



Come Follow Me

This week we celebrate Vocations Awareness Week. Vocation Awareness Week is an annual week-long celebration of the Catholic Church in Scotland dedicated to promote vocations to the priesthood, diaconate and consecrated life through prayer and education, and to renew our prayers and support for those who are considering one of these particular vocations.

This week, in schools throughout Scotland, we are considering the different aspects of vocation. Looking at the call of the First Disciples, Fourth Year students will consider how trusting God is an important part of any vocation.

Scripture – Mark 1: 16-20 Trusting God

As He walked by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew, his brother, throwing a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. Jesus said to them, “Come, follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men. ”Immediately they left their nets and followed Him.

When He had gone a little farther from there, He saw James the son of Zebedee and John, his brother, who also were in the boat mending their nets. Immediately He called them. And they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed Him.

Understanding the Story.....

A Fish out of water

To Christians, the account of the call of the first disciples is very, very familiar. In fact, it's so familiar that sometimes we overlook a few things that are perhaps a little unusual.

For one thing, notice the way Jesus talks. He speaks in a way that the fisherman will understand. He says ‘follow me and I will make fishers of men’. Now Jesus was from Nazareth. Nazareth was landlocked. There is a fair chance that Jesus may never have seen the Sea of Galilee before yet He speaks as though he knew all about the Sea and all about fishing.

What's more when Jesus calls the fisherman, he doesn't use the religious language of the Jewish people. He doesn't say ‘follow me and serve the Lord our God’ or ‘follow me and let's teach the Ten Commandments’. Indeed, nowhere in the Jewish scriptures does it mention ‘fishing for men’.

Moreover Jesus doesn't just talk from his own experience. The carpenter from Nazareth doesn't say 'follow and we'll build God's kingdom' or 'follow me and we'll lay the foundations of the Church, rather, he speaks to the fishermen in a way they will understand. He meets them where they are!

Let's go!

We're told that when Jesus calls the disciples they follow him immediately. Think about that for a second – the disciples dumped everything to follow Jesus right there and right then. There were no leaving parties or presentations or goodbyes - they just went. For us that probably sounds scary but the point is that the call of Jesus isn't about yesterday or tomorrow, its not something we can postpone or schedule for another time. The call of Jesus requires a response right here and right now!



Mending Their Nets

The passage tells us that James and John were mending their nets when Jesus called them. In many ways, this is a strange detail to report – it doesn't really seem to add anything to the story.

In the Bible, however, every word and every detail is important! Christians have always understood the "nets" as a great image of all that entangles us. All that keeps us from saying "yes" to God. Think how a net can trap a fish and how hard it is for the fish to get out, but also of how hopeless it can feel to try to untangle a net. So those nets are good image of all the things, all the entanglements, we need to let go of to follow Jesus.

Nets

Modern life can be very busy and sometimes very complicated. There are a lot of things that get in the way of 'saying yes to God'. Many of us will struggle to get to Mass on Sunday or get involved in our parish communities. We maybe feel that we have too much going on, too many other commitments and too many other priorities. We may feel to that we lack the support we need to live out our faith. Maybe we have to deal with peer pressure, maybe we don't have anyone we can go to Mass with, and maybe very few of our friends believe in God. Maybe we don't have the 'safety nets' we feel we need.



The story of the call of the First Disciples, however, teaches us an important lesson. When we say 'yes' to God in our lives he takes care of the rest. He helps get rid of all the entanglements in our lives. He will always give us all the support, encouragement, and resources we need. He just needs to us to say 'yes'. Sometimes we just need to take a risk and trust in God.

Reflection

1. Is 'faith' important to you ?
2. What impact does faith have on your life ?
3. What 'entanglements' stop you from getting to Mass or getting involved in your Parish community ?

Vocation Example

I'm what is called a Vocations Director. When a man feels called serve God in the priesthood, diaconate or a woman feels they want to become a religious sister I'm the person they come and see. What do I ask them? What do we talk about? To be honest, the first time I see them I ask them very little. I simply ask them to tell me, in as much detail as possible, the story of their life and the story of their faith. I let them tell me where they have been and what they have done and where they see their future. I always find that a tremendous privilege – how rare it is to hear the story of someone else's life!

I then ask why they feel called to serve God in the church. What happened in their lives to lead them to contact me? At that point the same thing always happens. Perhaps surprisingly, the person in front of me tells me why they shouldn't be priest or a deacon or a nun. They tell me they're too grumpy, too impatient and too messed up. They also tell me about the various tangled nets in their lives that stop them saying "yes" to God – maybe in the past they have been caught in the 'net' of addiction, maybe a 'net' of bad relationships, maybe a 'net' of debt.

Over the years, I have heard every reason imaginable why a person shouldn't commit to God. I should probably write a book! In the end there are a million and one reasons why any man shouldn't be a priest or any woman shouldn't be a

religious sister. But in the end, there is only one reason why anyone should serve the Church - because that's what God wants. That trumps anything else!

What qualities do I think are important for a priest? Great question. First and foremost, we need men who are willing to get out there and make a difference. Men who are willing to go where people are – the schools, the hospitals, the shopping centres. That's what Jesus did. He didn't stay in Nazareth. He went out and met people where they were – in the city of Jerusalem, in the town of Capernaum and by the Sea of Galilee. Secondly, we need men who can speak the language of today, men who understand the culture and men who understand the stories of people's lives.

A Vocations Director Working in Scotland

Activity

1. Working with a partner discuss the following:

- (a) What do you want to do with your life ?
- (b) What things will help you achieve that goal ?
- (c) What things might be a 'net' and prevent you from achieving that goal ?

2. Working by yourself answer the following :

- (a) If Jesus asked you to follow him, would you drop everything, like the first Apostles did ?
- (b) What would stop you following Jesus in this way ?
- (c) What makes it difficult for you to trust God ?

3. Working in groups/pairs:

Using the following conversion stories produce a collage/wall display on the theme 'trusting God'

Genesis 15:1–6

1Samuel 16:1–13

Luke 5:1–11

Isaiah 6:1–8

Matthew 4:18–22

John 20:11–18

Jeremiah 1:1–10

Luke 1:26–38

Acts 9:1–19

End of Lesson Prayer

Lord, I thank You that You are the God of the impossible. You can do anything. I want to trust in Your ability and not my own. Teach me to see difficulties in my life from Your perspective. Today I bring before You this difficulty in my life [Name a hard situation you are right now facing]. Help me not to fear but to trust You in this situation. Amen