

Third Sunday of Ordinary Time

Does it happen in your family that when your brothers or sisters tell stories of what happened in their childhood, they seem to remember different things about the same event. When my three sisters get together, they often have to say to one another, “I don’t remember that.”

In a world where we are anxious to get the facts right, we find it hard to accept that different stories about the same event can be a blessing. When we read the Scriptures, we can easily get distracted by the different stories about the same event. We need to keep looking for the point of the story rather than the differences in the detail. Last week we read John’s memory of the calling of the first disciples. This week we hear how Mark remembers how Jesus called the first ones to follow him.

Pope Francis has invited us to celebrate this Sunday as the Sunday of the Word of God. We can look a little deeper into why the Scriptures are proclaimed for us each time we gather here. Today’s readings are a great example of the riches that we are offered by the Word of God.

The Book of Jonah is a wonderful story, but we miss the point of it if we are looking for an historical event. We could say that it was written to make fun of those Jewish

people who thought that they were the only people in the world to be saved. Jonah, the Jew in the story, tries to run away from God while the pagan people of Nineveh immediately respond to God’s word. Even the cattle are clothed with sackcloth. It is not unlike the joke that God had to build a wall in heaven and then tell everyone on one side of the wall not to make too much noise because the Catholics on the other side of the wall think that they are the only ones there. But the point of the story from Jonah for us today is notice how quickly they responded to God’s word preached to them by the reluctant prophet.

In Mark’s account of the calling of the first disciples it is the unconditional and immediate response that those men made that catches our ear. We notice too that right from the beginning Jesus calls others to share in his ministry. He was walking along the shore of the sea of Galilee when he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net in the lake. Jesus calls them to follow him. “Follow me and I will make you fishers of people.” Without hesitation they leave their nets and begin to follow Jesus.

I think most of us would find it hard to identify with the way that these first disciples so quickly and so radically took up the invitation to follow Jesus. This part of the gospel describes the essence of what it means to begin to follow Jesus. But as we continue to read Mark’s gospel,

we will discover that Jesus needed to gradually teach those first disciples what it meant to be a disciple. Each time they understood more, they had to make a new commitment to follow Jesus.

We call ourselves a community learning to be disciples of Jesus. Each time we gather here to celebrate the Eucharist we are invited to say yes more fully to the invitation to follow Jesus. We know that we cannot do this alone. We need each other to help us to make that commitment. We pray for each other and we bring to prayer all that has happened in our lives during the week. The Word that is proclaimed for us keeps forming us as a community of faith. The Sacrament of the Eucharist feeds us so that we may have the strength to remain faithful to the call to follow the Lord. We are sent out to witness to the relationship that Jesus has with us. And we can do all this because Jesus has called us to follow him.