

Back before I was a seminarian, I was giving an announcement at Mass - I wanted people to come visit me at a table we had set up in the gathering space

Now the Church of the Resurrection in Rochester has a large gathering space and there are a lot of things going on - so I felt the need to make myself stand out a little more

So I told them that it should be easy to find me in the gathering space after Mass - I told them that I would be the only one eared Korean back there

In this case, this is how I identified myself

I see in today's readings the question of identity

How do we identify ourselves?

We have our name - we have the place where we live - we have the place we went to college - we have the place where we grew up - we have the place where we were born - we have the political party we are associated with - we have our favorite NFL team - we have our favorite music groups

Jesus was identified with Bethlehem since that is where He was born

Later Jesus is called a Nazarene because He grew up in Nazareth

Jesus, in today's Gospel, leaves Nazareth to go live up north by Capernaum

John the Baptist had prepared for Jesus preaching by telling the people to repent

There Jesus continues the message by telling people not to just repent, but that the Kingdom of heaven is at hand

In the Gospel of Matthew we then hear Jesus calling four of the twelve Apostles: Peter, Andrew, James, John

Have you ever wondered why they just stopped fishing and followed Jesus?

Did they really not like fishing and were looking for an excuse to leave?

Did James and John not like working with their father?

Jesus does tell Peter and Andrew, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men."

Now I know what that means and it does have a further special meaning as a priest, but as a fisherman 2000 years ago, I'm not sure if I would have know what Jesus was talking about - at least not enough to drop the only way of life that I had ever known and followed an itinerant preacher

What was so attractive about Jesus that Peter, Andrew, James, and John just left their lives and their nets behind to follow Jesus?

Now I realize Jesus is God and with God anything is possible

Maybe it was like a Jedi mind trick like the one Luke Skywalker uses at Jaba the Hut's place in the Return of the Jedi, but I'm 100% sure that wasn't it

Jesus is called a Nazarean, but we know that His ultimate identity is God, the second person of the Trinity

And Jesus, being God, is the fullness of truth, goodness, and beauty

Even without Jesus saying anything, I can just imagine truth, goodness, and beauty emanating from Him

This is what I think attracted these four fishermen to Jesus - so much so that they dropped their very lives and followed Him

They followed Jesus and proclaimed the gospel of the Kingdom of heaven and cured people  
Some thirty years later, Christians in Corinth had lost sight of who it was they were following  
St. Paul reprimands them for their divisions

Paul says there are to be no divisions and that they should agree in the matters of faith

It had been reported to Paul that some said they belonged to Paul; that some said they belonged to Apollos, or Cephas, or Christ

Paul asks them, "Who died for them?" - "In whose name were they baptized?"

In other words, what was their identity?

Did they identify themselves with some preacher of the Gospel?

Why were they not identifying themselves with the Gospel itself, with Christ?

Christ was suppose to be their identity

Paul is not saying that placing your identity in your faith is wrong

However, as Christians we are not to place our faith in this person or that person, in this priest or that priest, this church leader or that church leader, but in Christ - Christ is to be our identity

This is what Peter, Andrew, James, and John realized

That Jesus was big enough to be their everything

Jesus was big enough to stake their happiness in

Jesus was big enough to take on their identifying with Him

We too must do the same thing

No matter how bad the homily is, or how sinful the priest, as long as he has faculties, Christ meets us on the altar in the Eucharist

By taking Jesus into ourselves, into our bodies, we become more like Christ

We don't become more like St. Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or Father Vogel

Christ is to be our identity - we, the Church, are the body of Christ - Christ is our identity - that is why we gather as a body of believers

Christian shouldn't be just an attribute in a list of things like where we were born, where we went to school, what political party we belong to

Christian, Christ, should be the very center of who we are

Paul calls the Corinthians back to this understanding of themselves

Jesus invites Peter, Andrew, James, and John to follow Him, to make Him the center of their identities

Jesus invites us to do the same