

Immediately!

Feast of St. Andrew, November 30, 2020

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As Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.
- Matthew 4:18-22

The gospel author known as Matthew uses the word ‘immediately’ more than all of the other gospel writers combined. The word can at first seem clear enough, but we know that the English word *immediately* is or can be a chameleon. The same was true of the ancient Greek word *eutheos* (εὐθέως yoo-theh'-oce).

In some contexts, as used in English and in Scripture, *eutheos* can suggest impulsiveness, rash action, shallowness, a dangerous rush to judgment. Listen, for instance, to how immediately crops up twice in Matthew’s parable of the sower. The seed sown on rocky ground is described by Jesus as “... the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away.” (13:20-21)

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Judas “*immediately came up to Jesus and said, ‘Greetings, Rabbi!’ and kissed him.*” (26:49) Sometime later that same night, after Peter had denied Jesus three times, the cock crowed ‘immediately’. (26:74b)

In the Greek *eutheos* of Matthew’s gospel, immediately may also be cast in a more favorable light. It may positively suggest decisiveness, clear intention, not dawdling but doing now what is and should be done now, a priority. Immediately may be used to connote divine initiative and action.

Immediately is used twice in the passage we just heard. The word infuses a particularly bright energy to the scene. Four men had been fishermen. It’s fair to conjecture that fishing is the only way of life that their families had known for generations. And then came the day, the moment, when Jesus came along and called them, at which point things changed ...
immediately.

Interestingly, although the word is scattered throughout this gospel, and used to diverse ends, it’s only been used once before today’s scene, and there may be an intended parallel: “... when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him ...” (3:16) These two scenes are arguably connected by the theme of vocation, the before and after, the beginning of something altogether new and of God.

All of this leads me to wonder what is immediate for you or me. In what way has something immediate been unhelpful, obscured the good, even been destructive? In these instances we may ask for grace to slow down, reconsider, recover sabbath, perhaps even repair damage that's been caused by our *eutheos*, make amends.

As or more important today, considering the immediate responses of Andrew and three other fishermen – what is of divine immediacy for you or me? What are we waiting for? What need has presented itself that suggests our immediate attention? What is getting in our way? What – for God's sake – cannot or should not wait? Let us pray to know and see and respond when it's our God-given turn to act, immediately. *Amen.*