

In calling those whom He would later name Apostles, Jesus did not choose mighty emperors or kings, generals, senators or wealthy powerful men. He did not choose the educated, philosophers or great public speakers. He chose these common folk. They were simple, untaught fishermen. What is the meaning of this? Why would Jesus choose these men, who, arguably, are not competent to lead the Church, to be His Apostles?

That they were uneducated rustics, simple fishermen, does not mean that the great minds and teachers of the Church throughout the centuries are insignificant. After His resurrection, Jesus chose Paul to be an apostle. Paul, as you know, was highly educated and learned in Judaism. He studied under one of most preeminent rabbis of his day. He was a Roman citizen and educated in philosophy. In chapter 17 of the Acts of the Apostles, Paul finds himself at a place called

the Areopagus. It was there, at that time in history, that people would come to discuss and debate important matters. Scripture describes Paul's address to the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. Paul's speech shows that he understood these philosophies and was knowledgeable of Greek literature, which he quotes to them. And in many of Paul's letters, he is clearly drawing on Greek philosophical ideas, particularly, from Stoicism. And the Church, from the earliest times, and throughout history, has employed philosophy to help better explain the faith. And, of course, we see how brilliant Jesus Himself was, even as a youth of twelve years old. Scripture says that Joseph and Mary,

...found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions; and all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers (Luke 2:46–47).

St. Paul says that Church is

...built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets,  
with Christ Jesus Himself as the cornerstone (Eph 2:20).

This is remarkable. The Church is built on the foundation of simple fishmen. And Paul puts them on a par with the prophets of the Old Testament. Jesus gave these men the mission to go unto all nations to baptize and to teach them all that He had commanded them (Matt 28:19). These are the same men who were often unable to understand Jesus' teaching, and who denied Him, and ran away, when things got tough. Peter, in particular, vehemently denied Jesus.

Why, then, did Jesus chose simple, uneducated rustics to be His apostles? The answer to this question is found in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians.

For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For consider your call, brethren; not many of you were wise according to the flesh, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth; but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame

the strong, God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no flesh might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption; therefore, as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord" (1 Co 1:25-31).

The Lord chose these men so that no human being might boast. Their weaknesses and foolishness make it clear that the Church exists, and continues to exist, by the power of God and not that of men.

Christ founded the Church, saying, "I will build my Church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it (Mt 16:18). The Church, then, is divinely founded. It is not a human invention. The Church, In the words of St. Paul, is the body of Christ and we are members of it. The Church is not the hierarchy and the Church is not laity. The Church is Christ's body, that is, Christ Himself. We are members of His body, the Church, meaning, we are incorporated into His body,

making us members of His Church. We are members of Christ Himself. This is why we say that the Holy Eucharist makes the Church. The Holy Eucharist is truly and really Jesus' body and blood. And it is our communion in His body and blood that makes us His body, the Church. As St. Paul teaches,

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread (1 Co 10:16–17).

In choosing men, such as Peter and Andrew, James and John, our Lord makes it very clear to us, that men are not the source of the Church. These men, in particular, are far from being wise and clever. It was not by means of their human abilities and political talents that the Church took hold and flourished in the world. Throughout the centuries, the Lord has used such simple folks to convert the great and the small

alike. Thus, it was not by coincidence that Jesus called these men. Even their work as fishermen was part of their calling

In the Gospel of Luke, they had been at it all night long and had caught nothing. This shows us what mere human effort can accomplish. As Lord has said, "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). And so, after an entire night of fishing, weary from their labor, the Lord told them, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch" (Luke 5:4). Peter would have thought to himself, "This man, Jesus, knows nothing about fishing. This is futile. What a waste of time?" Peter says to Jesus, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets" (Luke 5:5). You know what happened. Their nets were filled to the breakpoint. They filled two boats with fish such that they began to sink.

Can we begin to see what we can do and what God can do? It is absurd to think that the Apostles founded and sustained the Church. The same is true today of the successors of the Apostles, the bishops. In any case, Peter responded, as we all should do before the Lord, by kneeling down at Jesus' feet and saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8). Jesus said to Peter, "Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men" (Luke 5:10). Thus, was their work as fishermen part of their calling to be Apostles. At this, they left everything to follow Jesus.

Our Lord chose these men to be Apostles, to be the first leaders and foundation of the Church. There are two important lessons here for us. First, the sin or the weakness of men is no reason, and certainly, no excuse, whatsoever, to separate from Christ's body, the Church. Do we leave because we discover that bishops, priests and deacons are sinners, like

us, or do we remain with the Church believing in Christ's promise, when He said, "Behold, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:20)? And that the gates of hades shall not prevail against the Church.

Second, choosing these men to be His Apostles, should be for us a great lesson in humility. They had been fishing all night and had caught nothing. Their human efforts were fruitless, useless. When the Lord intervened, however, with a miraculous catch of fish, Peter fell to his knees before Jesus, admitting, "I am a sinful man".

Humility is nothing more than recognizing and accepting the truth about ourselves. What a very difficult thing this is for us to do. Don't we love to think more of ourselves than we should? Don't we, at least at times, want others to also think more of us than they should? The Apostles thought far more of themselves than they should have. This was the reason that

their abandonment and denial of Jesus took them by surprised. Although it is not in Scripture, you can be sure that Peter and the Apostles were later saying to themselves, “I never thought I would ever do anything like that to Jesus”.

As a result of their pride, they were not only surprised by their sin, but were overwhelmed by their sorrow as we see in Peter. The stark contrast between who they believed themselves to be, and who they really were, was extremely difficult to take. It was pride that made the Apostle’s sorrow all the more painful. Imagine the guilt and shame involved, particularly, when it all ended in Jesus’ crucifixion. How could they face the Lord’s mother, since they had abandoned her son? And they abandoned her too. Mary remained with Him at the foot of the cross, but where were they? At least, the Apostle John, who was but a youth at the time, returned to

stand with Mary, in what was the most painful and agonizing moment of her life.

What happened to the Apostles is what pride does to us. It deludes us into thinking more of ourselves than we should, which leads to our downfall. This is what Peter and the Apostles did. They insistence that they would follow Jesus unto death. If they had understood the truth about themselves, as Jesus tried to tell them, they would not have made such bold claims. If they had been humble, they would have believed Jesus and begged Him not to let them abandon Him. This, however, was not the case.

Pride deludes us, leading to our fall, but pride is even more dangerous than this. When we fall, pride can lead us to despair. This is what happen to Judas, who, after betraying our Lord, went out and hung himself. In the book of Proverbs it says, “Pride goes before destruction” (Prov 16:18). If you are

ever surprised by your sins, then, you were thinking more of yourself than you should have. If we strive for humility, to know the truth about ourselves before God, then, we will never be surprised by our sins, and we will never fall victim to discouragement, or despair, as did Judas. Humility enables us to confess our sins, to accept that we can do nothing apart from Jesus, and to confidently entrust ourselves to the infinite mercy of God. In the end, this is what the Apostles did, not by their own strength, but by the power of the Holy Spirit. Is anyone of us here greater than the Apostles? Don't be a slave to pride and all its anxieties and dangers. If you wish to be at peace and find true happiness, then, embrace humility, that is, the truth about yourself, no matter how painful or difficult it may be. For as our Lord has said, "The truth will set you free".