

The image in the first reading of God carrying the people on eagles' wings has become quite a loved image and has been brought to life in a number of religious songs and hymns. It is a powerful image and one that we should spend time pondering. It suggests a God who protects his people, sheltering them in his wings like a bird might shelter its chicks. If we let our imaginations play with the image, we can also recognise the popular image of a child being carried high in the air by a bird, with the child having what we call a "bird's eye" view of the world. I think this is part of the message that is conveyed with this image in the Bible. Only it is not so much a "bird's eye" view as a "God's eye" view. From the eagles' wings high in the skies, the people could see far beyond their current situation in the wilderness. They could see across to the other nations; they could see to the land that God has promised them. God says that he will make them a people and give them a special place among the nations. He says they will be a kingdom of priests. In other words, they will worship God in freedom, and they will become a sign to the other nations of God's care for the world.

St Matthew gives us another image of being up high and seeing far away. Like the image of the eagle, it is an image of seeing the world in a different perspective. He tells us that Jesus looks out across the fields and sees a bountiful crop ready for harvesting. It sounds like an image of good news and potentially huge profits. But he can also see that there are no workers there to bring in the harvest. What looked like a scene of bounty and promise will quickly become a scene of waste and loss.

But, of course, Jesus wasn't looking at the fields; he wasn't thinking about profits. He was looking at the crowds; he was worried for the people. Yes, he saw the potential among them, but he also saw misery. He saw people who were sick and hungry, who had followed him because they sensed that he could turn things around for them. We are told that Jesus felt compassion for them. This is a strong word in the gospel. It is probably the strongest emotion that anyone can have. We might say that he felt for them right to the very core of his being.

There is an urgency in the situation, so he needs people to be out among the harvest. This prompts Jesus to gather a group of helpers around him. So, he calls the apostles. The list of things they are to do sounds fairly simple. They are to cure disease and sickness, cleanse lepers, and cast out devils. But it is not as straightforward as it sounds. They could only do

these things if they followed his instructions. This would mean that they needed to capture his vision of what was possible for these people. They would need to be able to see the potential of these people and not just their misery. It meant that they would need to fly with Jesus, as it were, on eagles' wings. This would mean allowing these basic human tasks to be transformed by God's power.

The thing that is striking in the calling of the apostles is that we are given the names of each of them. In the Bible, a person's name is important. Sometimes their name is changed when they are given a special task. We know that happened with Peter, who was called Simon. It also happened later with Paul, who had been called Saul.

We each need to think of ourselves as called by name. When a child is baptised, the ceremony begins with a question to the parents: "What name have you given to your child?" Then when it comes to the baptism itself, with the pouring of water, the priest calls the person by name and then says, "I baptise you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit". This naming connects us with God. If I can use the image of the first reading: at our baptism God lifts us up on eagles' wings. Throughout our life, God offers us a view of the world and of life that can be bigger than it might otherwise be. We grow in our capacity to see the world as Jesus sees it. This means developing the sort of compassion that so moved him in the gospel.

Ours is an important vocation. We are called to be disciples to our world. It can sound a daunting task, but it will only be that if we make it so. Jesus does not lay burdens on us; rather he carries our burdens. The best way to be a disciple is to imitate him. Imitate him with eyes open to see the people and the world around us. Imitate him by being moved with compassion – a compassion that moves us to see the possibilities that are before us and our world. Imitate him by doing something to make his kingdom visible.