

They left their nets and followed him

We link the birth of Christ with the winter solstice - when the sun begins to rise earlier each day, its light more enduring, its warmth (sooner or later!) guaranteed.

And so our liturgy for today plays upon that note, borrowing lines from the prophet Isaiah: *The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light, upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone.* The psalm for today also chimes in with *The Lord is my light and my salvation . . . of whom should I be afraid?*

Of course it's not so much the sun itself but the *rays* of the sun that do the brightening, the warming – the rays being none other than you and me in so far as we each carry some bit of that light and warmth of Christ into the circles within which we engage. As in keeping with that good old hymn: *This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine . . . let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.*

But moving on to the Gospel for today, it's one thing to read *about* the four fishermen of today's Gospel reading: Peter and Andrew, James and John. But what good will that do you – unless you think of them in relation to yourself, in what ways they may resemble you?

Think of anyone of them. May he not feel: well here I am within the confines of my boat again, the same old schedule, my everyday job, the limits of my workaday world, my little realm of responsibility. Here I am entangled in my nets (in every sense of entangled) – linking pieces that have become broken, that need mending again and again, worrying about the tides, the whereabouts of the fish, the pressure of competitors – which holds not only for my business but for my everyday life, patching up my relationships, worrying whether my accounts are in order, trying to hold my world together. Loose ends here and there always wearing upon my consciousness, tires needing fixing yesterday and here today we lose our electricity for several hours. Mending one thing or another week after week – like that inside door to my garage which refuses to close in cold weather!

It's like the fellow in the cartoon reclining in his backyard on a summer day while the house says "I need painting" or the dog says "I need to see the vet" or the lawn says "I need cutting" or the spouse says, "Dine in or dine out?"

By thus imagining the Gospel episode in ever-greater depth you begin to learn more about the four disciples – and what's even more – you begin to discover *how much they resemble you*, entangled as you are in the many demands of your survival. As a result, the little episode of only five verses begins to expand and deepen like the sea itself, awakens you to how shallowly you live your own life – so that when Jesus says, "Follow me; stop casting your net in any old direction only to come up empty, unfulfilled; go for the big fish, a bigness of mind and heart that resides among the bigger questions of why and what and who you are. Go deep," do you leave your nets and follow him?