



ST OLYMPIA ORTHODOX CHURCH

POTSDAM, NEW YORK 13676

ORTHODOX CHURCH OF AMERICA
DIOCESE OF NY AND NJ



**Welcome to St. Olympia Orthodox Church,
a young and, God willing, growing community of worshippers.**

**Our priest is Fr. Peter Irfan, Acting Rector.
You may reach him at 716-342-8520 (cell) or at fatherpeter777@yahoo.com.**

**Please join us for prayer and fellowship.
Divine Liturgies are held every Sunday at 10 am.
Great Vespers are held every Saturday evening at 5 pm.**

Next Services

Saturday, January 26th

**Great Vespers
5:00 pm**

**Fr. Peter is available to hear
confessions before Vespers by
appointment.**

Sunday, January 27th

**Matins
8:45 am**

**Divine Liturgy
10:00 am**

**Fellowship to follow
at
St. Olympia Chapel
123 Main Street
Potsdam, NY, 13676**

House Blessings

Fr. Peter will continue to bless homes throughout the North Country.
Phone or email him to schedule his visit.



Christ the Teacher - 14th century fresco, Decani Monastery, Kosovo

Matthew 4:12-17

*Note: the following article was written by an anonymous contributor.
It is included here by permission.*

In Matthew 4:12-17, there's something for us to consider which we usually don't consider. The essence and focus of this Scripture is on "calling." And that's where most folks tune out or turn off, because "calling" or "vocation" is usually interpreted as something reserved for those who have a call to pastoral ministry as a presbyter or deacon, or a call to monastic life. But today's Gospel actually deals with three distinct calls that all of us must heed if we would be faithful to Christ. There's the call to faith, the call to discipleship, and the call to ministry. Let's look at each of these briefly this morning, so that we'll be sure not to miss our calling.

Now the setting for this Gospel is the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. He's been baptized by John and led into the wilderness to be tempted for forty days by Satan. He gets the news that John the Baptist has been arrested, so He heads back to civilization to begin His ministry. And it's there we find the first calling on our lives: the call to faith, which begins with the call to change our minds. Jesus' first words in His ministry are found in verse 17, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," which means "Turn from your sin and put your trust in God's Good News." The word "repent" means "to change one's mind or attitude, leading to a change in behavior;" and Jesus begins His ministry by calling and challenging everyone who hears His voice to change their mind, to turn from sin, to turn from unbelief to personal trust in God, to turn from death to life.

And yeah, I know: it's not politically correct to talk about sin, and that for one of two reasons. The pseudo-Christian reason is that because we're all sinners, and because we're not supposed to judge, if we talk about sin, we might get too close to judging somebody; and we can't have that! The pagan alternative is that we don't really think we're sinners. Culture and pop psychology have taught us that we're good people. The "I'm okay, you're okay" mentality makes us say we don't need to repent and we don't need faith... or that we're not as bad a sinner as someone else.

The problem is our understanding of "sin." When we think of sin we think of murder, stealing, lying, adultery, covetousness, rape, or child abuse, or some other crime that's easy to acknowledge as wrong. But "sin" as the Bible most often defines it is anything that misses the mark intended by a holy and loving God. And the image of "missing the mark" should never be taken to diminish the seriousness of sin, because that mark is where life is found, life as God intends us to live it; and if we miss it, we're choosing death. And the sad truth is that you and I do opt for death in too many areas of our everyday life. No, we're not murdering, or stealing, or lying (one hopes!); but what about the seemingly-small things that also reflect on our character? Sometimes people speak of "the seven deadly sins:" greed, gluttony, pride, anger, lust, sloth, and envy; and in one way or another at the heart of all sin lies one of these. In one parish, lunch after Liturgy is frequently an exercise in greed and gluttony, as the people at the head of the line pile their plates high, with absolutely no thought as to whether there'll be enough for who ever's behind them. Will that make page 1 of the newspaper? No. But is it a deadly sin? Yes. And each of us could do our own list of how greed, gluttony, pride, anger, lust, laziness and envy corrupt our lives, couldn't we? That's why we each need ongoing repentance.

But understand: repentance is really a joyful thing, because it opens us to the grace God desires to pour into our lives. Repentance is not only our acknowledgment that something is wrong and needs to change, but is also our becoming open to change and growth and life instead of living death. The call that everyone must answer is the call of Jesus to turn from our selfish, sinful ways; to consider the claims that Christ makes; and then to choose whether we will trust Him, or continue down a path that's ultimately destructive to us and those around us. And know this: refusing to answer is itself an answer.

Beyond the call to faith, there's the call that Jesus gave to Simon, Andrew, James and John in Matthew 4:19, where, Jesus tells them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." This is the call to discipleship. A lot of people answer the call to faith. They consider the claims of Jesus, find them valid, trust in Him for salvation and are either baptized or recommit themselves to the promises made on their behalf when they were baptized as children. But then they just sort sit there and never go deeper into the life of faith. Jesus' call to these fishermen was a call to a deeper life, a changed life. We might say that if the call to faith is the call to change our minds, then the call to discipleship is the call to change our lives. This was Jesus' call for these men to change their lives.

And yes, that's a process. From John's Gospel, we learn that before their call in today's Gospel, Jesus had already encountered Andrew and his brother, Simon Peter. These men were likely familiar with Jesus and His teaching. And certainly Andrew, who had been a disciple of John the Baptist, was standing right next to John when "John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world!'" In other words, John was saying, "This is the One I've been telling you about." So Andrew and another of John's disciples, possibly John, the son of Zebedee, followed after Jesus. They hung out with Jesus for a while; then Andrew went and found his brother, Simon, and told him, "We have found the Messiah," and Peter went to meet Jesus. That's when Jesus told Simon his name would be Peter.

But still they didn't answer the call to discipleship right off the bat, because they recognized that the call to be a disciple is more challenging than the call to faith. Jesus didn't just say, "Trust Me;" He said, "Follow Me. Do what I do. Walk as I walk. Live as I live. Imitate Me." And quickly they saw that the way Jesus was walking was the way of selflessness and sacrifice. Jesus would take the basin at the end of his days, wrap a towel around Himself, wash the disciples' feet, and then go to the cross. It was not an easy life to which Jesus was calling these men. Discipleship is costly. Discipleship is about making the kingdom of God the priority of our lives. It's a leaving the old life, the old values, priorities and pursuits, and beginning a new life of faith, hope and love. There are a lot of people who hear, and even answer, the call to faith; but fewer are the people who hear and answer the call to discipleship, though the call goes out to everyone who answers the call to faith.

Look: the first disciples Jesus called were ordinary, common, hard-working fishermen. These guys made their living on the Sea of Galilee as commercial fishermen. It was hard, dangerous work, and the men who did it were simple, not highly educated, hard-working men who only sought to make a living for their families. And the point is that Jesus isn't necessarily looking for well-educated, well-qualified persons to be disciples. Jesus is looking for willing persons, persons who are willing to hear the call to faith and the claims of Jesus, and then willing to join Him in transforming the world. That's the call to discipleship: the call to learn from Him, then put into practice what we learn; and He's calling all of us to be His disciples.

And flowing out of the call to discipleship is the call to ministry: not ministry as a cleric or monastic, but simply service in the kingdom of God. Every person who answers the call to be a disciple is called to ministry. Jesus, after inviting these men to "follow" Him, adds that he will "make you fishers of men." He gave them a job to do: to work with him in transforming the world. If the call to faith is a call to change our minds, and the call to discipleship is the call to change our lives, then the call to ministry is the call to change our world. Jesus is calling us---common, ordinary, and unprepared as we are---to work with Him in transforming the world. And our ordinariness doesn't excuse us from answering the call, because Jesus doesn't call the qualified; He qualifies the called. Jesus needs Christian business men and women who can reach non-Christian businessmen and women. Jesus needs Christian law enforcement officers who can reach non-Christian law enforcement officers. Jesus needs students and grocery clerks and doctors and nurses and teachers seniors who will go into the places of their lives and witness to His saving grace. Jesus called these hard-working fishermen to reach their community, and He's calling us to reach our community.

Jesus is calling us to faith, to discipleship and to ministry. He's calling us to change our minds, to change our lives, and as His co-workers to change our world. It's likely that if you're here this morning, you've already answered the call to faith. But, just in case you haven't, Jesus is calling you to faith today. Don't miss your calling! There may be others here who haven't answered the call to discipleship. You know He wants you to go deeper, but you've been afraid of the cost of going deeper so you've resisted. Don't miss your calling! Still others may be here who have gone deeper and feel in love following Jesus, but have resisted serving because you felt you weren't capable. But He'll make you capable. So don't miss your calling!