

Homily – 2nd Sunday of Year B – January 14th 2018

“Behold The Lamb of God.” Today’s Gospel is about “finding Jesus.” So let me begin this homily by telling you a little story about a drunken Irishman who had a little trouble finding Jesus.

So this Irishman is stumbling through the woods, totally drunk, and he comes upon a preacher baptizing people in the river (like John the Baptist). The drunk guy proceeds into the water, subsequently bumping into the preacher. The preacher turns around and is almost overcome by the smell of alcohol, whereupon, he says the drunk, “Are you ready to find Jesus?” The drunk shouts: “Yes, I am.”

So the preacher grabs him and dunks him in the water. He pulls him back and asks, “Brother, have you found Jesus?” The drunk replies, “No, I haven’t found Jesus!” The preacher, shocked at the answer, dunks him again, but for a little longer! He again pulls him out of the water and says: “Have you found Jesus, brother?” The drunk answers, “No, I haven’t found Jesus!” By this time, the preacher is at his wits end and dunks the drunk again. But this time holds him down for about 30 seconds. And when he begins kicking his arms and legs about, he pulls him up. The preacher again asks the drunk: “For the love of God, have you found Jesus?” The drunk staggers upright, wipes his eyes, coughs up a bit of water, catches his breath, and says to the preacher: “Are you sure this is where he fell in?”

Obviously, by our presence here at Mass, we’ve “fallen in,” and found Jesus. Most of us “found Jesus” because someone brought us to the river of baptism and told us about Him. There’s a lot to be said for inherited religion — the kind many of us received from our parents if we were baptized as infants. It shows, first of all, that someone cared about us enough to represent us in the reception of the greatest gift of all: our membership in the life of Christ. Someone loved us and nurtured us in a living faith, perhaps sending us to parochial school or religious education classes to learn more about what it means to be a Christian and a Catholic.

But those among us who didn’t have the advantage of an inherited faith — those who may have come into the church as adults — aren’t really at a disadvantage. They were granted something that those with an inherited faith may not experience: the priceless moment of decision when they metaphorically “fell-in” and found Jesus.

Religious faith is something they once felt the absence of and actively sought. Attaining membership in the church and coming to the Lord’s Table in the Eucharist are privileges they keenly appreciate. The moment of decision, in which one deliberately chooses to “fall-in” and to follow Jesus is a precious hour that shapes everything that comes after it!

In the Bible, it always sounds so black-and-white and immediate. For example, one minute, Samuel is asleep in his bed, dreaming a young boy’s dreams. He’s not waiting for God to call. He won’t recognize the voice of God when it speaks to him. But after his priest-mentor Eli tells him how to respond to the Lord, Samuel finds the words and the courage to say, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.” Samuel has “fallen in” and found God. From then on, Samuel will grow in stature as one of the great prophets of Israel, the anointer of kings and mouthpiece of the Most High.

The time of decision comes also to Saint Paul on his way to Damascus, his hand clutching papers permitting him to arrest and slaughter Christians. He is struck to the ground, blinded, as the voice of Jesus demands that he answer for his actions. Paul, a zealous Pharisee, was *not* looking for Jesus. But Jesus was looking for him, and so Paul accepted the invitation to “fall-in” and to become the great apostle to the Gentiles and most-quoted writer of the New Testament.

We also have John the Baptist as an example of discovering faith. The disciples around John the Baptist (his own followers) had made up their mind to follow the great Baptizer on his mission.

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Imagine their surprise when John pointed to Jesus and shouted, “Behold, the Lamb of God.” Two of John’s disciples transferred their allegiance at once to Jesus. One of them, Andrew, even went home to fetch his brother Simon Peter. And from that day, folks who made their living fishing found a new vocation they had never dreamed of in the service of the Teacher. One would become the leader of a new community of faith, and both would die for their beliefs.

Those of us with an inherited faith may feel a little cheated at the idea that we never got the chance to decide, once and for all, that this Jesus was for us. Even those who came to the church through the RCIA may sense that their journey in faith was more gradual and less dramatic than the stories we hear in scripture (less dramatic than Samuel or Paul).

Faith in God may never have been a question for many of us. Becoming Catholic may have been more for the sake of convenience than a burning desire to celebrate at the Lord’s Table. Maintaining church membership may be more about habit than conviction. But to all of us, in whatever situation we find ourselves, faint or fervent, Jesus walks into our lives today and asks: “What are you looking for?”

What is my answer – right now? What is your answer? Do we want religion as usual, something comforting and unchanging and un-challenging? Or do we want to know, as the disciples did, where Jesus is headed?

To their question, “where are you staying,” Jesus replies only: “Come, and you will see.”

Come! Come — don’t just stand there, don’t expect things to stay the same. In the four Gospels alone the Greek word for following Christ occurs 77 times. Now, it’s our turn to take our appointed place in the evangelical process. If we want to see where Jesus is headed, we have to *follow* where he is going.

“Our God is a walkin’ God,” as Dr. Martin Luther King used to preach and as the old spiritual reminds us.
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Discipleship demands that we are willing to move out of our complacency and familiar comforts and ask new questions of ourselves. It will necessarily mean change and sacrifice. Our time of decision, we see, has wheels.