

Mass intro:

nice to be home again
several weeks teaching a course on confirmation at Sant'Anselmo
18 students from 11 countries
Pope's audience, sends his blessings to family and friends, esp. youth & sick

Although travelling is attractive, I become quickly aware how much I miss home. For the last several weeks, I lived in a single room in the monastery attached to the university. My bed sat in a frame, but it felt more like a hammock; my sink ran cold water only; I showered down the hall, where three times out of four there would be hot water; they provided washing machines, but no dryers; I missed fixing the food my way and seeing my own friends. Women and children are in short supply at a monastery. People say as you get older you get more set in your routines. In fact the later years of life burden many people by stealing those lifelong comforts; ultimately people lose the freedom to live at their own home, to drive a car, to walk, to eat, and become dependent on others. The problem even faces newly marrieds and new parents, who discover that living with another person in the house changes the routine.

Simon was a man accustomed to routine. He makes his first appearance in Luke's gospel when Jesus gives him this fishing lesson. Simon knows how to fish; he knows how to live. He can buy a boat, clean a net, fish at night, point the boat, and find deep waters; he's a family man who gets along with the in-laws; we know this from Luke's Gospel. But we also know that on this night Simon caught no fish, and that he considered himself a sinner. He was something less than a professional, and something less than a holy man.

When Jesus appears, he suggests that Simon break a couple routines--one professional, the other personal. Simon is reluctant to do either one. Speaking to the professional fisher, Jesus says, "Throw the nets over there," and Simon's first response is, "We tried that already and it doesn't work." But what Jesus really seeks is a personal change; he wants Simon to become a disciple. Simon's first response is, "Go away from me, Lord, I am a sinner." He had been living a comfortable though imperfect life. It would have been easier doing it his own way than to change, even if he wasn't catching fish.

Sometimes we work to change a routine, to get a new job, to acquire a new skill. Sometimes the change comes hard; we lose a friend, a spouse, a parent, or a child. Nobody likes to leave things behind, yet that is precisely what Jesus asks. He knows that no matter how much we have to change, no matter how much we lose, we will never lose him. When Christ is our first love, the rest can change.