Listen to this conversation and see if it doesn’t strike a familiar note:

And the Lord said, GO!
And I said, Who, me?
And God said, Yes, you.
And I said,
   But I’m not ready yet
And there is company coming
And I can’t leave my family, . .
And God said, You’re stalling.

And the Lord said, GO!
I said, But I don’t want to.
And God said I didn’t ask you if you wanted to.
And I said:
   Listen, I’m not that kind of person
To get involved in arguments.
Besides my family won’t like it,
And what will the neighbors think?
And God said: Baloney!

And a third time the Lord said, GO!
And I said, Do I have to?
And God said, Do you love me?
And I said,
   Lord, I’m scared.
People are going to hate me, . .
And I can’t take it all by myself.
And God said, Where do you think I will be?

And the Lord said, GO!
And I sighed
Here I am…send me.

Remember how last weekend the gospel told us the story of the initial conversation between Jesus and the first two of his disciples. As Andrew and John followed Him, Jesus turned to them and said: What do you want? The disciples were caught short by the request and could only stammer: Where do you live? And then followed the invitation: Come and see. The disciples spent the rest of the day with him. It was an encounter that would change their lives completely.

In this week’s gospel we read of an encounter even more significant. Jesus has returned to Galilee after the Baptist’s imprisonment and has begun to preach the kingdom with the same cry of John: The Kingdom of God is at hand; change your lives. Jesus now walks along the shore of the Sea of Galilee and finds Andrew and Peter in the midst of their work as fishermen. Once again He invites: “Come after me”, and, with the memory of their earlier encounter burned in their memories, Andrew and Peter immediately abandon their
nets - and their livelihood - and become his followers. The encounter is repeated with James and John. Jesus summons them; they drop everything, leave their father in the boat, and become Jesus’ followers. It is no longer a call simply to know Him, it is a call to change their lives completely and follow Him.

If the conversation with which we began this homily struck a familiar chord, we are aware that Jesus enters into dialogue with each of us. He walks into our life; He gives us the opportunity to learn of Him and then bids us follow. Noah knew that type of call, and Paul reminds us that it is one that is desperately important for all times.

Like the disciples, Jesus calls us to learn of Him. The learning, what we sometimes call Christian education, should be that opportunity to follow the initial invitation to come and see. We need to read the gospels in the way in which they were intended, and that is, to introduce us to the person of Jesus. To follow Him, one must follow the person and not some abstract plan or teaching. To be a Christian is to follow Christ – to follow in His footsteps - and not merely to admire what He teaches.

Our call to come and see; our call to know Him, is an ongoing education; it is a constant commitment. We build schools for our children; we provide religious education programs for all ages. The ideal is that no individual will need to live in ignorance of the Son of God. It is essential that we recognize that initial invitation of Jesus and train our children to do the same.

But more to the point, we must always be aware that, after that initial encounter, He calls us to follow. Our lives can never really remain the same. We are to live His life. We are to love those around us as He loves them. We are to see our world through His eyes. We are to come to know everything – our very selves, our families and friends, our world, as He knows and loves them. We are to love them as we and they are loved by Jesus.

Andrew and Peter, James and John dropped everything and became His disciples. The principal theme of Mark’s gospel is that we, too, are called to be disciples and must begin to change our own lives. It is to be a change that can do nothing but deepen our joy and make more profound our satisfaction in making a difference in the lives of others. It is the basis of our preaching the gospel. As Francis of Assisi reminded his followers, “Always preach the gospel, and where it is necessary, use words.” No matter what our profession or walk in life, we are called to find motivation for our careers in that radical call of Christ.

Headlines describe Pope Francis’ trips - to the Far East and throughout the world. He spoke to six million in the Philippines and in the rain! He exemplifies the meaning of the Church Unity Octave we conclude this week as he reaches out to people of all faiths, calling for a mutual respect and living a call to unity. Christ’s prayer on the night before His passion must never be forgotten: “May they be one, as we are one.” It is the call for our age – for every age - to drop all to follow Him, putting His will and love at the profound depths of our hearts, of our professions, our careers, our lives. It is in answering His call that we find strength and motivation to reach out to others and to make a difference. The call to follow is persistent, and it is radical. It is a call that goes out to each of us, and it must be answered in every phase of life, from childhood even to retired old age.

And the Lord said, GO!
And I sighed
Here I am…send me.