



## Bible Reflection on Vocations

2017 is the PANAM Zone Year for Divine Word Vocations. Each month throughout this year, the biblical reflection will focus on a passage related to vocation awareness, discernment and promotion. In each reflection, the Bible Committee will make use of the five steps of *lectio divina*: read, meditate, pray, contemplate and act.

### January 2017 — Jesus Calls His First Disciples

#### 1. *Read*

##### **Matthew 4:12-23**

As he was walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew, casting a net into the sea; they were fishermen. He said to them, “Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men.” At once they left their nets and followed him. He walked along from there and saw two other brothers, James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They were in a boat, with their father Zebedee, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left their boat and their father and followed him.

He went around all of Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and curing every disease and illness among the people.

(Gospel reading of the Third Sunday of the Year –  
Cycle A, January 22, 2017)

#### 2. *Meditate*

One of the first things Jesus does after beginning his public ministry is to call disciples. In the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, Jesus has barely announced his message when he passes by fishermen (Simon and An-

drew, James and John) and invites them to follow him: “Come after me, and I will make you fishers of people” (Matt 4:19; Mark 1:17). He has not yet performed even one miracle.

In the Gospel of Luke, however, that call takes place after several healing miracles. The call of Simon Peter and others takes place after a miraculous catch of fish (Luke 5:1-11). In Jesus’ day individuals sought to be disciples of the rabbis, who themselves rarely initiated the master-disciple relationship. In these three Gospels, however, it is Jesus who takes the initiative and invites certain chosen individuals to follow him (that is, to become a disciple).

In the New Testament, it is only in the Gospel of John where the first disciples begin the relationship by approaching Jesus and asking him where he is staying (John 1:35-42). They have been prompted to do so by John the Baptist, the church’s first vocation director, who points Jesus out to them and calls him the Lamb of God. Unlike the Synoptics, the Fourth Gospel indicates that Andrew and *some other unnamed individual* are the first disciples of Jesus. Simon becomes a follower of Jesus only on the second day when his brother Andrew looks for him and recruits him for Jesus’ band.

Matthew notes that Peter and Andrew, as well as James and John, *immediately* abandon their nets and boat and family to follow Jesus. The word “immediately” does not appear in the texts of Mark, Luke, or John. This is especially surprising for Mark, who tells his story at a fast pace and uses the Greek word *euthus* (“immediately”) 42 times. Interestingly enough, the word occurs only seven times in all of Matthew and only once in the Gospel of Luke. Matthew prefers to use a related Greek synonym, *eutheōs*, which also means “immediately” and which Mark never uses. In Matthew, *eutheōs* occurs 12 times, two of which can be found in the story of the call of the first disciples. The word gives a sense of urgency to this call.

The disciples don’t wait, don’t ask questions, and don’t know the consequences of their decision. However, they get up, abandon what they are doing, and follow Jesus. One gets the impression of total dedication, total abandonment, total commitment to Jesus and his cause. One also gets the impression that Jesus expected a total and prompt response to his call.

In gathering disciples Jesus obviously did not want to accomplish his mission by himself. He felt the need of companionship and he recognized that others needed to continue his mission after him. We can hardly call this band of disciples a “church,” which really formed after Jesus’ death and resurrection. Yet the action of calling disciples was

the first stage of establishing a church, the community of those gathered in Jesus' name.

The Gospel of Matthew is concerned about the community of disciples called the church. Jesus is presented as the creator of a new community, founded on his own righteous words and deeds. The reign of God in Matthew is clearly identified with the community of the disciples, and that community is identified with Jesus himself. Jesus is present where two or three are gathered in his name (Matt 18:20), and he remains with the disciples until the end of time (Matt 28:20).

Matthew sees God's reign as one that includes everyone. The kingdom of God is somehow identified with the Christian community, and yet the church does not exhaust that kingdom. The reign of God is completely realized only at the end of the world, but it begins with the church.

Jesus' disciples are not meant to be mere passive spectators of Jesus' life and ministry. Jesus calls these men to a future in which they will continue their job as fishermen – except that from this time on their “catch” involves human beings, those who will respond to Jesus' message. Discipleship requires an active involvement – not only with Jesus but with others. They too become part of a community, part of a church.

In a very subtle way from the very beginning this community is already diverse culturally. The first two disciples called are Simon and Andrew. Although they are brothers, Simon is the Greek form of a Hebrew name (Simeon), while Andrew is a Greek name. It was not uncommon for Jews in the days of Jesus to have two names, one Hebrew and one Greek or Latin. Another example is Paul (a Greek name), who was also known as Saul (a Hebrew name).

Today we do not have the advantage of the first disciples, who actually saw what Jesus looked like, heard his voice, and touched him. Yet vocations today are also initiated by Jesus, who expects us to answer his call promptly and with total dedication.

A religious vocation requires discernment, a process which helps us to recognize the voice of Jesus and the will of God in our lives. That is often accomplished through others, that is, through the church, through the community where Jesus is present. Anyone in the church today can – and should – play the role of John the Baptist and encourage vocations.

In today's world a religious vocation requires an intimate relationship with Jesus, a willingness to follow him, and an active participation in a church that is diverse, inclusive and open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.



### 3. *Pray*

Lord Jesus, help me to respond quickly and totally  
to your call and to God's will.

May I be open to your Spirit  
so that I can help guide others  
to what you want them to do.

May young people be willing to listen to you and  
to respond to your call,

Give them the courage to dedicate themselves  
to whatever you want of them.

### 4. *Contemplate*

- Spend some time quietly thanking God for your vocation and God's plans for you.
- Bask in God's love for you.

### 5. *Act*

- Pray for an increase in religious vocations.
- Pray for someone you know who may have a religious vocation.
- The next time you have an opportunity, share the story of your vocation with someone else.

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