

### Third Sunday after Epiphany

*What is the primary aim of all evangelisation and of all catechesis? Possibly that of teaching people a certain number of eternal truths, or of passing on Christian values to the rising generation? No, it is to bring people to a personal encounter with Jesus Christ the only Saviour by making them his disciples.*

This sounds a little like Billy Graham or a TV evangelist doesn't it. It isn't; it's the opening of an Advent retreat at the Papal household a few years ago. I wonder what they thought when they heard those words? What do you think when you hear them? How do you respond when someone asks you 'do you love Jesus?' or 'do you have a personal relationship with Jesus?' Do you pretend to be deaf, or suddenly and inexplicably unable to understand English! Or perhaps say 'oh no thank you, I'm an Anglican!' Perhaps if like me you were formed in the 70's you might think of Mary Magdalene's song in Jesus Christ Superstar.

I don't know how to love him  
What to do, how to move him  
I've been changed, yes really changed  
In these past few days  
When I've seen myself  
I seem like someone else

Should I bring him down  
Should I scream and shout  
Should I speak of love  
Let my feelings out?  
I never thought I'd come to this  
What's it all about?

He scares me so  
I want him so  
I love him so

What might that mean to say you have a personal relationship with Jesus, what might it look like? Is it possible? The answer is yes, it is possible; but is quite unlike any other relationship you can envisage. It is the Ur relationship, the relationship from which all others spring.

Today's gospel is a familiar one relating to the call of Peter and Andrew, James and John. We know the story; the setting on the lake, the fishing boats, Zebedee left behind, the response of the four. They drop everything and go with the Rabbi, who has made such an impact on them. Catching fish is one thing; catching people is another. Yet Jesus told them that it would be people that they would be fishing for from then

on. Though I don't think we should stretch the metaphor too far. I don't really like the thought of trapping or hooking people! I'm not much of a fisherman!

What is important is to think of is not catching, but gathering, drawing together, I will *draw* all to *myself*. This gathering, this drawing together is achieved by the attraction of the message, the teaching, the living, the quality and the integrity of what was lived and taught. Those who came into contact with Jesus saw a man with authority, but without a hidden agenda, apolitical, someone who made them see things differently, see themselves and others differently. We've all got pictures of Jesus in our minds, usually ingrained from Sunday school books, we don't know what he looked like, but he must have been a wonderful person to be with. So much so that by the end of today's reading 'great crowds' were following him. Jesus is often portrayed as something of an activist, but unlike modern day activists there was no sense of taking sides or alienating anyone. People could not leave him alone. Men and women, children, rich and poor, Pharisees, soldiers, Sadducees, tax collectors, prostitutes, demons the sick and the well, there were crowds whenever Jesus appeared. They listened to him, argued with him, loved him, laughed with him, hated him and in the end killed him, but they couldn't leave him alone. I can only liken it to either being in love or holding a new born! You can't leave either of them alone! Just Imagine being with someone who leaves you feeling better, refreshed, excited, more clear about where you are going. Now perhaps you don't think about Jesus in this way, but I think it is worth remembering that this is what Jesus is really like and we need to hold on to this vision of Jesus when we reflect on our gospels or commit ourselves to prayer. It may even make us want to pray rather than thinking of it as a duty. This gathering then is to be of those who were able to *share* that renewed sense of meaning and purpose, this refreshment this excitement in life that is the mark of the Christian community. It is however not just gathering, but staying; where are you staying, they asked him last week? Come and See.

The gospels tell us that Jesus had been living in Nazareth, and he is known as Jesus of Nazareth. Now we know that Nazareth didn't have a very good reputation, remember Nathanael - 'can anything good come out of Nazareth?' It's not a good start to the Jesus movement; but things are about to get a whole lot worse because whilst Nazareth may been the wrong side of the tracks where Jesus is heading really is beyond the black stump. In today's gospel we see him leaving his home of Nazareth, and making his home by the sea at Capernaum. Capernaum is Gentile territory, Galilee of the Gentiles this is part of what was the northern Kingdom of Israel and included the tribal territories, of Zebulun, Dan, Naphtali, Asher. This is the country of the Ten Lost Tribes. Tiglath-Pileser III King of the Assyrians descended on these tribes in around 720BC and expunged them from the history books.

Your personal encounter with Jesus is then something which *stems* from prayer and the gospels and being a part of the gathering, those who are gathered, those drawn into this net. When we read of staying or abiding we need to think of a changed way of being, our being 'in relationship' is not an intermittent state but one that changes who we are.

This drawing together changes our understanding of relationship. James and John are called to leave Zebedee, a dramatic move in their day, Jesus in the gospels speaks of a changed relationship with parents, brothers and sisters. This changed state of being alters relationship with others. Rowan Williams wrote: 'If other relationships seek to define you in a way that distorts this basic relationship (the relationship with Jesus), you lose something vital for your own well-being and that of all around you. You lose the possibility of a love more than you could have planned or realized for yourself. Love God less and you love everyone and everything less.'

I chose you said Jesus, so being with Jesus, in relationship with Jesus, means being in the company that he has gathered, he has chosen, not the company you would normally choose. Follow, come, we are called to go, to stay where we might not want to go, Naphtali and Zebulun are perhaps metaphors for difficult places and situation, things we would rather avoid, Jesus of course later would tell his followers to take up their cross. ...tough! So this is not easy, it is easy to bruise and be bruised, but this is what a personal relationship with Jesus looks like, we have been gathered, look around the catch is amazing, are we attentive to it, expectant, open, responsive.....? Come, follow me.