

JANUARY 13, 2025 FATHER FRANCIS SALASIAR

After having celebrated the season of Christmas, we begin the Ordinary season. As we start this new season, we are given the beginning of Jesus' public ministry as he proclaims that the time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe in the Good News. We have heard this invitation of repentance before. That was John the Baptist's message but we thought John was the warm-up act. He had said to him... He had said this himself. "I am not He." So what is Jesus doing reprising all that? Jesus calls his announcement 'Good News'. But at this precise moment, as the story begins, the message itself is not solid enough. And if we are truthful, it is difficult to discern what's good about it. The kingdom, we are told, is near. It's not here. It's not fulfilled. It is not crashing in to replace the dim and sometimes grim realities of this world. They're still under the slavery of Romans.

But Mark does not give us a chance to ponder that far along as the story moves right along the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Where he calls his disciples, promising them that he will make them fishers of people. It is striking and quite probably revealing that Mark's vision of the gospel story gets off to such a humble and modest start. Matthew has his mysterious star in the east and the wise men who follow it. Luke gives us layer upon layer of drama surrounding the birth and later appearance of Jesus. John brings us with what... ..with that all-creating word of God who was with God in the beginning to the rim of the galaxies. To the beginning of all things. But not Mark. Mark allows Jesus merely to appear from out of nowhere, emerging humbly from Nazareth to be baptized by John. And then, just when we do expect that the curtain is going to rise on the drama to come, we find ourselves in Galilee as Jesus gets to work assembling a suit of followers that can be described as nothing other than ragtag.

The important thing that we have to keep reminding ourselves of is the proclamation of Jesus. "The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe in the Good News." This is the core of Jesus' mission. It's a message of hope, restoration, and transformation. The phrase "the Kingdom of God" is not just about Heaven, it's about God's reign breaking into our world, changing lives, systems, and hearts here and now. People today, more than ever, need to know that this Kingdom is real and available. They need to see the joy and the possibilities of that Kingdom in us. Too often people are so easily satisfied with just having what's quick, easy, and cheap. People settle for immediate gratifications like liquor or rock band, sports, or the distractions provided by the entertainment world. They look to these things to save them, or at least to help them move forward in a grim and distracted world.

But as CS Lewis once wrote, "We are far too easily satisfied. We are like a child who refuses an invitation to go to the beach for the day and prefers to sit in the alley in the slum making mud pies simply because the child really can't imagine how much better a day at the shore can be." "What could be better than making these slimy mud pies?", the child might think. If only he knew. So, dear brothers and sisters, the Kingdom of God is at hand. Though we begin this Ordinary season, though it is the Ordinary Time, but we are reminded at the beginning as we start this season of the message, the Good News, that the Kingdom of God is near at hand. Let us not be so easily satisfied with the temporary pleasures of money, power, and food, cable TV, and wonders of technology. A better, exciting, hopeful, joyful, Kingdom of God is real.

The Kingdom of God is at hand. Let us live as a people who have this truth and let us help others too to know this truth. And Jesus chooses his apos--disciples, selecting and calling Simon, his brother John, and

James, and his brother. Each of us are called through our baptism, we are given this invitation to become fishers of people. To carry the Good News that there is a better world possible and available. The Kingdom of God is near. May we continue to grow in our love towards God and may we share this kingdom message to the people, particularly those who are hurting. Particularly who feel that they are last, they're left out, they're abandoned. May the presence of Christ, whom we have celebrated these last few weeks, continue to inspire us, bless us. May we carry forward the message of God. The time is fulfilled. And the Kingdom of God has come near.