

**January 21, 2018 The Pied Piper Homily:** Brothers and sisters, in the history of German folklore, there are few characters as memorable as the Pied Piper of Hamelin. His legend dates back to the Middle Ages and his extraordinary story has been a favored subject by many artists, poets and storytellers for centuries. Attired in a multi-colored costume, the Pied Piper is a charismatic figure who attracts an enormous following. A gifted musician, he can mesmerize any audience by the sound of his flute. According to the best known legend, the Pied Piper is hired by civil officials to rid their town of rodents. They hope that his music can lure the troublesome pests out of town. The Pied Piper agrees to do so, and is successful in his mission to rid the town of the vermin. But when he asks for payment for the service rendered, he is refused. The Pied Piper exacts revenge by training his sights on the village children. His music casts a spell on them, and they all follow him out of the village and away from their homes.

The Piper represents all those who lead people astray and who entice them to walk down the wrong path. In addition, he stands for those who are deceptively clever and lead good, unsuspecting people on the road to oblivion.

The theme of today's gospel (Mk.1:14-20) is the call to discipleship. Jesus takes the most unusual step of calling his first four disciples, who will form a closely knit circle around their master. Jesus calls them to come after him, follow him, be with him, and share in his life and mission. The early disciples are called to follow the path he sets out for them. He will not disappoint them!

It is interesting to note that the word "follow" appears in the gospel of Mark no fewer than eighty times. When our Lord says, "Come after me", his words may reflect the venerable Jewish practice of a student walking a few paces behind his master, at a respectable distance. The word "disciple" is based on a Greek word meaning "student". Recall the scolding Peter receives from the mouth of Christ after he opposed his master's decision to fully embrace the mystery of the cross. "GET BEHIND ME, Satan". The disciple is called to follow, not lead.

Even today, the custom of following is practiced in the Far East. An Arab woman walks behind her husband, not alongside him; a son follows his father; a bride follows her bridegroom; and an employee walks behind his employer.

Fr. George Montague, a distinguished biblical scholar, insists that several essential lessons can be gleaned from the school of Jesus. To learn in his school is, first and foremost, to follow him. The disciples learn life's most important lessons by living with Jesus and enjoying to the full his desired company. He will teach them by his example at every moment. Fr. Montague points out that there is no address for Jesus' school, no fixed place where the disciples gather daily to be taught. Jesus is constantly on the move. Discipleship always is a journey. There is no map to tell his disciples where he will be tomorrow. In truth, discipleship is following Jesus where he intends to lead us. Arguably, the Christian may be led to unlikely places today such as a soup kitchen, homeless shelter, or a home for unwed mothers, where Christ's Word takes flesh.

One of the world's most prestigious institutions of higher learning is Oxford University in England. Actually, Oxford is an umbrella of schools, one of which is named in honor of Our Lord, Christ College.

Nowadays, one wonders if the voice the students hear at the University belongs to Christ, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life (Jn.14:6). Today, too many “Pied Pipers”, lead others astray, making it virtually impossible for them to distinguish between good and evil, and to fulfill their vocation in life, which is holiness . In particular, The seductive sounds of the twenty- four hour news shows, the blandishments of the entertainment and advertising industry and the omnipresent social media network all conspire to stifle the voice of Christ and lead too many of the baptized to travel down the wrong roads.

The Pied Piper may be alive and well in the modern world. Even so, we each have a choice of following a more attractive teacher, and his name is Jesus. Let us reflect on the lovely words of today’s gospel. “Then they abandoned their nets and followed Him”. (Mk.1:18) He will never disappoint us!

Amen!