

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time  
January 25-26, 2020  
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There's been a lot going on this week!

Impeachment proceedings in DC. Pasion-inducing proposals in our own general assembly. A police officer killed in Newport News. Flooding rains in Pennsylvania.

And here at Saint Mary's, the last 8 days have been very full. We celebrated a funeral for a woman in her 60's who had ALS, and a man who lived to be 98 and a half. We had a Mass for life on Monday. A busload of parishioners went to the March for Life on Friday. We celebrated a wedding Saturday. Our school community prepared for Catholic Schools week. The poor were fed. The sick were visited.

And on Tuesday, I went to MCV hospital to baptize a three month old member of our parish. He has a cancer that is found in one out of every 2 million children. The baptism was beautiful. Pray for a little boy named John.

If you have ever visited MCV hospital, you know that getting out of there is harder than getting out of purgatory!

In fact, I ended up wandering in an unfamiliar hallway. A woman came up to me. She could tell I was a Catholic priest. She pointed at my collar.

She was speaking in Spanish, and what little Spanish I know was not enough for me to understand. She was upset. I assumed a family member was sick.

Then, I saw a brother priest walking down the hallway. He speaks Spanish. I gestured and he came over. He spoke to the woman and off they went.

I was grateful to God that my brother priest showed up just when he was needed. On my drive home, I called another priest to tell him about what had happened.

During the conversation, I kept saying, "I admire that priest. He started learning Spanish when he was in his 30's. And every year, he uses vacation time to study more Spanish. He has worked hard to learn the language. I wish I knew the language."

After the 6<sup>th</sup> time that I said, "I admire him," the priest on the phone said to me, "I know – you *admire* him. But you're not willing to follow his example."

I was silent.

You see, if I *admire* the priest who learned Spanish, that is *safe*. It doesn't require any work or change from me.

But, to *follow* his example... that would require *work* on my part. Am I ready for that much change?

When Jesus started preaching in Galilee, lots of people *admired* him. But soon, Jesus made it clear that he was not just seeking admirers. He is seeking disciples, people who will *follow* him.

Matthew tells us that Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee. He saw Simon Peter and Andrew, working hard. Jesus called out, "Come after me." They immediately left their nets and followed Jesus. A little while later Jesus called James and John: "follow me!" Immediately they left their father and their boat, and followed Jesus.

Peter, Andrew, James and John were *disciples* of Jesus. They followed him. Mary, his mother, and Mary of Magdala, *they* were *disciples* who followed Jesus.

Jesus called, and they followed him *everywhere*. They stayed with him. They were willing to let go of what was familiar, in order to follow him. That's what *disciples* do. They are willing to embrace the hard work that leads to change. Jesus makes that change possible.

Matthew also introduce another group of people to us. He calls them "the crowd." The crowd is full of people who *admire* Jesus. They are thrilled by his preaching. They are awestruck by his miracles.

But, when the going gets tough...they abandon Jesus. A "crowd" of admirers shouted "Hosanna" to Jesus on Palm Sunday – but on Good Friday the "crowd" shouted "Crucify him."

So, who does God NEED us to be in 2020?

*Admirers* of Jesus come to church once a week, hear an entertaining homily from the brilliant pastor, and then go home and live as if the Gospel has no real connection to daily life. *Disciples, followers* of Jesus are convinced that the Gospel is the only way of life which makes sense. Disciples immerse themselves in the scriptures, and strive to live Gospel wisdom every day.

*Admirers* of Jesus like to say a little prayer their moms taught them. *Disciples, followers* of Jesus carve out time every day, and pray as if everything depended on prayer...because it *does*.

*Admirers* of Jesus tell themselves that they are 'really good people' since they 'have not killed anyone recently,' and they 'only cheat a *little*' on their taxes. *Disciples* of Jesus know that holiness is never easy, and that it requires honest work to follow Jesus.

*Admirers* of Jesus love those TV preachers, who tell them that if they just follow *the preacher's* version of the Gospel, they will always feel good, look good, and have a good

credit score. *Disciples* find out that following Jesus may leave you exhausted, sweaty, confused, alone. Disciples confront the fact that Jesus may ask you to give everything away in order to follow him.

*Admirers* of Jesus enjoy the warm glow of a nice Mass with good music. *Disciples* of Jesus understand that the Eucharist sends us forth to serve Christ and his people. In the Eucharist, we come to understand that Jesus really meant it when he said, “If you did not feed the hungry, or visit the imprisoned, or clothe the naked, or welcome the stranger, or forgive your enemy, then you will not enter the kingdom of heaven!”

When Jesus calls us by name in Baptism, we begin a journey in which our faith transforms every decision we make, even when that decision means that you may lose your job, or stir up a friendly neighborhood dinner party, or challenge an immoral practice at home or at work.

Robert Casey, the former Democratic Governor of Pennsylvania, was told by his party that he would not be allowed to speak at their national convention, because he took a stand against abortion. He was not content to be an admirer of Jesus...

Mother Theresa regularly called on American governors to commute death sentences into a sentence of life in prison, because she stood with the Popes against the death penalty. And for that, she was criticized, even by many Catholics. She was not content to be an admirer of Jesus...

Pope John Paul II, whose pro-life preaching made him popular even among evangelical Christians, received thousands of letters of complaint when he called for diplomacy prior to the Gulf War. He was more than an admirer...

Archbishop Romero in El Salvador refused to stop asking questions about why the poor in his country were not being cared for. He was shot to death, while celebrating the Eucharist, because he was more than an admirer...

And a priest I know gives up vacation time to learn a language so that he can minister to a frightened woman in a hospital hallway. He is more than an admirer. I... well I have some things to pray about, and some things that Jesus wants me to get to work on!

His call is clear and universal. “Come, follow me.” It’s the call rooted in the word and echoed in the Eucharist. How wonderful it is when we follow the Lord who leads us to a place of life, and love, and service, and joy.