

Sunday Homily

Title Homily on the Starting Point

Date: January 25, 2026

Sunday: 3rd Sunday of Ordinary Time

Scripture: Matthew chapter 4: 12-23

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Text: The responses of Peter and Andrew, of James and John raise fascinating questions.

Modern depth psychology asks about motives. Why would four men give up their livelihoods to follow Jesus? Jesus had no resume at this point—no miracles, very little teaching. He came from an insignificant village. He skipped rabbi school. He joined John the Baptist's movement, but John was arrested. Jesus fled from Judea in southern Israel, from the area of Jerusalem and the Temple, from the center of the faith to backwater Galilee. Why follow Jesus? Besides, John's arrest meant danger for new religious movements.

The evangelists did not study psychology; they don't answer our motive questions. But Matthew gives us hints. He writes at length about geography. And Matthew tells us about Jesus's first brief sermon. He tells us a great deal.

We need to acknowledge a presumption about humanity. Humans have changed little over the centuries. Our technology, our society and culture have developed. But humans are much the same. Then and now, we ask what leads to a good life. Such questions don't jump full formed into our heads very often. But they are behind our motives, the reasons we act, the ways we interact. What is a good, full life?

We humans also know that we live life against a background called society. Every society must arrange the different aspects of life. Politics is one issue: how will we be governed? Economics is another question: how will people meet their needs? How society shares

necessary knowledge is a concern: each person must know how to navigate the world. Relating to another is an issue: how do we relate to those near to us and those who differ from us?

A few of us—not all—and perhaps too few—ask the ought questions. How ought we live; what is right and what is wrong? The ought questions apply to all aspects of our lives. Is there a right and a wrong way to make a living, for instance?

Therefore, geography becomes destiny. The people in a certain place and time create models of a good life. Jesus had fled to Galilee because of the danger in Judea. Peter, Andrew, James, and John lived in Galilee. They made a living as fishermen on the Sea of Galilee, a small lake 13 by 8 miles. Galilee was called pagan Galilee or Galilee of the Gentiles by the religious elite in Jerusalem. They called it a place of darkness. Galilee was the entry point for invaders. For nearly 800 years, foreign powers occupied Israel, first the Assyrians, then the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks and, in the first century, the Romans. All governed by the sword and spear. Some occupiers put down roots in Galilee. Rome had built cities along the coast to the West. The Greeks built ten cities to the northeast called the Decapolis. Directly to the south were the Samaritans, the religious enemies of Israel. These peoples had different lifestyles, different gods, different values, and norms.

Daily survival was tough. Fishing did not make one rich; only large landowners gained wealth. Rome was taxing Israel into poverty. And daily, Jewish believers confronted others, people who differed. The daily interactions with others raised tensions. After all, the religious elites in Jerusalem taught them to segregate themselves from these others, from those who differed.

So, this young man without teaching credentials began preaching. His first sermon was: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Why did that sermon move the hearts and fire up the souls of these four men? Why did they repent, meaning why did they change their lives? The kingdom of God, or the kingdom of heaven is the transformation of this world; it is the restoration of God's original harmony as experienced in paradise, the Garden of Eden. People could relate in peace; enemies reconcile; differences tolerated even appreciated. The offended forgive grievances. Justice governs interaction, everyone has the means to build a decent life. The dignity of all is respected. People recognized each other's goodness.

Jesus said: the kingdom is near. Why? Because it is not a place, not a nation, not a race, not a certain people, not a bloodline, a tribe, not a family. It is a state of mind and heart; it is a perspective on reality, a way to value creation, a way to interact with people. Jesus could teach the kingdom of heaven; we can learn it. Very soon in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus will teach the Sermon on the Mount to fill in the details about God's kingdom. Where ever we are, each of us can live in God's Kingdom.

Here's the lesson from this: All of us ask ourselves either consciously or unconsciously how to live a good life. Most of us also ask, how ought I live? Jesus offers us this possibility. We can live in peace within ourselves and with others. We can even learn to love. The Kingdom is near. Peter, Andrew, James, and John changed their lives because they saw in Christ their possibility and their potential for a full life. Today's Gospel raises this question: Do we hear a call from the Lord?