Homily 26 January 2014
Third Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
Isaiah 8:23-9:3; Psalm 27:1,4,13-14; 1 Corinthians 1:10-13,17; Matthew 4:12-23

Being a disciple of Christ without leaving home

Jesus called to Simon and Andrew, James and John, and immediately they left everything and followed him.

Back in the 1970s, when my sister was young, she and her husband were friends with another young couple. The other couple seemed quite happy, and soon had their first child. And then one day the husband met a group of wandering Christians. They were traveling the country doing their best to preach the Gospel. Caught up in their fervor and feeling called to follow Jesus, he joined them. He left his wife and child and never returned.

How many others were with Simon Peter and the other three on that day? I imagine quite a few: many in boats, others on shore mending nets, sorting the catch for market, repairing boats and tackle.

And I wonder, when Jesus called to Simon and Andrew, did it suddenly become quiet: men and women pausing at their work, voices hushed, all eyes turned toward Jesus and Simon?

How many wished Jesus had called them, how many wanted to answer the call as well?

Jesus eventually called twelve men to be his apostles, but he calls everyone to discipleship.

As the bystanders watched the encounter of Jesus and those four men, did their lives change that day as well? ... Changing as they went back to work, to conversations stopped mid-sentence. Perhaps the change was not so dramatic as Peter’s and John’s, but slow and inexorable none-the-less.
Did they find themselves in later days sitting on a mountainside listening to the beatitudes, or on a grassy hill eating the bread that Jesus blessed and gave to them before they set out for home, or in the synagogue while Jesus read the scripture from the scroll?

They followed Jesus, and yet every journey ended where it began: at home among those they loved. What would they have said to that young husband, who forty years ago left his wife and child to follow Christ?

What does it mean to be a disciple?

“Be perfect,” said Jesus, “just as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

It does not matter what you do for a living, if you are rich or poor, if you travel the world, or never wander but a few miles from home. Discipleship is not so much about what you do and where you go, but about who you are and for whom you live your life.

Discipleship is not just empty words. It must be lived out in deeds that give substance to the words: in works of mercy and acts of love.

It is more than just hearing the words of Christ, you must believe what you hear and proclaim what you believe. Proclaim it in both words and action: at work and school, at home, in all the places you live your life.

Discipleship is also work, and he who does not work should not eat. You must, of course, give an honest days work for an honest days wage, but you must do many other kinds of work as well:

• Work at your friendships and your marriage.
• Work at forgiveness, at patience, at prayer, at generosity and justice, and much, much more.

But above all, discipleship is your relationship to Jesus. Christians are not disciples of an idea or a philosophy, but of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the child of Mary, the friend of Peter and Andrew, of James and John, of Martha and Mary.
What would I have said to that young husband, who forty years ago left his wife and child to follow Christ?

Jesus didn’t call you to be an apostle, he called you to be a disciple and a husband. If you are looking for Jesus, then look in all the places he said he would be.

• Look for him in those you love, at home in the most ordinary circumstances of your life, and bear in mind that all who live in love, live in God.

• Look for him in the parish, with all those gathered in his name. Share with them the hard but satisfying work of discipleship.

• Look for him in least of your brothers and sisters: the sick, the hungry, the ignorant, the sorrowful.

• Look for him in the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist, which is his body, the bread of life. You can’t come any closer to him than that.

Jesus comes to you where you are at, so don’t run away from him! Turn around and go back.