

**Third Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A  
(Jan. 23, 2005)**

**Time to Change**

As Matthew tells the story, no sooner did Jesus hear that John the Baptist was arrested than he decided to leave Nazareth, to find new headquarters in Capernaum, and then to start to preach. His message was clear and simple: everyone should repent; everyone should change. Why? The Kingdom of God was near, very near.

Perhaps he changed the place where he was living to let people know that he was willing to change as well. At any rate it is evident that he realized he could not do the work of the Kingdom all by himself and so he started to gather around him a group of people to help him, a small community that would eventually grow into the Church as we know it today, a community that embraces all Christians and which is constantly being challenged by Jesus to repentance and conversion, that is, to change! Those first disciples, simple, unlettered fishermen, did not hesitate to follow him. Indeed, as all the evangelists tell us, their response was immediate and enthusiastic. Jesus passes by; they are casting their nets for a catch of fish: Simon and Andrew, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, there with their father, mending their nets. It hardly seems possible that they could just pick up and go without question, without even asking permission of their father. I often wonder how poor, old Zebedee felt when he saw his sons drop their nets and go off with this preacher. Did he think to himself, “Where are they going? What are they getting into? And who will help me in this fishing business? Who will mend the nets?”

Well, maybe it didn't happen exactly as the evangelists tell it, but the disciples did respond and their response was whole-hearted, generous, and enthusiastic.

In our second reading we hear Paul speaking to his dear friends in Corinth and challenging them to respond – to respond to the call to be a community of believers in Christ, not following this or that popular preacher, but following Jesus Christ. Paul tells them in no uncertain language that to respond properly to that call means that they must get rid

of factions and division in the community, that they are the *one* Body of Christ and the kinds of dissensions that have arisen are incompatible with their Christian vocation. Paul, too, is telling the people that they have to change!

So the first thing Paul is urging is unity. Note well it is unity, not uniformity. He is not asking them all to say and do the same things in exactly the same way. Differences there well may be. And that's all right. But with their differences they must be able to find common ground in the conviction that they remain one, united in faith in Jesus Christ, hope in the face of difficulties, and love for God and for one another.

Now the Gospels were not written just for the disciples and the first followers of Jesus, nor were Paul's letters written only for the communities that he addresses. They were all written for us as well. So we must, as best we can, find our place in the Gospels, in Paul's letters. We must let them challenge us as they challenged the people who first heard or read them.

So, how do they challenge us? Well, in much the same way they challenged those early Christians. First of all, to respond and then to be community, genuine community, as we carry out our Christian responsibility to help in the continuing effort to build the kingdom of God. Perhaps that means that we, too, will have to change.

We are at the moment in the middle of a week of prayer for Christian Unity. Paul's words to the Corinthians are very appropriate as we pray that we all might be one. The divisions that exist in Christianity are one of the great scandals of our time. Jesus came for all people. He did not come just for us Catholics or for any other group of Christians. He came for all.

And we have to remember that "all" doesn't just mean Christians. While our prayer this week is specifically for Christian unity, we must remember that Jesus came for his own people as well, our Jewish brothers and sisters. And of course he also came for the Muslims. There are three holy days in our week: Friday for the Muslims, Saturday for the Jews, and Sunday for the Christians.

We sometimes sing a hymn that says, "They will know we are Christians by our love." My feeling is that that does not just mean our love for one another as Christians, but how we mirror in our lives the love of Jesus for all humanity. It's a challenge, perhaps a great one, but it's the

challenge Jesus gives us all as he calls us the same way he called his disciples. It's up to each and every one of us now to decide how we will accept the challenge and answer the call.