

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Nov 30th 2016

As one of the original Twelve, Andrew deserves a feast day of his own. But we know very little about what sets Andrew apart from the other eleven. From the gospels we learn that he was Simon Peter's brother, and that he was from Bethsaida but later settled down with Simon and Simon's mother-in-law in the same house (or household) in Capernaum. According to the Fourth Gospel, he was a disciple of John the Baptizer, who introduced him to Jesus as the Lamb of God. After spending an afternoon with Jesus, Andrew told his brother that he had met the Messiah. That last note, about announcing the news of Jesus as Messiah, underscores his function of being an "evangelist"—one who shares news about Jesus. That may be why the editors of our Lectionary chose, as the first reading for his feast, the passage from Paul to the Romans about the necessity of verbally sharing one's faith understanding of Jesus if the gospel is to spread among the human family.

Given that the original twelve disciples model for us what it means to be a follower of Jesus, Paul's description of evangelization in Romans 10 helps us ponder our own call to be some kind of apostles (messengers) and evangelists (carriers of good news). We usually leave that dimension of discipleship to those formally ordained to carry out that task—bishops, priests, and deacons. But remember that our baptism and confirmation affirm that we are called to share in the mission of Jesus as prophet, priest, and king. The prophetic role entails being some kind of bearer of the good news about Jesus' person and mission. Paul's point in Romans 10 is that living the prophetic role of evangelist means actually talking about Jesus and our faith in him. That notion commonly evokes images of evangelizing from door to door, or standing on a corner and calling people to conversion. The life of Andrew, and that of all the early Christians we meet in Scripture, suggests otherwise.

Andrew and the rest were first called to follow Jesus, simply to be with him. If talking with people about Jesus seems odd and unnatural to us, it may be that we have skipped the following and being with Jesus part. I understand the following and being with part of discipleship occurring in some obvious ways: pondering Jesus' life and teaching in Scripture, praying about and to Jesus as our risen Lord, and hanging out with others who are obviously motivated by their own following of Jesus. For Catholics that means gathering for Eucharist at least on Sunday, or Saturday evening, and taking the opportunity of the Sacrament of Reconciliation from time to time. This sense of getting to know Jesus through reflecting on Scripture, and through prayer and sacrament gets livelier when we meet with kindred spirits to pray and tell stories about our efforts to live our faith in daily life on some regular rhythm—say once a month. When these ways of following and being with Jesus begin to focus our lives in serving others in Jesus' name, other people—folks seeking what they sense we have—will ask what keeps us happy, loving and hopeful. Then, how we answer these seekers will flow quite naturally from our experience of following Jesus in these ways. Some people call that kind of conversation "the new evangelization." Well, it is really the old, original evangelization, as practiced by Andrew and his brother Simon, by the brothers Zebedee, by the other eight, by the seventy-two, by the five hundred, Paul, and all the rest, each in their own way.

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