

25 January 2015

Today's readings have a very strong theme of vocation and calling. It is in baptism that we receive the gift of faith when through the power of water and the Holy Spirit we become children of God, we enter the faith community and we receive from Jesus the promise of eternal life. It is on the day of baptism that parents and godparents speak the promises of faith so that the child will grow in his or her knowledge of God through the support of the parish community. In fact, the whole parish community act as 'godparents' in supporting a candidate for baptism.

My ordination seventeen years ago as a priest was a day of great joy and celebration for me. But you have often heard me say that as time passes, I think more and more of the day of my baptism on 29 November 1969 in the parish of Our Lady Help of Christians, East Brunswick. Following Mum's death in August, I think often of that day when my parents and god parents, in very basic and broken English, asked the Church for the gift of faith, asked that I be received into the faith community, spoke on my behalf the Church's baptismal promises of faith, the promises that have formed me and shaped me as a Christian and as a priest.

One of the great blessings bestowed upon the Church by the Second Vatican Council fifty years ago, was the realisation that in baptism each and every Christian receives a vocation, a divine calling and gift from God. The word vocation used to be associated with the 'special' call given to priests and religious but the Vatican Council made it very clear that the 'special' vocation is what first happens in baptism and that from baptism comes a particular call to serve God as a priest, religious or missionary. In baptism, each of us receives from the Lord that first and fundamental vocation to be his disciples.

Now we understand better the context of today's readings. In the first reading Jonah, like many of the characters in the Old Testament, is a reluctant prophet. The prophets are called by God and entrusted with a special mission but often do not feel that they are smart enough, holy enough or actually up to the task. The one who is called sometimes points to someone else saying to God, 'Not me; go and ask them, they look smarter and more holy'. But God insists on his choice and remains

faithful to his promise. He gives those he has chosen a grace and power far beyond their expectation. And so, filled with the power of God's word, Jonah goes to the great and glamorous city of Nineveh and preaches a message of conversion. God's word, working through Jonah, breaks the stubbornness and hard-heartedness of the people of Nineveh.

This theme of vocation is seen very clearly in today's Gospel. Jesus enters Galilee and proclaims the good news of God's kingdom. He calls Simon & Andrew, James & John to leave their nets behind and to follow him. Through the proclamation of the Gospel, these men will no longer catch fish; they will catch people for the kingdom. Notice how Jesus did not go to the temple or the synagogue; Jesus did not go to the religious leaders and theological experts of the time. He entered the lives of simple working people and gave them a new vocation. He transformed the lives of these simple fishermen through the power of his word.

Today's Gospel reminds us that Jesus enters into our lives with a new and powerful vocation, Jesus enters into our lives and gives us a grace and power far beyond our imagination. He fills our lives with good news.

As I thought about this week's homily, I was conscious of Australia Day celebrations and to ask the question, 'What sort of country are we called to be?' We are a place of relative peace, harmony, political freedom and social stability. However, in recent time that security has been shattered and challenged. There is continuing political debate in this country about climate change, the future of education, funding for medical services, the treatment of asylum seekers, priorities for the budget, and how to deal with substance abuse and homelessness. And as always on this occasion, there is continued talk about reconciliation with our indigenous brothers and sisters. I look forward to seeing tomorrow's newspapers that will contain the long list of Australia Day awards, that wonderful recognition of many of our fellow citizens who every day make our country a better place. Religious or non-religious they hear a call to serve and to help those in need and they do so humbly and with great fidelity and dedication. As disciples of Jesus, we too hear a call that comes to us in Baptism – to give, to love and to serve.