

2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time
January 17-18, 2009
St. John the Evangelist Parish
Deacon James J. Benjamin

I Samuel 3: 3b-10, 19 Ps. 40: 2-4, 7-10 I Cor. 6: 13c-15a, 17-20 John 1: 35-42

A powerful theme of being called by God appears in the readings today. Both the OT reading, from the book of Samuel, and the Gospel passage from John deal with this phenomenon. We have an opportunity today to think about how God communicates with us, and how open we are to hearing what he has to say to us.

The readings give us two ways in which God's call happened: Samuel experienced it in a confusing series of dreams. Even the old priest Eli didn't understand what was going on until he was awakened for the third time! Sometimes the Lord's call can be ambiguous; we may not be sure what we are hearing or what we are supposed to do. Sometimes it helps to go to a spiritual elder to find out what might be happening, as Samuel did with Eli.

Eli gives Samuel good advice, and it is good advice for us too. If we think God is trying to get in touch with us... and God is always trying to do that... our best response is one of openness: Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.

The prayer of Eli is marvelous; our ears, our mind and our heart are open to what the Lord has in mind for us. It's the prayer for a lifetime, for the Lord doesn't call us only once, but many, many times in the course of our lives. He wants to give us guidance, certainly in big events, like a choice of career, or school, or the choice of a spouse. But God also is available to advise us in smaller things: how we could best spend some vacation time, or a special gift for a loved one, or the next book we should read.

Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening. It is a good habit to get into, before making important decisions, or when we are just uncertain about what to do next,

to just be quiet and listen to the One who loves us more than we can imagine and wants us to walk on the right path always.

The Gospel passage reports a different sort of call. This time the call to Andrew and his companion, (who is possibly the beloved disciple himself), is initiated by John the Baptist. Look! There is the Lamb of God.

Andrew and his friend were disciples of John; presumably they trusted him from having been with him, observing his love of God and his total commitment to preaching his message of repentance, for they immediately leave him and follow Jesus. Sometimes the call from God may come through someone else.

On a personal note, my call to the diaconate came initially from a priest friend, and it was supported by my family, Msgr. Tillman and others. I was a bit like Eli, slow on the uptake: it took me several messages over a period of years before I figured out that God wasn't going to let up until I made my decision to enter the diaconate.

In my experience God's call can come at any time and without any warning. For me it came while walking with my friend on a dusty road in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the former Yugoslavia.

One thing to remember is that it is important to check out the authenticity of the invitation you have received, making sure that what you sense is truly from God. Sometimes it is O.K. to wait and reflect alone. Jesuits recommend considering your emotional reaction whenever you think about your call: if you feel consoled, positive, enthusiastic when you consider the choice then it is probably from God. If, on the other hand, you feel a sense of desolation, isolation, generally negative emotions, with this choice before you, then it's a good sign that it may not be authentically from God. You also could discuss your options with someone you trust, hopefully someone with good sense and spiritual maturity.

Andrew and his companion evidently decided to check out John's advice by following behind Jesus and observing him.

Not a bad strategy,
but Jesus soon sees them and asks them the fateful question,
“What are you looking for?”
What a question!
We came here today because each of us is looking for something.
What are you looking for?
Peace? Understanding? Forgiveness?
Community? A sense of mission?
Closeness to Jesus?
It is a good question to consider:
What, indeed, are you and I looking for?

John’s two disciples seem not to know how to respond to Jesus,
for they ask him another question,
“Teacher, where do you stay?”
Seemingly a commonplace question,
but scholars suggest they were asking,
as we might today to clarify something we’ve just heard,
“Jesus, where are you coming from?
Are you asking us a superficial question,
or are you really asking us to speak of the deepest yearnings of our hearts?”
And, of course, that is exactly what Jesus was asking of them,
and of us.
Even if we may have lost touch with why we actually come here,
week after week, year after year,
or even if we secretly think
that the kind of peace or joy we seek is really impossible anyway,
Jesus asks us, “what are you looking for?”

You remember that he sometimes asked people disfigured with leprosy
or lost in their sin what they wanted from him.
And then he gave them the healing or the forgiveness they were seeking.
And so he will do for us.
Jesus wants to heal us, to make us whole, to make us holy—
all related words.

When we are open to hearing his call,
“Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening,”
he will lead us on that path of healing and wholeness.

And then, his invitation to Andrew and his friend,
“Come and see.”
Come with me, come follow me,
learn from me, know that I am the one
for whom you have looked your entire life, and see.
“See,” that great verb that in Sacred Scripture,

that has to with faith.

When the blind man recovered his sight,
he found faith in Jesus as his Messiah.

His physical sight and his eyes of faith became functional together.

Come and see:

follow the path of righteousness and obedience to my Word,
and come to a greater faith in Me.

Our entire lives are about this process:

listening actively and regularly for God's call, today,
asking him to give us the deepest desire of our wounded selves,
following him in the best and most total way we can,
and nurturing the growth of ever-greater faith in Jesus in our hearts.

Lord, help us to open ourselves and to quiet ourselves
so that we can hear your gentle voice leading us.

Give us the grace to follow where you want us to go,
even if we are confused or feel lost at times.

Bless us with the sense of your presence and your love,
fill us with your peace and increase our faith in you. Amen.