

FOLLOW ME AND I WILL MAKE YOU FISH FOR PEOPLE

boy. Tell me about your religious leader.

Son: He's an unemployed house builder named Jesus. He has no real income and no place to stay. He speaks a clear message of love and peace. The Pharisees hate him and the Romans think he's a revolutionary.

Dad: Son, this sounds like a disaster waiting to happen. You might get killed. You may not go.

Son: (With relief in his voice) *Whew!!* Yes, Dad..

The young man in the story knows well that his father will say no, so, like the child he is, he can blame his lack of commitment on his parents. Read it in Luke 9:⁵⁷⁻⁶².

How like us he is. We lie to ourselves, saying:

*I'll become more faithful when..... or when.... or ... or
...but now I just can't do so because gets in the way.*

Dr. Kenneth Bailey repeatedly reminds us that even today a Near Eastern son is under similar constraints of parental obedience ⁴. Imagine a young man whose innate brilliance has brought him away from following his peasant father's shepherd - life and has taken him to Paris when he has just finished his Ph.D. at the Sorbonne. He is offered a great opportunity with a French firm. His obedience to his semi-literate father demands that he return to his village and ask permission to take the job. Of course he knows that his father will agree and will give his blessing, but respect for his father demands that he ask. Such filial obedience is cultural, that is, it crosses the religious lines of Christian, Muslim, Druse, Zoroastrian and so on.

The call of Christ takes precedent over all. It is the most powerful command we can hear. Each of us Christians has heard it.

How have I responded to that call?

Please prepare St. Mark 1:21-28 for next Sunday.

⁴ Bailey, Kenneth, *Poet and Peasant and Though Peasant Eyes* Eerdmans, 1983, *passim*.

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF EPIPHANY



The Call of Simon Peter and Andrew
Duccio di Buoninsegna (c. 1255 - 1319)
The National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, USA.
A Panel From The Maestà

In 1308 the city of Siena commissioned Duccio ¹ to produce a two sided altar piece for the cathedral's high altar. It contained some 50 panels. The approximately 5 x 5 meter work is now known under the name of The Maestà (The Majesty).

On June 9, 1311, the completed painting was brought into the cathedral. A contemporary chronicler wrote:

And on that day when it (the Maestà) was brought into the cathedral, all workshops remained closed, and the bishop commanded a great host of devoted priests and monks to file past in solemn procession. This was

¹ A contemporary and rival of Giotto, Duccio continued the Siennese tradition of flat, Icon-like painting upon gold-leaf backgrounds. Giotto moved toward the depth and realism that flowered in Florence's artistic Renaissance.

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accompanied by all the high officers of the Commune and by all the people; all honorable citizens of Siena surrounded said panel with candles held in their hands, and women and children followed humbly behind. They accompanied the panel amidst the glorious pealing of bells after a solemn procession on the Piazza del Campo into the very cathedral; and all this out of reverence for the costly panel... The poor received many alms, and we prayed to the Holy Mother of God, our patron saint, that she might in her infinite mercy preserve this our city of Siena from every misfortune, traitor or enemy.

The panels were disassembled in the 18th century. Some were sold, others are to be seen in the Cathedral museum in Siena; the few remaining are now scattered around the world and, sadly, some have been lost.

Today's Gospel St. Mark 1: 14-20 [Year B, Epiphany 3]

✠ NOW AFTER JOHN WAS ARRESTED, JESUS CAME TO GALILEE, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.' As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you fish for people.' And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him. [© NRSV]

A Difficult Job

Dried and salted Sea of Galilee fish were exported all over the ancient world. Most of the Twelve Apostles were peasant/fishermen with a double source of income. They farmed their land and went out in their boats to fish while waiting for the crops to grow. Fishing was done at night on the large lake, about 6 x 12 miles, where surprise storms seemed to come out of nowhere. Boats swamped and men drowned. You'll recall the Gospel stories of the Apostles in the lake in

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the midst of a storm, unable to make headway until the Lord calmed the winds. (See Mark 4:³⁵ ff.)

Today we have a glimpse of that life, the casting of nets into Galilee Lake and the mending of them on the shore. It was a family business employing brothers, Andrew and Simon (Peter) or a father and his sons like Zebedee with his boys, James and John. It is the second encounter, the one with Zebedee's boys, that is the most unique. It was culturally unthinkable that a son could or would abandon his father unless the father had given permission. Even the Prodigal Son *asks* his father for his inheritance. James and John leave their dad flat. Only the hired men remain.

The Near East is a patriarchal society where wives and mothers are subordinated.² The familiar woman's veil is but an outward symbol of a larger subordination. In some areas women are never mentioned, nor are they visible to male visitors. In some parts of the Near East today, if and when it becomes impossible *not* to mention a woman, a male speaker does so after first apologizing, then continues his statements, such as, "....., You'll forgive me, *a woman*, did so and so." One does not ask a Near Eastern gentleman, "How's the wife and kids?" Asking about a wife would be an unforgivable affront. Mothers actually lose their names upon the birth of a son: For example, before the baby came she was called *Fatama*. She delivers and is ever after known as *Ali's mother*.³

A father's word is law. Sons expect and are expected to ask permission, seeking their fathers' consent before setting out on important new tasks. You'll recall that one man, urged to follow Jesus, responds that he must first go home and say farewell to his parents. It's easy to imagine the dialogue:

Son: Dad, I want to follow a new religious leader.

Dad: That's wonderful son! You've always been such a devout

² It should be noted that the **non**-Islamic Near East is usually much more egalitarian.

³ There seem to be three possible instances of this in the New Testament. Mary is referred to as *The Mother of Jesus*. See *John 2:¹, 2:³ and Acts 1:¹⁴*