

SCREEN: Happy Anniversary!

Yesterday was my anniversary.

I was ordained a priest on June 29th, 1985.

I'll help you with the math, that was 34 years ago.

I know, it's shocking because I look so young!

This week I found myself thinking back on all the parishes I served.

I've met so many great people and had incredible experiences.

And I'm not just saying this, but my time here as your pastor

have been the best years by far.

SCREEN: blank red background

But 34 years...where'd the time go?

Maybe you're like me:

celebrating a birthday, a wedding anniversary or other achievement makes you feel nostalgic.

You reflect on all that has been and wonder what the future holds.

SCREEN: The Classics main screen

Today we're launching our summer message series titled, The Classics.

This series will take us through Labor Day.

We chose the title because this summer at Mass,

we will hear some of the classic stories;

the greatest hits - the 'golden oldies' - of the Bible.

Stories we first heard as kids and

have heard many times over the years.

But because they're so familiar to us,

when we hear them again, our tendency can be to tune out, saying,

"I've heard that one before."

But I want to challenge you to listen like you're hearing them for the first time.

If you do, you'll hear God calling you to deeper faith this summer.

So let's begin.

The readings today brought back a lot of memories of my 8 years in seminary.

I heard these readings many times.

They are classic vocation stories.

In the first reading today we met the Prophet Elijah,
considered one of the bible's greatest prophets.

Now remember that prophets were individuals called by God to be his spokesmen.

Any time God's Chosen People got off track or
lost sight of their faith,

God sent a prophet to call them back.

Elijah's time as a prophet was nearing an end
so God instructed him to choose someone to take his place;
a young man named Elisha.

He was plowing a field when the prophet found him and threw his cloak over him.

Here's what happened next:

SCREEN: Elisha left the oxen, ran after Elijah, and said,

*"Please, let me kiss my father and mother goodbye,
and I will follow you."*

Elijah answered, *"Go back! Have I done anything to you?"*

Elisha left him, and taking the yoke of oxen, slaughtered them;
he used the plowing equipment for fuel to boil their flesh,
and gave it to his people to eat.

Then Elisha left and followed Elijah as his attendant.

Now I got to be honest,

if I were Elijah I might be a little miffed that God said,

"Your time is at an end and I've picked a new guy to take over."

But Elijah was obedient.

The prophet's cloak was his uniform, almost like my vestment.

Putting it on Elisha was basically saying, *"You're it!"*

And I'm always blown away by Elisha's response.

It was immediate.

He said, "*I'm ready! Send me!*" and off they went.

Elisha left his family behind, gave up his inheritance,
and headed off in an entirely new direction all because God called him.

He said 'yes', not knowing what would be required of him.

Talk about faith and trust!

You can see why this reading is used to encourage vocations.

Priests and all who lead the Church are called to be like Elisha.

To hear the Lord saying, "*Follow me*" and to respond with faith and trust,
even though they have no idea where they're going.

Jesus in the Gospel today was calling people to follow him
and he encountered some reluctant followers.

One wanted time to bury his father, another asked to say goodbye to his family.

Neither strike me as unreasonable requests, but Jesus must have sensed their hesitancy
because here's what he said:

**SCREEN: "No one who sets a hand to the plow
and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God."**

Meaning that discipleship requires a 100% commitment.

You can't follow the Lord half-heartedly,
with one foot in the world and one in the Kingdom.

It's all or nothing.

Those Jesus met in today's Gospel were willing to follow,
but only if they could do it on their own terms.

As I said, these are classic vocation stories.

But they're not just for priests, they apply to any one who wants to follow Jesus.

Let me talk about how these readings have impacted me over the years.

When I was ordained a priest in 1985,

I had no idea where I'd be assigned.

Because I grew up in the suburbs,

I assumed that's where I'd be sent.

My first assignment was at Our Lady Queen of Peace Church,
in a very poor section of DC.

Boy, was I outside my comfort zone!

But the parishioners loved and accepted me and it was a great first assignment.

Through them, God was teaching me some important lessons
about faith and trust and the need to abandon preconceived ideas
about people and places and ministry.

Let me share three lessons I've learned from all the places I've served.

SCREEN: expect the unexpected

Lesson One: expect the unexpected.

My first assignment taught me this, but I keep learning it every day.

It means letting go of my plans, my agenda,
and my desire for life on my terms.

And every time I let go and let God lead,

I open up a space for the Lord to speak.

Ask yourself, how open are you to God's call?

Who do you most relate to in the readings today?

Are you more like Elisha: *I'm ready, send me!* OR
like the reluctant followers Jesus met:

I'll follow you, but only on my own terms.

Now, following is not easy.

Every follower can expect disappointments, challenges and setbacks;
it's part of the journey.

But when seen through the eyes of faith,
the struggles make you stronger,
more mature, and in the end, a better disciple.

SCREEN: turn to others

Another lesson I've learned is that I need the support of others.

This is true for every disciple.

Being members of Christ's Body - the Church - means

we are connected to him and to one another.

No disciple makes it as a loner; no one is an island.

We all need good, healthy relationships...

whether they be with family, friends or other disciples.

Last week we announced that Jen Mayer is joining our parish staff as adult discipleship coordinator.

Jen will coordinate our adult small groups and our Becoming Catholic program.

We went through a long search process to find the right person because we know how crucial this ministry is.

Disciples grow when they have others to guide and support them.

Which makes them more effective witnesses of Christ.

Without others to help point the way,
life can get out of balance.

Turning to others for support requires humility and admitting,
I don't have all the answers.

I need others if I am going to succeed and grow.

Every follower is a work in progress.

Discipleship is a journey with ups and downs,
good days and bad days.

Turning to others helps keep us on the right path.

SCREEN: share the love and mercy of God

Which brings me to the greatest lesson I've learned over the years:
my mission as a follower is to share the love and mercy of God.

And that's because His love and mercy makes all things possible.

As a priest, I make it my goal to share this every day, in some way.

Whether I'm celebrating Mass, hearing confessions,
anointing the sick or traveling to Honduras -

it's all about sharing God's love and mercy.

God makes all things possible for me and you and every follower.

Think of the ways you can do this with those God brings into your life;
with family, friends, neighbors and those in need.

These lessons I've learned aren't new, aren't original,
and aren't particularly deep.

They are classic lessons for followers of Christ.

On the day of my ordination, as a naive 26 year old,
I was ready to save the world.

Thirty four years later, the world still needs saving.

I wake up every morning asking God to show me
where to go and what to do, and he never disappoints.

As I recommit to my calling,

I invite you to do the same.

Let us hear the voice of Christ, saying "*Follow me!*"

And may our response to the Lord be loud and clear:

I'm ready, send me! Amen. +