

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time (Cycle A) Homily
Saint William, Champion | January 22, 2023
Is 8:23—9:3 | 1 Cor 1:10-13, 17 | Mt 4:12-23

What is your purpose in life? I was searching online and ran across an interview with Norman Lear. For those of you who are old enough to remember and admit it, Norman was the creative genius who wrote and produced and maybe even defined the term situational comedy, or “sitcom” back in the 1970’s. If you were paying attention to the opening or closing credits, you would see Norman Lear’s name as a writer and/or producer for many of these. A couple of his works are *All in the Family*, *Sanford & Son*, and *The Jeffersons*. During the interview, Norman talked about being on two journeys in life... One was a horizontal journey, about learning things we need to know – like life and career skills. The other was more a vertical journey, and as he described it, was about understanding of ourselves and what the meaning of our life is.

Norman related a story of a young girl who was in one of his early movies. She was six years old when he made the film and he ran into her at a cast reunion when she was 31. She spoke to him and told him how

much working with him meant to her. Fast forward another 25 years, and there's a second reunion and they meet again. And she tells Norman that he didn't understand how much it meant to her the last time – and explained by quoting an example from HIS book... about that special sweatshirt... the one that he waited to pull out of the dryer to put on – the one that, when you put it on, made you feel taller and thinner and stronger and smarter. She said, "You were my sweatshirt". And Norman understood.

I am amazed that the Christmas season ended only two weeks ago and our readings have already moved on to the beginnings of Jesus's public ministry... but as we know, the Bible isn't a historical book, but one about the history of our relationship with God... and to be honest, none of the disciples were there when Jesus was growing up, so we jump ahead here... and we find that just after his baptism, and going into the desert to fast and be tempted by the devil, Jesus leaves Nazareth for Capernaum and begins to call his first disciples.

Every time I hear the story, though, I find it amazing on many levels – because of who Jesus picked. You don't find anyone here who is ANYBODY. They are a group of unknowns. No special pedigrees or skills. A bunch of simple fishermen. And they probably didn't smell all that good, didn't have much money, little social standing. And Jesus picked them! Even crazier – Jesus at least tells Simon and Andrew that they will be catching people, so maybe they will learn some new skills. But James and John come along with no promises of what they'll be doing... they just follow in faith, allowing what it all means to unfold on the journey they will take together.

Consider this... you are at work and an itinerant preacher walks by and invites you to follow him. How many of us are likely to go? To leave behind our job/career/family? With no guarantees as to what the outcome will be?

And I wonder – maybe it's EXACTLY why Jesus picked these men – because they were willing to follow him, more than anyone else would be.. Consider the rich man who came to Jesus at night and asked what it

would take to enter the Kingdom... when Jesus told him to sell all he had and give it to the poor and then follow him, the man went away sad, because he couldn't give up his possessions... Maybe it was easier for these four men to follow Jesus, because they weren't tied down to wonderful things at home, or careers that they loved, or creature comforts and wealth...

But it certainly does remind me that it is a daily commitment to being a disciple. I remember being told that Jesus only asks us as Catholics to spend one hour a week with Him by worshipping at mass... and frequently it's not even that. Oftentimes, I can view our parking lot from my bathroom as I'm getting dressed, and it's typically empty by an hour after mass starts. But Jesus isn't calling us just to follow him for an hour each week... There is also the time we spend – or maybe should be spending - in prayer daily... And hopefully, if we leave mass and take what we've heard today with us – then even the time we spend once our cars leave this parking lot is still spent following Jesus.

But it's a decision and a commitment that ultimately each one of us has to make on a daily basis. Just three weeks ago, we celebrated a New Year, and many of us hopefully took some time to look back on where our journeys had taken us and made resolutions about what we wanted to do differently this year. How are we doing?.... We still have about 344 (or 343, if you're hearing this on Sunday) days left to follow Jesus a little more closely if we haven't done the best job so far... to make the light of Christ present in our little corners of the world... to reveal Jesus to all those whom we meet or even encounter not just inside, but more importantly, outside these walls. And I think we have to remember – GOD IS NOT CALLING ON US TO BRING JESUS TO EVERY PERSON IN THE WORLD – BUT HE IS CALLING US TO BRING JESUS TO EVERY PERSON WE MEET! For some people, we may be the only Jesus they encounter... We have opportunities to be someone's "sweatshirt". Will we?...