, and joyfully witness to God’s kingdom that Christ has brought near.