

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

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Learning to follow directions is big at our house right now, and there are 2 things that I *really* try to emphasize:

1. Give directions because I *love* them – want them to be *safe* and *happy*, and *learn* how to keep *themselves* safe and happy.
2. We can follow directions *even* if we don't *want* to!

Of course, we never reach a point in life where we don't have to follow directions.

- ❖ Necessary in all kinds of circumstances – at work, on the road or in public places
- ❖ Vital for healthy relationships that we be able to listen to what people in our lives are saying and asking of us

This is true of our relationship with God as well, though it can be difficult because we often can't understand or appreciate what he's accomplishing.

- ❖ John the Baptist is a great example of this.
- ❖ When Jesus came to be baptized, he didn't get it and even balked at first, but submitted after Jesus reassured him it was the right thing to do.

Then, in this week's gospel, John himself tells us how far from getting it he really was when *twice* he says "I myself did not know him."

- ❖ The thing is, John *did* know Jesus – they were *cousins*!
- ❖ But he didn't know him as the *Messiah*, the *Son of God* – *not* until he saw the HS *descend* and *remain* on him, the sign God had promised.

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So we see that God *called* John and then gave him *just* enough information to *follow* directions, which is how he *loves all* of us.

- ❖ You see, we can't *love* God without *servicing* him, just like we can't say that we *truly love* someone if we're not willing to *give* of ourselves for them.
- ❖ The *depth* of the relationship is determined by the *amount* of ourselves we're willing to *give*, so God never *offers* us more love than we can *receive* because that means *asking* more than we can *give*.

Now, when we *do* experience the love of God and *respond* by following his *directions*, even if we don't *understand* or *want* to follow them, our *act* of love and humble *sacrifice* makes *room* for us to experience *more* of God's love.

- ❖ Because love and service *build* on each other God is *always* coming to us wherever we *are* to *draw* us *closer* to him.
- ❖ *Progress* in the spiritual life comes from responding to God's love *drawing* us to *his* heart by moving *him* closer and closer to *ours*.
- ❖ And we see an example of this in the *second* part of today's gospel.

Notice that Jesus doesn't come up and say, "Hi, I'm *Jesus*, the *Lamb* of God John's been *telling* you about, let's go" – he just *walks by*.

- ❖ Jesus doesn't *demand* anything from them, but simply *comes* to where they *are*.
- ❖ But when they *encounter* him, something *resonates* in their hearts and so they *follow*, and Jesus does the *same* thing with *us*.

Whenever we read the gospels, we're *presented* with opportunities to be *drawn* into the life of *Jesus*.

- ❖ For *John* and *Andrew*, it's John the Baptist's *testimony*, identifying Jesus as the one they've *waiting* for.
- ❖ For *us*, maybe it's the *mercy* he shows to the woman caught in *adultery* or the *compassion* he shows to the *parents* of sick or oppressed *children*.
- ❖ Maybe it's the *tears* he sheds for *Lazarus* or the *delight* he has when people come to him in *faith*.

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- ❖ Maybe it's the way he prays from the *cross* for those who *hate* him.

Whatever draws us in, we're *attracted* because we want to experience it *firsthand*.

- ❖ So *each* time, just like with John and Andrew, Jesus is *prompting* us to look *deeper* into our hearts, asking us, "*What do you seek?*"
- ❖ What are you *looking* for? What are you *hoping* for?
- ❖ We *follow* Jesus' directions because *he's* the *answer* to those questions, and even if don't *understand* that, his invitation is *always*, "Come and see."