

- Since Christmas we've been meditating on the wondrous mystery of the Incarnation, of God becoming man – stepping into the limits of time and space and clothing Himself with our human flesh.
- We've pondered His birth as well as His manifestation to the world in the Epiphany and His Baptism. And now in these weeks after the Epiphany, we get to see the power of the Word-Made-Flesh to impact human souls and draw them to Himself in faith.
- We're given a remarkable example of Christ's power in our Gospel today. As Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee, He simply called out to the fishermen Peter and Andrew: "'Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men.' At once they left their nets and followed Him."
- Then our Lord walks along a little farther and sees the brothers James and John mending their nets with their father, and after calling them, they, too, "immediately left their boat and their father and followed Him."
- I love this passage because it shows us the power Jesus has to attract followers to Himself, a power strong enough to draw men away from their livelihoods, to drop everything and follow Him.
- On some level they knew that Jesus was no ordinary man, but Someone who, in a moment's notice, they knew they couldn't live without. So they followed Him, and by a life of suffering and grace these humble fishermen were fashioned into great saints.
- Last Sunday I mentioned how as Christians we are called to life of union with God – indeed, an eternal union with Him! – a life that we foster through our daily prayer and reception of the Sacraments. We're called to follow Him in a union of love.
- Of course, what blocks this union is sin. So, if we know we're living in a way that goes against the Church's teachings, especially on serious moral matters, then we must repent of the sin and confess it honestly so that we can be fully united with our Lord.
- You all know the big issues I'm talking about: cohabitation before marriage, birth control, same sex unions, adultery, pornography. The world will tell you these things are okay and even good, but it's a lie. These are serious sins that endanger your soul!
- Each of these actions is a serious misuse of the great gift of procreation. Understand that the act by which we engender new life is absolutely sacred, and these sins that I've mentioned profane the nuptial act by stripping it of its beauty and dignity.
- I tell you this not to judge or shame you, but to call you back and to tell you that there's something better than your sin. That *something* is actually *Someone*!
- While the process of repentance and confessing our sins can be daunting, especially if we've lived with a sin for a long time and have a deep attachment to it, Jesus promises us a joy and a hope that so is so much greater than the pleasure our sins may give.
- I'm sure that that was part of what stirred the manly hearts of Sts. Peter, Andrew, James and John to such quick and complete devotion. I have to believe that they sensed the joy and the hope that Christ creates within all of us who are open to Him and His grace.
- This calling of Jesus that we see being given to the apostles is given to all men. On a most fundamental level, our Lord calls to each person through one's conscience and the natural law. In the depths of our consciences, every man is given the opportunity to hear our Lord's voice and to know what is right and wrong so that we might follow Him.
- But our Lord also calls to us more directly through the preaching of the Gospel, which has been the Church's primary task ever since Pentecost.

- Every time we hear or read the Scriptures, every time we listen to a homily that is faithful to the Church's teachings, Christ speaks to us and calls us to follow Him, just as He spoke to Andrew, Peter, James and John in our Gospel story.
- Over the centuries there have been many, many saints to whom Jesus has appeared and spoken. While the circumstances surrounding the visions of Christ to the saints vary widely, all of them attest to how Jesus radiated mercy and love in His countenance.
- All of them attest to how Jesus engendered within them that same hope and that joy that made Peter, Andrew, James and John drop everything and follow Him.
- In the way He looked at them, in the way He spoke to them, the saints experienced a joy and hope so profound that they were willing to give up everything to be with Him. The good news is that, while we may not have a vision of Christ, that same joy and hope are available to us as well.
- Both our first reading and Gospel speak of how those in darkness have seen a great light. A light has shown for those dwelling in a land of gloom and death, and that light is Christ.
- When we live in mortal sin, we live in darkness, cut off from God. But in the light of Christ, which shines forth in His Church, we find the hope for mercy that brings us joy.
- If we are willing to humble ourselves, admit our wrong-doing in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and make it our aim to reform our lives and avoid sin in the future, then Christ will break the shackles of sin that hold us bound.
- Light will dawn on our souls as we are washed clean in Jesus' blood, which He poured out on the cross for the sakes of us all, and joy and hope will be ours.
- Think for a moment of the very worst sins you have committed in your life, the memories of which you keep guarded in the very pit of your soul. Even those sins that you regret the most are no match for the power of God's mercy and love.
- It doesn't matter what we've done wrong, or how many times we've committed a particular sin. If we are sorry and ask God for forgiveness, then His mercy is ours.
- And as your pastor, that's what I want for you. Over the years that I've been here, I've set a lot of different goals for our parish – such as getting this church built, adorning it with art, and now we have the goal of renovating the Allen Center.
- And while these have been noble and necessary goals, the ultimate goal I have for our parish is that all of us go to Heaven!
- It's my daily prayer that each and every one of us spend eternity together with our Lord. This requires that we repent and accept God's mercy.
- Very beautifully, all of us, whether we know it or not, long for salvation in the very depths of our souls. All of us desire to live in the light of Christ's love. All of us long to be in union with Him.
- As we begin to approach the great penitential season of Lent, let us each open ourselves up to our Lord's mercy and love by examining ourselves well and making a good confession.
- And after we washed ourselves in His redeeming blood, let us leave our nets and follow Him.