

3rd SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME – B (January 21, 2024)

We are in Year B of the three-year cycle of Sunday readings, and during this year we give special attention to the gospel of St. Mark—the second of the four gospels that begin the New Testament. Today’s reading is from chapter one of Mark, and it tells of the very beginning of Jesus’ public life and ministry. He proclaims that the time of fulfillment of God’s promise to send a Savior has come and that the kingdom of God is at hand, and thus the need for us to ‘repent, and believe in the gospel’.

He then immediately begins the process of calling certain men to follow him and take part in his work of calling the world to accept and embrace him as the Savior that he is. Simon and his brother Andrew, and James and his brother John were all fishermen. But when Jesus called them, they abandoned their nets and followed him. Mark tells us that James and John were with their father Zebedee; you can’t help but wonder what he thought when he saw his two sons leave him and the rest of the crew to follow this stranger: ‘hey, guys, get back here and get back to work—we’ve got fish to catch!’

Jesus called those four men, but they of course had no idea of what they were in for...and they weren’t always quick to pick up on what Jesus was saying, doing, and telling them what they were to say and do. But he was patient with them, while at the same time not afraid to get on their case when they messed up. And it’s the same with us—Jesus continues to call all of us to follow him, to use generously and joyfully the gifts he has given us to be a sign of Christ to others.

Jesus also calls certain individuals to specific tasks in spreading the gospel, and particularly to the priesthood. Our archdiocese is blessed to have a number of young men who are currently in formation—either doing their philosophy studies at Loras College in Dubuque, or their theology studies at Mundelein Seminary (just north of Chicago). During their second year, those seminarians do an internship in their home diocese; as you know, Jacob Francois will be here at Holy Rosary Cluster for that purpose. He was here two weeks ago to introduce himself, and he will arrive to begin his internship next weekend. He will be here till around the middle of May.

I was at Mundelein this past week for a workshop for these interns and the pastors they will be working with, and it was a really good experience. Jacob and I spent quite a bit of time together to talk about the details of what he will be doing here as well as daily details like living arrangements and other such things. We also spent time with the other three seminarians from our archdiocese who will be doing these internships this semester as well. If all goes well, then they will all be ordained as priests in 2026 (two years from now)—four new priests at one time! That will be a special celebration...especially since there will only be one new priest ordained this year and only one ordained next year in 2025. Please keep up your daily prayers for an increase in our seminarian and priest numbers for the Archdiocese of Dubuque!

What will Jacob be doing here? Again, the purpose of these internships is for the seminarians to get a sense of what parish life and ministry is like in real life, on the ‘front lines’ if you will, and to do so for a longer time than is available in the summer. To that end, Jacob will be involved in such things as:

- ⑩ serving in various liturgical roles such as lector and Eucharistic minister
- ⑩ visiting the CCD classes throughout the cluster
- ⑩ attending various parish and cluster meetings
- ⑩ leading scripture/wake services and committal services at the cemetery
- ⑩ giving homilies or other spiritual reflections
- ⑩ leading Lenten devotions (e.g. Stations of the Cross) and Eucharistic devotions

⑩ visiting the sick, the homebound, the hospitalized, and those in care facilities, and taking Holy Communion to them.

Jacob also told me of his desire to lead a Scripture study during his time here; stay tuned for details.

This list is by no means complete. He will also spend some time with our cluster staff to learn about their responsibilities and some of the details that keep things running. And one of the most important things for Jacob—and what he really looks forward to—is simply to get to know you, the good folks of Holy Rosary Cluster. Obviously, he won't get to know everyone—he will be here for only about 3-1/2 months. But don't be shy about introducing yourself or maybe even inviting him to your home.

Back to today's gospel: Jesus called those four fishermen to follow him, and they did so without hesitation. But let's not make the mistake of thinking that Jesus called only those four or the others whom he called as apostles. Recall his words: "This is the time for fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." Those words are directed to everyone without exception. Our specific roles will vary, of course, from person to person, but Jesus wants us for himself. And he gives us what we need to fulfill the tasks he has given us...and to do so with firm faith and real joy. Pray for Jacob as he prepares to begin his internship with us. And pray for yourselves and each other for the grace and desire to hear and follow Jesus' invitation and challenge to follow him.