

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year A

[Is. 9:1-4; 1 Cor. 1:10-3, 17-8; Mt. 4:12-23]

Excerpts from Pope Francis – *Angelus* - 22 January 2023

by Father Charles Fillion

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Brothers and sisters, it is always amazing to hear 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. And this is when Jesus goes back to look for them where they live and work. The Lord always looks for us. 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). Would you be able to leave everything and follow Jesus? 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. But sooner or later, the moment comes in which it is necessary *to leave so as to follow*. 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 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”?

Let us ask the Mother Mary to 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 with Jesus.