

### **Third Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Many of us find it hard to put into words what we feel about Australia Day and why it is important for us to celebrate this day each year. Most of us are just happy to say that Australia is where we live. This is the place we call home. We want to celebrate that.

Our readings for today puts us in touch with the place that Jesus called home for the last part of his life. He leaves the home that he has grown up in at Nazareth and travels north east to a fishing village on the north western shore of the lake of Galilee. For the next three years, if Jesus can call anywhere home, it will be the town of Capernaum. Mathew describes it as being on the borders of Zebulon and Naphtali. He then quotes what we read as our first reading today from the book of Isaiah. God promises that although this land may have been humbled in the past, He will in the future confer glory upon it. It will become God's own country where people who dwelt in darkness will now live in the light. They will experience a new freedom. "For the yoke that was weighing on him, the bar across his shoulders, the rod of his oppressor, these you will break as on the day of Midian". When Jesus began his public ministry on the shores of the Lake of Galilee this prophecy began to be fulfilled. People were drawn to Jesus because he revealed the light of God's love for them. People began to experience the freedom that he

offered them as he healed them of their sicknesses and as he gave them a new understanding of how God was calling them to live.

The wonderful thing for us is that what happened two thousand years ago is made present to us now by the power of the Word that is proclaimed for us. Pope Francis has declared this Third Sunday of Ordinary Time as the Sunday of the Word of God. He wants us to have a renewed appreciation of the power of the Word of God. When we hear Jesus saying to the people of Galilee, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand" we believe that Jesus is saying that to us too. Jesus constantly calls us to repentance so that we can be fully open to God's love for us and be willing to share that love with those around us.

In his letter about today, Pope Francis tells us that "the Bible belongs to all those called to hear its message and to recognise themselves in its words.". He then reminds us priests of the responsibility that we have, to prepare our homilies well. "When we take time to pray and meditate on the sacred text, we can speak from the heart and thus reach the hearts of those who hear us, conveying what is essential and capable of bearing fruit."

Today we listen as Jesus calls the first of his disciples to leave everything and to follow him. Jesus meets them where they are and invites them to follow him. The brothers Peter and Andrew hear Jesus say to them, “Follow me and I will make you fishers of men” James and John are also called to follow Jesus. We can’t help but be amazed at the immediacy with which they answer that call. They leave everything behind when they begin to follow Jesus.

Jesus meets us where we are too. No matter what we are doing Jesus calls us to follow him. We too have a lot to leave behind when we take seriously the call to follow Jesus. Few of us are called to leave behind the family to which we belong, the house in which we live or the work that we do each day. But we are called to leave behind many other things. We are called to leave behind any self-centeredness that we might have. Jesus teaches us how to be people who centre our lives upon Him. Jesus empowers us to be people for others. Jesus calls us to leave behind our dependence upon material things. Jesus teaches us how we can depend upon Him for all that we need. Jesus empowers us to share generously what we have been given. Jesus calls us to leave behind the anxiety that robs us of peace. Jesus teaches us that we can put our hope and our trust in Him, no matter what seems to be going wrong around us. Jesus empowers us to bring His peace to others, to

walk with them and support them through the troubles that they encounter.

A little later in his letter, Pope Francis makes the link between the Scriptures and faith. “A profound bond links sacred Scripture and the faith of believers. Since faith comes from hearing, and what is heard is based on the word of Christ, believers are bound to listen attentively to the word of the Lord, both in the celebration of the liturgy and in their personal prayer and reflection.”

When St. Paul wrote to the Corinthian community, he had to chastise them for their lack of unity. There were serious differences in that community of believers as there can be within any group of people who are called to follow Jesus. We will only discover our unity when we focus in on the one who leads us. No matter who we are, no matter where we come from, when we accept the call to follow Jesus, we become one with Him and through him we become one with each other.

As thankful as we are for being able to call Australia home, we know that there is another dimension to our lives. We know that as disciples of Jesus we can only truly be at home in Jesus. It is only there that we can experience the fullness of life and the peace that we all desire.