

There are some key words in today's Gospel story we can miss if we're not careful. Jesus says to Peter and his brother Andrew, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men." In response, the two brothers left their nets and followed Him, at once. At once. Saint Matthew makes it a point to emphasize that the brothers didn't hesitate to leave behind their successful fishing careers and source of income to follow an itinerant preacher.

Then Jesus calls James and his brother John. They respond by leaving their boat and their father and following Jesus, immediately. Immediately. It would have been unheard of in their culture to leave their aging father behind. They were expected to keep the family business alive. Again, Saint Matthew points out that these brothers didn't hesitate in dropping everything to follow a rabbi they had heard so much about.

It would have been easy for these men to make up all kinds of excuses to delay answering Jesus' call. They could have said that they first needed to make sure someone would look after their boats and their families while they were gone. They could have argued that it just wasn't a good time in general. They could have claimed that they would meet up with Him down the road somewhere when it was less of an interruption, less of an inconvenience. They could have held on to their nets. But they didn't.

Jesus is always coming out to meet us, walking along the shoreline of our lives. He is calling each one of us to leave behind our nets and follow Him, at once, immediately. You may be thinking to yourself, "What is Deacon talking about? I am following Jesus. I'm at Mass right now, aren't I?" While that's true, it's still hard for us to let go of our nets. We struggle to let go of the things that keep us from following Jesus as closely as we should. Jesus wants us to follow Him more closely today than yesterday, more passionately tomorrow than today. Yet, we don't want to give up our nets tangled with gossiping, cutting corners, wrong relationships, immoral

behavior, habits of arrogance, rash judgments, or addictions. We hold on tight to these nets and let them weigh us down.

In order for us to spread the kind of light we heard about in our first reading and the Gospel, we have to let go of our nets. We can't have it both ways. We can't have the rewards of following Jesus without the sacrifice of releasing our grip on the things that hold us back from a more intimate relationship with Him. It's like people who want the meal but not the cooking. Who want the grades but not the studying. Who want the health and weight loss without the exercise. Who want the salary but not the work.

So, if we know what we need to do, why don't we just do it? I have a theory about this. Time is both a blessing and a curse. We think we have time to change our ways. We tell ourselves that we have time to answer Jesus' call. One day, we'll give up the things we're holding on to. Eventually, we'll forgive more. Someday, we'll get around to loving more. We'll have time to make amends for our wrongs in the future. Sooner or later, we'll have time to follow Jesus more closely. Meanwhile, we keep clutching our nets.

However, there will come a day in our lives when there is no more time for us. And we don't know when that day will come. Plus, Jesus doesn't want us to procrastinate. He doesn't want us to delay, because as He tells us at in the middle of the Gospel, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." That doesn't mean that it's the end of days right now. It's not some abstract idea in the distant future. It means that the work of restoring God's kingdom has already begun. That's happening right here right now. We're called to help spread the light amid all the darkness without hesitation.

The Gospel shows us that the ones who let go of their nets are given a new mission, a deeper purpose for their lives. For us, following Jesus more closely isn't a matter of leaving

behind our families, our jobs, or our residences. It's a matter of leaving behind our current way of living, which can be far more difficult. The real problem for us is not where we live, but how we live. It's not how much we have, but what we do with it. It's not in finding the truth, but in embracing it wholeheartedly.

Look at the world around us, the world needs more light. Saint Paul warned the Corinthians in our second reading about divisions. We would all probably agree that our world is more divided now than we can ever remember. If you turn on the news or browse the internet, it can even seem like the darkness is spreading and starting to overwhelm the light. This past Monday was Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day. He wisely once said, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness. Only light can do that." You see, that's where we come in.

As Christians, we share in Christ's mission. The light has continued to spread throughout history because His followers, normal men and women, like his first apostles, like you and me, have found ways to spread that light to the people around them. We received the light of Christ at our baptism and we spread that light by being an example for others through our words and or deeds, but mostly through our actions.

Today, we kick off Catholic Schools Week. The faculty and staff of our school is a perfect example of people spreading light amid the darkness. They teach our young people to walk freely in the light, to walk in the footsteps of the Light, Jesus Christ. Through the love they experience inside this building, our young people learn that Jesus' light draws others to Him not only so that they can see the way, but so that they can light the way for others as well. Our young people walk out our school doors as light bearers in an often darkened world.

Brothers and sisters, spreading the light is open to all of us, if we're willing to risk a new way of living, if we're willing to let go of our nets, if we're willing to put an end to our

procrastination to repent. We will only experience the light to the extent that we're willing to let our nets go. It's hard to follow Jesus if we're dragging around all kinds of tangled nets woven from bad memories, angers, hurts, and sins.

It's said that you can tell what is truly important in a person's life not by what they get out of it but by what they're willing to give up for it. The brothers in our Gospel left behind their nets and followed Jesus, immediately, at once. What nets do you need to leave behind to follow the Lord more closely?