

HOMILY OF ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE, APOSTOLIC NUNCIO
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE CATHOLIC CONFERENCE DIRECTORS
FEAST OF SAINT ANDREW
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SAINT JOHN PAUL II NATIONAL SHRINE, WASHINGTON, DC

My brothers and sisters in Christ,

I am happy to be with you on this Feast of the Apostle Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter. As the Apostolic Nuncio, the representative of the Holy Father Pope Francis, the Successor of Saint Peter, to the United States, I wish to express His Holiness' personal closeness and paternal affection for each of you, as well as his gratitude for your service to the Church.

On numerous occasions, the Holy Father has expressed his desire for a synodal church, that is, a church that walks together, that listens to the voice of Christ and the Spirit, that takes its members seriously, and that preserves communion among the People of God, including the bishops and the Pope. Your state Catholic Conferences are outstanding examples of synodality and a sign of what can be accomplished when people of faith work together for the spread of the Gospel. Through your work, which is a service to the bishops as successors of the Apostles, the word of Christ goes forth and people come to faith and salvation through Christ. place yourself at the service of the Gospel in the mission of evangelization. *How beautiful are the feet of those who bring Good News!* (Romans 10:15; Is 52:7)

A synodal Church walks together. Jesus too walked with others. Our Gospel notes that *"As Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers."* (Mt 4:18) It goes on to recount the call of the fishermen. Today we remember Saint Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter. He and his brother radically left their nets and followed at the sound of the Lord's voice.

In reflecting on Saint Andrew, we learn how to serve the Church. First, we learn humility. He is often referred to as the "brother" of Simon Peter. A musically-gifted bishop was once asked what he thought was the most difficult instrument to play. He replied, "Second Fiddle." It is sometimes hard to play a role of service behind another person, but it is important to reflect on the gift and privilege of being called to serve. Andrew understands and accepts his role both as a brother and as Apostle, one called and sent by Christ on mission. Although your work is hidden from the limelight, I encourage you to carry on in humble service to Christ and His Church.

In the Eastern tradition, Andrew is called the "*Protokletos*", which means the "first called." In the Gospel of John, he was initially a disciple of John the Baptist who pointed out the Lamb of God (John 2:35). Andrew was a man seeking the Messiah and the fulfillment of the hopes and dreams of Israel. He is a model for us, not only for his sincere pursuit of God but also for his ability to listen and to see. He listened to what John had to say and then he followed Jesus, "*saw where he was staying and stayed with him that day.*" (John 2:39)

To be missionaries, we must first be disciples. Andrew reminds us of the need to seek God ourselves: to not only continually seek the face of Christ but also to be with Him – to encounter Him. Pope Benedict XVI wrote: "Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction." (Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*, 25 December 2005,1)

Saint Andrew had this encounter with the Lord, and it changed his life. Imagine hearing Jesus' voice for the first time. What thoughts and feelings would have been in our minds and hearts? Dwell in the transformative power of the moment! Andrew was so moved by his encounter with the Lord that he could say to Simon, "*We have found the Messiah!*" (John 2:41)

Do we say the same? Is our faith an encounter with the loving God, or do we sometimes slip into a religious formalism, sometimes far removed from the living Word of God? This is a real challenge for the Church today: to present the Faith as a life changing encounter with the person of Jesus. It was Andrew who brought Simon to Jesus. He was first a disciple and then became a missionary disciple. Do we follow his example?

Andrew also appears at other important moments in the Gospels. It is he who points out the boy with five loaves and two fish (John 6:9). Jesus uses the occasion to perform a great miracle with Eucharistic overtones. Again, Andrew shares in the mission of making Jesus known as the one who fulfills our deepest hunger and desires.

In Saint Mark's Gospel (Mk 13:1-4), when Jesus speaks of the destruction of the Temple, saying that not one stone would be left upon another, Andrew asks what signs will appear and when all these things will be accomplished. This provides the occasion for Jesus to speak more fully about the destruction of the Temple, the end of times, of the need to be attentive to the signs of the times and of the need to bear witness. This is useful for us too. We also must be attentive to the "signs of the times" and the change in our society and world, adapting our strategies for evangelization so that the Gospel may go forth. Attentive to the signs of the times, the Church can offer concrete solutions to the people who look to her to find their way to the Lord of life.

Finally, just before the Last Supper (John 12:20-26), Andrew serves with Philip as an interpreter for some Greeks who had come to Jerusalem for Passover. There Jesus declared that His hour had arrived and spoke of the necessity of the grain of wheat falling to the ground and dying to bear much fruit. Andrew served as a mediator for bringing the message of Jesus' death and resurrection, foretold in the Gospel, to the Greek-speaking world. It seems that he was always bringing people to Jesus. He is an example of being in a permanent state of mission. There Jesus also promised: "*If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.*" (John 12:26)

That promise remains true for us. Today, we honor Saint Andrew. With his brother Simon, he never ceased to be a "fisher of men," bearing witness to the Risen Lord to the very end of his earthly journey. We too are called to bear witness to Christ daily and are invited to share the "joy of the Gospel" which fills the whole earth. May Saint Andrew intercede for us so that we might be joy-filled missionary disciples, testifying to others: "*We have found the Messiah!*" (John 2:41)