

3rd Sunday per Annum - B
Jonah 3:1-5, 10;
I Corinthians 7:29-31;
Mark 1:14-20
Little Flower - 1/21/18

My Brothers and Sisters,

When I was a student in Rome, there were certain passages of Scripture, both Old and New Testament, that were cited in many different classes. The beginning of today's Gospel was one of those passages. Over and over we were taught that the words of Jesus in Mark 1:14-15 were the core of what the historical Jesus preached when he lived and walked among us: "*This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.*"

The second theme of today's Gospel is vocation. We believe that God calls each of us by name. Therefore, everyone's vocation story is different. People often ask me when I first thought about becoming a priest. They are usually amazed when I tell them that I first wanted to become a priest when I was in first grade. I think what first attracted me to the priesthood was the mystery and beauty of the Latin Mass. It is important to understand that in the 1950's almost all Catholic first grade boys thought about becoming priests and almost all Catholic first grade girls thought about becoming sisters. The difference between me and most of the rest of the boys was that I never changed my mind or seriously considered a different vocation.

Likewise, in those days, parents, priests, sisters, and lay teachers encouraged us to consider priesthood. Therefore, I received a lot of encouragement and support. Also, when we were in the upper grades, there was a vocation presentation every First Friday afternoon. The Indianapolis Serra Club sponsored a religious vocation exhibit at Scecina High School at least two or three times while I was in grade school or high school.

In today's Gospel, Jesus called Peter and Andrew. Since they were fisherman, Jesus called them in language they could understand: "*Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men.*" They immediately left their nets and followed him, as did James and John. Today many young men and women mistakenly believe that if God is going to call them to priesthood or religious life, the call will be dramatic. On the contrary, Jesus' call to Peter and Andrew was not dramatic.

In today's first reading, we hear God's call to the Prophet Jonah's to call the Ninevites to repent. However, what most of us know about Jonah was that he spent three days and three nights in the belly of a whale or large fish. We might call him the reluctant prophet. When God called him to go preach at Nineveh, he tried to run away from God. I have to wonder if our lack of vocations to priesthood and religious life stems at least partially from young men and women trying to run away from God because they see so many other possibilities for their lives.

My brothers and sisters, today we are beginning a program sponsored by the Archdiocese titled *Called by Name*. Surveys consistently show that many young people have never been encouraged, and sometimes never even invited, to consider a religious vocation. The purpose of this program is to ask you to identify potential candidates for priesthood or religious life.

Today please take home a bulletin. In the bulletin there is a flyer with *Called by Name* forms. During the week, please pray that God will help you discern individuals who might be invited to consider a vocation to priesthood or religious life. Look around your communities—your family, your neighborhood, your work, and especially our parish—and identify those, 14 years of age or older, who appear to have some of the qualities that you think could make them good sisters, brothers, or priests. Complete the forms, and bring them back next weekend, and drop them in the collection. The work of fostering and encouraging vocations belongs to the whole Church, especially parents. It is not just the work of priests or vocations directors.