

Homily for January 20-21<sup>st</sup> 2018  
3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time

**“Who, Me?”**

Last summer I was in Rome. I’ve been privileged to spend time in the Eternal City twice, and both times I visited the church of San Luigi dei Francesi. Translated this is: “The Church of St. Louis of the French”. What makes this church so meaningful is a series of three paintings by the 16<sup>th</sup>-century artist Caravaggio all about the life of St Matthew. They are all in a little side chapel called the Contarelli. The one that most spoke to me was this painting, entitled, “The Call of Matthew”. The painting is lovely and is an apt commentary on the lesson we had from 1 Corinthians 7. In a couple of minutes, I would like to describe it to you. For now, I want to read for you again the passage we had from 1 Corinthians 7.

*I mean, brethren, the appointed time has grown very short; from now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none,<sup>30</sup> and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods,<sup>31</sup> and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the form of this world is passing away.*

These are striking words that when thoughtfully considered are meant to help orientate us as we live in this world. Here Paul is talking about things of great importance, marriage, grief, joy, commerce, our interactions with the day to day world and telling us to hold loosely to all of them. Why does he do this? It is because Paul understands that the form of the world we see is passing away. The time has grown very short he says. What does this mean by this?

We want to understand Paul’s words in light of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Because he recognized this event as the hinge of history, he wants us to realise that everything else needs to be now seen from the perspective of that great event. Because God became a man in the person of Jesus and the Resurrection followed his death there is a new reality that has Jesus has ushered into the world that changes everything. Paul says that because of this event the world as we know it is passing away and a whole new order of things have begun. What is this new order, this new world?

When people live with an awareness of death as the end and nothing more, then all we have in this world is ultimately the worldview Paul will refer to in 1 Corinthians 15: “Eat, drink and be merry because tomorrow we die.” If death brings our lives and existence to an end than all, there is to focus on is the present time and the form of the world as we now know it.

But what if death is not what God wanted? What if Christ risen from the dead has appeared as the first fruits of an entirely new world? An order that one day will usher in a new heaven and a new earth. What if all the things that we consider absolute and final aren’t so absolute and final after all? What if death does not have the last word? Then I would suggest in following Paul, this realisation changes everything.

I can learn to let go of the things that are so obsessively important for me. I can now appreciate them for what they indeed are; not clinging to them as if they alone give my life meaning. We can come to know what the Englishman G.K.Chesterton discovered when he said:

***The moment I became convinced that the world is not to make me perfectly happy it began to make me truly happy.***

I think this quote is so helpful as an introduction to the Call of St. Matthew.

You will notice in this painting that all of the light emanates from above where Jesus is on the right-hand side of the picture. You will also see that the light shines towards where Matthew is sitting. Jesus is pointing to him, and Matthew is gesturing toward himself as if to say, who me? What is Jesus doing by calling Matthew? The same thing Paul is writing to us in Corinthians. The form of the world is passing away. But notice how Matthew, while attentive to Jesus and being touched by the light of Christ, has one hand pointed towards himself, and the other hand is clutching the coins.

Notice the position of Jesus' hand and compare it with this next painting. Here is Michelangelo's creation of Adam. See the similarity? Jesus came to do that which the first Adam could not because of his preoccupation with the world. Jesus came to call us back to that which is most important and does it in the most worldly of settings. One gets the sense that Jesus has crashed the backroom of a bar, where the boys are counting their ill-gotten gain.

Then notice the character of the far left side; he is consumed by this present world, as Matthew interlocks his other hand with his greedy friend.

How hard it is for Matthew, how hard it is for us to take to heart the truth of Paul and the invitation of Jesus. Because from our perspective, weighed down by the immediacy of the world and all of the relationships and responsibilities that make up our everyday life, it can be difficult for us to see Jesus and respond to his invitation to come out of the shadows of this world and to live in light of the Resurrection.

How is this possible? To answer that question, let's consider the Gospel appointed for today.

Here is the inaugural address of Jesus. I say this because these are the first words Jesus speaks in Mark's Gospel. As he begins to preach he says: This is the time of fulfilment. It is Jesus' way of saying what Paul said, except instead of the negative, the time is running short, Jesus says the time is fulfilled and states it in the positive. The new time is beginning. The kingdom of God is at hand. What does this mean?

There is the breakthrough of a new world. God's new order which is predicated upon Jesus himself and his resurrection from the dead. This fact requires a response from us:

***Repent and believe the Gospel.***

The word behind repent is a Greek word metanoia. It is the blending of two Greek words: "nous" which we would translate as "mind" and the prefix "meta" means "beyond" Therefore the word repent means to go beyond the mind that you have. Jesus is stating: "The kingdom of God is

breaking through so we can see our lives with the perspective of Paul and the call of Jesus. We are learning to travel light in the world. Therefore it is time for a new mind. A new way of seeing, a new way of thinking, a new way of imagining not caught in the structures of the old world.

What is the mark of this? We are to believe in the Gospel or the good news. It is the glad tidings that Jesus has risen from the dead. It is this call to conversion, this invitation to hear the good news and to see the light of the Resurrection that is at the heart of what it means to be Christians.

As we with Simon, Andrew, James and John, as we with Matthew, learn to stop grasping and more fully grow in trusting Jesus we can then follow him along the way through this world that is passing away. And with Jonah and the Apostles, we can discover more fully that we are to join in extending the news to others that the time is short and the present form of this world is passing away.

Change your mind, go beyond seeing that world from the human perspective and begin to see it from the perspective of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Then with Chesterton and Matthew, we will discover:

***The moment I became convinced that the world is not to make me perfectly happy it began to make me truly happy.***