

Jesus demands we experience inconvenience, obedience

written by Bishop Anthony B. Taylor |

In today's Gospel, we have Luke's version of Jesus' call of his first disciples, and two themes appear clearly: obedience and a break with the past that changes their lives forever.

Up to now, Jesus has been teaching and working miracles. He had crowds following him, but nowhere are we told that Peter, James or John had been part of those crowds. Our Gospel presents them as simple fishermen who had just come to shore after an unsuccessful night of fishing. They were just washing their nets, minding their own business.

For all we know, Jesus may have been a total stranger to them. But when Jesus gets into Peter's boat and asks him to put out a short distance from the shore, Peter obeys even though he has to have been tired from all his work. Be that as it may, when Jesus then teaches the crowd from the boat, Peter had to have been listening too and surely must have been fascinated by Jesus and the things that he was saying.

"If we do obey, Jesus gets into our boat and starts to teach us unexpected things that fascinate us, maybe things about ourselves, maybe things about what he is doing in our world."

Then Jesus makes a second demand: "Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch." Peter obeys this, too, even though he has "worked hard at this all night" without success. And lo and behold, he caught so many fish that the nets were beginning to tear. Peter now knows that he is in the presence of something supernatural.

Knowing his own unworthiness, he falls to his knees and says: "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." And Jesus responds: "Do not be afraid; from now on, you will be catching men." At which point Peter and his partners James and John, the sons of Zebedee, make a break with the past that will change their lives forever. They leave everything. Their boats, their nets, their careers, their families, "everything and followed him."

Jesus calls you and me to follow him too, and these same two themes come up over and over again in our own spiritual lives: obedience and a break with the past that changes our lives forever.

You and I have been part of those crowds listening to Jesus teach and seeing him work miracles. We come to Mass, we hear homilies and we share in the miracle of the Eucharist. We study catechism, and we can see him work marvels every day if we will just view the events of our lives through the eyes of faith. And then Jesus begins to make demands of us. Things that inconvenience us, things that require us to set aside our pride and hurt feelings, things that require us to accommodate someone else's needs or preferences and we decide whether we will obey the Lord or not. If we do obey, Jesus gets into our boat and starts to teach us unexpected things that fascinate us, maybe things about ourselves, maybe things about what he is doing in our world.

And then he makes a second demand: "Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch." Step out in faith. Every priest and religious has heard this call and obeyed it, but this

deep water full of fish is for everyone. Meaning that this call is for you — “Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch.”

Like Peter, and like me, you too may feel unworthy as a sinner or incapable due to personal limitations, but that’s no excuse. When the Lord calls, the only proper answer is: “Yes, Lord! Yes, I’ll do whatever you ask in faith.” If you do so, I guarantee that you’ll be astonished at the results. Your net will be filled with fish, overflowing.

And soon, you will find yourself breaking with the past. Setting aside things in your life that are not worthy of the Lord, leaving behind all those attitudes and grudges and hurt feelings that are getting in the way of you leaving everything and following Jesus. But if you are willing to walk by faith, trusting in Jesus, “do not be afraid” because “from now on you will be catching men.”

Bishop Anthony B. Taylor delivered this homily Feb. 6.