

A husband says to his wife: "Last night, in your sleep, you were using abusive language against me." The wife replies "That was your imagination." "What imagination,?" hubby replies. WIFE: "That I was asleep!"

My older sister was here over Christmas. She told me that women are better at multi-tasking than men, so I asked her to sit down and be quiet. She couldn't do either! And that's how it all started.....

OK, first some background on this gospel. After beginning his gospel with John's baptism of Jesus, Mark leaves the wilderness behind and introduces Jesus in Galilee. John has been arrested and his death will be told later. The old era has ended with the ministry of John, and the new begins with Jesus. The one foretold by Isaiah, anointed by God's Spirit and sent to bring good news (Isaiah 61:1), has arrived.

Jesus proclaims, "The time is fulfilled" (v. 15). Now is the decisive turning point. God is breaking into history to fulfill His promises and bring His plan of salvation to completion. The heart of Jesus' proclamation of the good news is this: "The kingdom of God has come near." The term 'kingdom' should be understood in a dynamic sense. It is not a territory or place that has come near, but it is the 'reign of God' that has arrived with the ministry of Jesus. The term suggests both a present and a future quality. God's kingdom is embodied in the person of Jesus, yet we await its completion. This kingdom is the world as God intended it to be – a world of justice, peace, goodness, and joy. The good news is that now this reign of God is beginning for those who choose to accept it and enter into it.

This decisive time of fulfillment and the breaking in of God's kingdom demands a twofold response: "Repent, and believe in the good news." Repentance means turning from everything that leads away from God's reign. Belief means accepting God's reign and yielding to everything that God is doing in Jesus Christ.

An essential part of accepting God's reign is the call to discipleship. As Jesus calls Simon (later called Peter), Andrew, James, and John, He offers them the opportunity to be part of this kingdom of God and to offer their lives for the work of bringing God's plan for the world to completion. Their response is immediate, selfless, and total.

Now it was not unusual at the time for Jewish men to choose a rabbi to follow for a period of time in order to learn from him. But with these disciples, Jesus takes the initiative, choosing whom He wishes. Jesus' words to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people," are a succinct expression of the meaning of disciples. Jesus' followers are not called to study the Torah, like disciples of the rabbis, but to follow a person – Jesus Christ. The call of Jesus gives disciples a radically new purpose in life. They will no longer serve their own interests and desires but those of Jesus.

These 2 sets of brothers immediately leave their nets, their boats, and their livelihood to follow Jesus. By illustrating discipleship with the call of these 4 fishermen, Mark emphasizes that entering the kingdom is more important than even life itself. The call to discipleship requires a decision – to accept the invitation of Jesus, to leave behind our old lives, to be taught by Jesus, and to participate in bringing God's reign to fulfillment. (all adapted from Stephen J. Binz, JESUS, THE SUFFERING SERVANT, Part 1, p. 18-19)

And one fascinating detail. Mark has a calculated use of the Greek verb '*amphiballo*,' 'casting a net into the sea' (1:16ff). This verb only occurs in the Septuagint – the Greek translation of the Old Testament, in the Book of Habakkuk: "Are you not from of old, O lord my God, my Holy One?...You have made people like the fish of the sea, like crawling things that have no ruler. *The enemy* brings all of them up with a hook; *he drags them out with his net, (amphibestron)*, he gathers them in his seine; so he rejoices and exults. *Therefore*

he sacrifices to ('amphiballo) his net (amphibestron) and makes offerings to his seine; for by them his portion is lavish, and his food is rich.

So 'casting a net' subtly identifies Simon and Andrew as blind idolaters needing repentance. What seals the deal on this interpretation is that Peter and Andrew left behind real physical nets, not nets of idolatry. Considering this, we might be startled: they left the wrong nets! Mark is telling us that they followed Jesus as idolaters who were clueless about their need for repentance. And in many ways, then, they function as proxies for all other disciples – including us – who are often blind to what we drag behind us, to that which influences everything we say and do. (Roc O'Connor, SJ, I WANT TO SEE, p. 60-61)

Which brings me to the heart of the application of this text for us. Sometimes the simple act of naming something can be immensely helpful. Before we can put a name on something we stand more helpless before its effects, not really knowing what's happening to us.

What are the major faith struggles, idols, for disciples in our own time, within our own world? Here are ten that deserve particular attention.

1. The struggle with the atheism of our everyday consciousness – that is, the struggle to have a vital sense of God within a secular culture that, for good and bad, is the most powerful narcotic ever perpetrated on this planet – the struggle to be conscious of God outside church and explicit religious activity.
2. The struggle to live in torn, divided, and highly polarized communities, as wounded persons ourselves, and carry that tension without resentment and without giving it back in kind; the struggle inside our own wounded selves to be healers and peacemakers rather than contribute to the tension.
3. The struggle to live, love, and forgive beyond the infectious ideologies that we daily inhale – that is, the struggle for true sincerity, to genuinely know and follow our hearts and minds beyond what is prescribed to us by the Right and the Left – the struggle to be neither liberal nor conservative but rather men and women of the truth, and of compassion.
4. The struggle to carry our sexuality without undue frigidity and without irresponsibility; the struggle for a healthy sexuality that can both properly revere -- and properly delight in -- this great power; the struggle to carry our sexuality in such a way so as to radiate both chastity and passion.
5. The struggle for interiority and prayer inside a culture that in its thirst for information and distraction constitutes a virtual conspiracy against depth and solitude, the eclipse of silence in our world; the struggle to move our eyes beyond our digital screens toward a deeper horizon.
6. The struggle to deal in a healthy way with 'the dragon' of personal grandiosity, ambition, and pathological restlessness inside a culture that daily overstimulates them; the struggle to cope in a healthy way with both affirmation and rejection; the struggle inside a restless and overstimulated environment to habitually find the delicate balance between depression and inflation.
7. The struggle not to be motivated by paranoia, fear, narrowness, and overprotectionism in the face of terrorism and overpowering complexity; the struggle not to let our desire for clarity and security to override compassion and truth.
8. The struggle with moral loneliness inside a religious, cultural, political, and moral desert; the struggle to find soul mates who meet us and encourage us inside our moral center.
9. The struggle to link faith to justice; the struggle to get a letter of reference from the poor, to connect the Gospels to the streets, to remain on the side of the poor, the excluded, the immigrant.

10. The struggle for community and church; the struggle inside a culture of excessive individuality to find the healthy line between individuality and community, spirituality and church; the struggle as adult children of the Enlightenment to be both mature and committed, spiritual, and connected to the only community that is trying to proclaim this message to the world, the church.

What is the value in a list of this sort? It's important to name things and to name them properly. Our idolatries, our pathologies, are always with us. Simply naming them does not in and of itself banish them, or cure them. However, as James Hillman used to quip, "a symptom suffers most when it doesn't know where it belongs." An idol remains an idol as long as we don't name it as such. (adapted from Rolheiser, *WRESTLING WITH GOD*, p. 167-170)

What nets do we need to leave behind, in order to follow Christ more faithfully? Amen.