

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time B - Speak, Lord, your servant is listening!

January 17, 2021.

We now begin what the Church calls “Ordinary Time.” We begin with a significant story, found in the first reading (1 Samuel 3:3b-10, 19) for this Sunday. A young man named Samuel is sleeping in the temple. He wakes up instantly when he hears his name spoken out loud. He cries out, “Here I am!” and runs to his master, Eli, who is sleeping in another place in the temple. “You called me, what do you want?” “I didn’t call you,” Eli rasps. “Go back to sleep.” But the same thing happened again until the third time when the old man at last understands. Wisely, he says “Samuel if this happens again, say these words: **‘Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.’**” So following the instruction, that’s what Samuel did and he grew up accompanied by the Lord’s presence.

After his baptism in the Jordan, Jesus set out on his great mission. Throughout this year, we follow the course of his mission in readings from the gospel of Mark. The gospel readings of this Sunday (from John) and next Sunday (from Mark) invite us to set out on this journey of discovery as disciples of the Lord. Just as he called the first disciples, the Saviour has a personal call for each one of us to become his ‘disciple’. The word, ‘disciple’, occurs many times in the New Testament. Why was it so important for the first Christians? Discipleship, the privileged relationship one can have with a great and inspiring leader, has been an important factor in the shaping of human history, the shaping of Christianity. The lives of their followers are changed, and they face life with a new inspiration and hope. Clearly, those who made up the communities of the New Testament experienced this kind of relationship with the Risen Lord. Today’s reading from John’s gospel (1:35-42) helps us understand how we too can have this kind of relationship with the Saviour. Many factors are at work as disciples come to meet and appreciate their leader. The Gospel reading tells us how John introduces his disciples to follow Jesus — the one must increase and I must decrease. We are told, **“John was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God.’ The two disciples heard what he said and followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following him and said to them, ‘What are you looking for?’ They said to him, ‘Rabbi’ ... where are you staying?’ He said to them, ‘Come and see.’”**

“What are you looking for?” There are several layers to this question. The plain meaning is, “What’s up? Why are you following me?” But there’s a deeper layer too, the same one that finally shook Samuel loose: **“Are you looking for God? Is there something about me that answers the deep desire of your heart?”**. Jesus’ invitation then and now is the same: **“Come and see.”** Andrew accepted the invitation and then ran to his brother Simon, shouting, **“we have found the Messiah!”** When Jesus saw Simon, he gave him the name *Cephas* (Peter), meaning “the Rock”, a new identity for him. Jesus must have seen the innermost stability in him. Peter could never have become fully himself if someone had not named him all the way to his depths. The same goes for Samuel. God can call any of us by a name that reaches all the way down into our souls, to a place that we do not even know about! Our job is to begin listening and grow. God is constantly calling us into a deeper relationship with him in the circumstances of life we find ourselves in. When we were baptized our ears are symbolically opened to his call. Much ranting noise in the world we live in have drowned out God’s call. It is important to find peace and quiet in our days so we can hear the voice of God. Do you sense in your inside a kind voice whispering an invitation, calling you by your real name, calling you to be an ally of the Christ of God, inviting you to come and see the poor and the suffering, the sick and the lonely?

As disciples of inspiring leaders, many men and women have had the experience of finding themselves, and giving meaning to their lives. We can look forward to that same experience, if we accept the Lord's invitation to share our lives with him. Today's reading reminds us that Peter found his true self in the new name Jesus gave him. For the wisdom of Christian faith, this personal identity has its origin in the eternal designs of God. Samuel was called by name. Simon's unique place in the plan of God was declared in the new name Jesus gave him. Yes, he still had much to learn, but the path that was to lead to his eternal glory had been made clear. The truth of Christ must be the compass that guides our hearts, minds, and decisions in all the ups and downs of mission as Christ's disciples and ambassadors in this darkened, needy world. That is the only sure path to the deep interior peace and lasting fruitfulness we yearn for. Hence, St. Paul's encouragement to the Corinthians in this Sunday's reading can also serve as his encouragement to us— ***“Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? But whoever is joined to the Lord becomes one Spirit with him.”*** (1 Corinthians 6:13c-15a).

This coming Monday, January 18, marked in our church calendar the beginning of the **Week of Prayer for Christian Unity** and will conclude on January 25, the Festival Day of the Conversion of Saint Paul. This year's theme – **Abide in my love and you shall bear much fruit** (John 15:5-9) – calls us to pray and to work for reconciliation and unity in the church, with our human family, and with all of creation. It invites us to nourish unity with God and with one another through contemplative silence, prayer, and common action. ***“So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*** (John 8:31-32)

As Pope Francis reminds us **“Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he has found the love of God in Christ Jesus”** We should not postpone our commitment to the mission of Christ. Faith is a gift that we must share so that more people know the unconditional love of Jesus. What is our mission at this time, this week, this month, this year? ***“Whatever you have said in the darkness will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered behind closed doors will be proclaimed on the housetops”*** (Luke 12:1-7)

The holy father's January prayer intention for evangelization extends the scope even wider: **“At the service of human fraternity, may the Lord give us the grace to live in full fellowship with our brothers and sisters of other religions, praying for one another, open to all.”**