

## *2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time*

In the days ahead we Christians observe the week of prayer for Christian Unity. On Monday we lovers of justice commemorate Dr. Martin Luther King. On Wednesday we Americans witness the inauguration of our new president. On Friday we Catholics observe the National Day of Prayer for the Protection of Unborn Children. This week will stir strong feelings. We judge other people in the moment, but history usually needs more time. Even the disciples did not completely judge Jesus correctly at their first encounter.

In today's gospel John the Baptist spots Jesus and identifies him to two of his own disciples. Jesus asks them a deep, haunting question, "What are you looking for?" Now, John had just told them, Jesus was the Lamb of God, who would shed his blood for the forgiveness of sins. But when they meet him, they freeze and imperfectly call him, "Rabbi," or "Teacher." They ask, "Where are you staying?" Jesus bites his lip and simply says, "Come and... see."

One disciple is Andrew. We don't know the name of the other; one theory holds he is the one who will be called the beloved disciple later in the gospel. After a few hours with Jesus, Andrew goes to his brother to announce big news: "We have found the Messiah." All of these disciples were just going about their ordinary business on an ordinary day, but they must have been sufficiently contemplating the meaning of life for them to respond to Jesus so quickly.

Throughout the gospels many people got Jesus wrong. Religious leaders did not comprehend his mission. The disciples misunderstood how to behave even in his presence. The Son of God, the Word made Flesh, the Good Shepherd, the leader par excellence, didn't impress everybody who met him. History has helped us. We believe in him, but we have the advantage of time.

Our upcoming week features many people who have all endured imperfect judgments: Christians of other denominations, Martin Luther King, President Donald Trump, President-elect Joe Biden, unborn children by tens of millions, and Jesus Christ. We make judgments based on the information we have, but history teaches us humility. Many people turn out differently than the way each of us so confidently categorizes them.

Christian unity was one of the aims of the Second Vatican Council, which believed that the way forward was not to conceive of the separations between Christians as irreconcilable divisions, but as varying degrees of communion. All Christians follow Christ. Our unity may be imperfect, but it exists.

The President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Archbishop José Gómez of Los Angeles wrote this week, "We do not love those who oppose us because they are lovable, or even likable, Rev. [Martin Luther] King once said. We love them because God loves them. And by our love, we seek their conversion and friendship, not their humiliation. This is our Christian duty in this moment — to be healers and peacemakers, to overcome evil and lies, not by more of the same, but with words of truth and works of love."

Christ asks each of us, "What are you looking for?" Christ invites each of us, "Come and see." Come to Jesus. Come in humility. History shows you will not see everything clearly at once, but you will see.

*Sunday, January 17, 2021*