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St. Anthony of Padua Church, Effingham, Illinois
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The Second Sunday of the Year (B)

The celebrated author, J.R.R. Tolkien, put these words into the mouth of his illustrious hobbit, Bilbo Baggins: "It's a dangerous business, Frodo, going out of your door. You step into the Road, and if you don't keep your feet, there is no knowing where you might be swept off to."¹ It is advice that Bilbo himself did not keep and neither did Frodo, for they found themselves swept up in the story of the Ring.

It is advice that Andrew also did not keep, for he was swept up in the story of Jesus Christ. When Andrew took his first step away from John the Baptist and after Jesus, he had no idea where that step would take him. He did not know that that one step would bring him to the multiplication of the loaves or would find him bringing the Greeks to Jesus (cf. John 6:8-15 and 12:20-26). Nor did he know that that first step, if he let himself be carried away and swept up into the life of the Savior, would take him to Patras to give his life for Christ on an X-shaped cross. Bilbo's words are true indeed.

What did Andrew see in Jesus that led him to drop everything and follow him? Why did he follow Jesus who, as Pope

¹ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring: Being the First Part of the Lord of the Rings* (New York, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1994), 72.

Benedict says, "did not give him answers but required him to trust"?² He may not have heard the answer to his questions, but he knew that the one who passed by was himself the Answer.

Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist, which meant that he was looking for something, for someone. This is why Jesus asked him, "What are you looking for" (John 1:38).

Andrew knew that John, whom he first followed, "was sent from God" and that he came "to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him" (John 1:6-7). Andrew sought this Light, the Lamb of God, the Messiah.

What is it that you and I seek? There is one thing that each of us seeks, even if we do not quite know how to express it: we desire the happy life, but we often do not know where or how we will find it.

Andrew knew that he could only find happiness in the Messiah, the Anointed One of God, and so for him he looked and waited. His desire to wait for the Messiah shows him to be "truly a man of faith and hope."³ The moment he heard John the Baptist say, as he pointed to Jesus, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" must have stirred him deep within, for at that moment he and another of John's disciples followed Jesus, they took, that

² Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience Address, 17 May 2006.

³ *Ibid.*, 14 June 2006.

first step, which shows that he was also a man of deep courage and firm conviction (John 1:36, 37).

I took my first step after Jesus - not knowing where it would or will lead - many years ago. The Lord first began to call to me through the two most decisive moments in my life: the deaths of my parents. When my father died when I was seven and when my mother died twenty-one years ago today, I became like those two disciples who waited for the Messiah.

The words of the Psalmist could easily be my own: "I have waited, waited for the Lord, and he stooped toward me and heard my cry. And he put a new song into my mouth, a hymn to our God" (Psalm 40:2,4). I sought the Lord, I cried out for him, and when at last I found him in prayer, in the Scriptures and in the Sacraments; I stayed with him, I rested in him, and I learned from him.

I came to believe ever more strongly that "God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power" (I Corinthians 6:). As a young boy, I learned all too well the frailty and brevity of life, along with its sufferings, and I knew, almost intuitively, that what Saint Paul said is true: "You are not your own. For you have been purchased at a price. Therefore glorify God in your body" (I Corinthians 6:).

When I began my high school studies I naturally began to consider my future and what it meant to glorify God in my body.

Slowly I began to realize that I could glorify God in my body only if I did what he wanted me to do and I knew that in doing his will I would find fulfillment, joy and peace. I knew the Psalmist was right: "In the written scroll it is prescribed for my, to do your will, O my God, is my delight" (Psalm 40:8). But what was his will?

At first, I decided to study history and be a teacher, but very soon after I began looking into colleges it became clear to me that this would not be a life that I would find fulfilling. Others would, but not me. It might have been what I wanted - or at least thought I wanted - but it was not what God wanted. I began to realize that the Lord was calling me to his priesthood. And so I said to him, "Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will" (Psalm 40:8-9).

Why did the Lord choose me? I do not know. I only know that he calls whom he wills. The Lord called to me slowly and in many ways through the circumstances of my life. Like Samuel, hearing his call and recognizing it was a bit of a journey in itself and it took the help of others to recognize; just as Samuel needed Eli to hear the Lord and as Peter needed Andrew to hear his call, so I needed the help of my friends and fellow parishioners to hear his call for me.

My brothers and sisters, we know that the Eucharist is central to the life of the Catholic faith and that without priests we cannot have the Eucharist.

We see in the call of Andrew, Peter and John that the Lord called them to a deeper communion with him than he called his other disciples. Before long, Jesus would choose from his disciples twelve men whom he called Apostles. These Apostles were his ambassadors, those who would act in his name and carry on his mission, and their ministry has been passed down through the centuries through the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

As we consider the call of the Apostles, we see that the Lord Jesus did not simply call everyone to fulfill his ministry, nor did he call a random few. He chose specific men to fulfill his mission for the forgiveness of sins. The Lord Jesus continues to call certain men to himself, to stay with him, to be his ambassadors, his presence, in the world today and he continues to call them personally. He continues to call those whom he wishes to make his presence known through the forgiveness of sins and the Eucharist.

Regretfully, too few young men are responding to the call of the Lord with generous and courageous hearts; too many keep their feet, as it were, and will not allow themselves to be caught up in the life of Christ.

The call of the Lord can be ignored and it can be stifled, but it often cannot be silenced. If we consider again the fact that each of us wants the happy life, we know, too, that the Lord desires the happy life for each of us. And what is more, he knows what will bring us happiness better than we do, for it is he who made us. If we knew what would bring us lasting happiness we would already have attained it.

My brothers and sisters, we know that the Eucharist is central to our life and faith and that without priests we cannot have the Eucharist. Who will celebrate the Mass for future generations? Who will absolve sins in the Lord's name? Who will anoint the sick? Who will accompany us on our final journey?

Each of us needs to double our efforts and prayers to encourage young men to follow after Jesus Christ as his priests. Priests do not simply fall out of heaven; they come from within families. Could it be that the Lord is calling your son to the priesthood? If he is, encourage him to respond generously and courageously.

It is true that a priestly life is not always easy, but no life is; even married life has its struggles and hardships. "The Lord's ways are not easy, but we are not made for ease."⁴ We are made, rather, for virtue, for growth in holiness, which

⁴ *Ibid.*, Address to his countrymen, 25 April 2005.

always involves a certain amount of difficulty as we die more and more to our desires and passions. For some, holiness is attained through marriage or the single life; for others, holiness is attained through a life of priestly service. In the end, holiness always leads to joy, for it is the will of God for us in Christ Jesus.

In the end, the question that all young men must ask is not so much, "What do I want from life," but "What does not God want from my life; what does God want me to do?" If the answer is to follow him as did Andrew, Peter and John, if the answer is to be one of his priests, then that young man should lose his feet and be swept up in the great adventure of Jesus Christ.

Let each of us, then, encourage young men to say to the Lord, "Speak, for your servant is listening," and if the Lord is calling them to his service, "Behold I come" (I Samuel 3:10; Psalm 40:8). Amen!