

Second Sunday of the year January 21, 2018

1 Samuel 3:3-10, 19; 1 Corinthians 6:13-15, 17-20; John 1:35-42

God's call is personal and he invites every individual to build a close relationship with him. His call is unique as he calls individuals as well as nations to be united with him. The Bible constantly narrates the instances of God calling people and demanding a response from him. We have the examples of Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah and several other persons who were called by God and they responded to him by sacrificing everything to obey his invitation. In the New Testament we have the call of Mary at the Annunciation, the call of Peter and his companions at the lake, call of Matthew the Tax Collector, call of Paul and several others. In the Gospel of John we hear Jesus telling his disciples: "You did not choose me but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit." God calls us today to participate in his mission and he expects us to respond to his call. In the first reading we have God calling young Samuel as he was sleeping in the Temple. Once Samuel recognizes God's call he responds to him saying: "Speak Lord, your servant is listening." Once he is ready to listen, God gives him the message and the mission. In the second reading Paul reminds us that our bodies are holy as we are the members of Christ's Body and the Temple of the Holy Spirit. Our bodies are meant to glorify God and not meant for immorality. In the Gospel we have John identifying the Messiah in Jesus and telling his disciples that he is the Lamb of God. He also encourages them to be the followers of Jesus. These disciples in their turn invite others to come to be with Jesus on his mission.

The call from God to holiness is constant in our lives and it requires a response from us. The Bible tells us of God's call in the life of every person, manifesting his majesty, power and mystery. He presents every individual with the gift of life at the creation and calls each person by name. Calling by name signifies that God personally cares for him. He then gives new life with the Sacrament of Baptism where a person is dead to the world and reborn in Christ. God calls each individual on a specific mission to continue his work on earth, as a missionary, religious, priest, a teacher or any other work he has chosen. In the book of Deuteronomy Moses tells the people of Israel: "You are a holy people to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his possession out of all the people that are present on the face of the earth." God's call constitutes a permanent relationship expressed in the Old Testament in the form

of the Covenant. God promises the people that if they truly obey his commands then he will be their God and they will be his people. In the New Testament we have the examples of the particular call given to the Apostles who were personally called to share his work of the Kingdom. Later he calls Paul while he was on his way to Damascus to be the Apostle of the Gentiles. Down the centuries we have the examples of thousands of people whom God has called to share his life. God's call continues even today and he gives the commission to proclaim his kingdom to all.

In today's First Reading we heard God calling young Samuel. This was at the very early stage of Prophet's long career. The family of Eli belonging to the priestly family of Levi was placed in charge of the shrine. Meantime, Samuel's mother Hannah had dedicated him to the Lord in gratitude for the gift of his birth. Young Samuel's devotion to God is apparent as he sleeps in the presence of the ark. Here he experienced the call of God. Samuel was called three times that night and each time he ran to his Mater Eli and reported to him without realizing that it was God who was calling him. Eli was spiritually enlightened to realize that it was the call of God to Samuel and instructed him to announce that he was ready to listen to God's word. When he was called again Samuel responded to God and offered his humble service to him saying, "Speak Lord, your servant is listening." Samuel answered his calling from God and listened to him attentively. As he grew up, the Lord was with him and Samuel was devoted to the Lord. This indicates that as Samuel learned the Words of God, either directly listening to God or from divine inspirations and also from the teachings of Eli. Samuel valued those words of God and memorized the laws of God together with his commandments. He made a genuine effort to implement them in his life through his thoughts, words and actions. He answered God's call by persevering in His living faith to the best of his ability and listened to all that God had to tell him.

In today's Second Reading Paul tells the Corinthians community that our bodies are meant to serve the Lord. They are not meant to be used for worldly desires and pleasures that do not glorify God. This is because we are members of Christ's Body and therefore our bodies are made holy. We belong to Christ and God the Father will raise our bodies just as he raised Jesus from the dead since our bodies are members of the mystical Body of Christ. Paul tells the Corinthians that we cannot say that our bodies are not touched by sin. He instructs them that there are sins both outside the body and against the body. If we are disrespectful

towards someone, that is a sin outside the body. If we are selfish, refusing to share the blessings that the Lord has bestowed upon us, that is also a sin outside the body. All our unchristian words and actions that do not shine in the love of Christ are sins outside the body. A sin against the body is when we lower our desires to satisfy our unhealthy carnal relationships, contrary to the sacredness of the Church. Because we have become Temples of the Holy Spirit, we do not own our bodies. Although we have a free will, we no longer have a right to choose what is unholy. Since the Holy Spirit dwells in our body, it belongs to God and therefore must be respected. Through the Sacrament of Baptism, we have waived that right, alleging our obedience to the spiritual law of God. We have been purchased by the price of Christ's blood and must use our bodies to glorify God.

Our Gospel of today places before us the delicate way of God's calling. This is revealed to us by the actions of the two disciples of John the Baptist who followed Jesus. Here John the Baptist who takes the initiative to tell them about the Lamb of God and directs them to Jesus. The Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John have different views regarding the way in which Jesus received his first disciples. In the Synoptic Gospels Jesus simply invites four fishermen to follow him and promises to make them fishers of Men. They respond to his call, leave everything including their family and follow him. In John on the other hand the first disciples of Jesus were originally the disciples of John the Baptist. On the suggestion of John they leave him and become the followers of Jesus. Some historians of early Christianity think that John rather accurately reflects what really happened. The fourth Evangelist here makes it clear that the disciples of John should become the disciples of Jesus as John himself prepared the way towards the real leader. He told them about Jesus the Lamb of God. This title of the Lamb of God is intended to recall the rich background of the Paschal lamb as well as the suffering servant as pointed out by Prophet Isaiah. In other words, Jesus is the savior and therefore he must be followed.

John was aware that his role as a leader was only temporary and that he had to yield the leadership to Jesus. Perhaps with much hesitation or out of curiosity the two disciples of John followed Jesus. The first question Jesus asked those followed him was, what they were looking for and what they wanted. This was the key question of all discipleship, ancient and modern. The disciples in the story responded saying that they wanted to know where exactly Jesus was staying. He in turn issued the invitation to come and see and the Gospel tells us that they

accepted his invitation to go with him and spent the day with him. In every person's life, the discipleship is about faith, risk and discovery. It is the faith in the one who calls the other, makes the response possible. On the part of the listener it is the decision to respond even if there is uncertainty or darkness ahead of them. Ultimately it is the discovery of the richness of the person who invites makes vocation complete. In the gospel Jesus did not give them any lengthy description about becoming a disciple. Discipleship comes from experience and no theory or explanation can capture its reality. We are told that the disciples not only followed Jesus but they remained with him the entire day.

We do not know what happened and where exactly they stayed when they went with Jesus. The term "remain" is used in John to convey a relationship, commitment and intimacy. It describes what is at the heart of authentic discipleship. To know him in the Gospel is to seek, find and respond to his loving presence in the fabric of one's daily lives. However their spending time with Jesus had lasting effect on them. One of the two, Andrew who became a committed follower of Jesus went immediately in great excitement to his brother Simon, and told him that they had found the Messiah. He brought Simon to Jesus who gave him a new name, Cephas, which is translated as Peter and the word means "rock." Simon Peter became a follower, an apostle and the leader of the new community. A change of name among the chosen people meant a change of position or function. It is important to note that Peter, in spite of his future important role, was not called directly by Jesus but through his brother. And that happens again and again. Everyone, including the greatest saints, were called by another, often lesser, person and brought to Christ. In the life of Jesuit Saint Peter Claver who became the apostle of the slaves of South America, it was the simple saintly brother Alphonsus Rodrigues who gave him the inspiration. Each one of us has been led to Jesus by other people and we too have the task of leading others to him.

Jesus came to the earth to proclaim the Kingdom of God and for this mission he elicits human help. He calls people personally to be with him to continue his work on earth and fulfill the Kingdom. He chose every human way possible to make his church more acceptable to our human understanding and more acceptable to our finite human nature. We know from faith that Jesus the Son of God could deal directly with every human person directly. He could teach the infallible truth, forgive sins, build up new relationships and pour out his graces. Then there will

be no need of a church with its teaching authority and doctrine, or the sacraments and not even Eucharist. But in his divine wisdom he elicits human help and support to complete his mission of establishing the kingdom of God. In his mission Jesus chose the lowly, simple ordinary persons. The first twelve disciples he chose were ordinary persons from Galilee, some of them fishermen, some tax collectors, some freedom fighters and others whose background is not known. Certainly they were not men of education and social standing in their community. He trained them and made them persons to carry out his work and to be his witnesses on earth. This is the same way Jesus has continued his mission over the past two thousand years building a new community and kingdom with ordinary simple persons.

God's call is a gift and this call is given to each and every person demands a response and readiness to work for him. He has called people to be missionaries, preachers, teachers, ordinary office workers, builders of families, social workers, medical practitioners, nurses, persons who could be his instruments of reconciliation, to work as priests and religious. In the Old Testament Prophet Jeremiah responding to the call of God says how he was called by God and he felt cheated at times and did not want to talk any more, for as a prophet he had suffered a lot from his adversaries. But he confessed that there was a compulsion from within him that did not allow him to keep quiet but talk on behalf of God and proclaim his justice. This again was the call that forced Mother Theresa to go and work in the slums and care for the poorest of the poor or of Father Damien to go and work among the lepers or to Francis Xavier to leave his motherland and go to distant lands like India, Japan to set the world on fire. Jesus places this responsibility on each one of us to continue his work on earth in a large or a small way depending on the talents he has placed on us.

God wants each and every one of us to experience the Kingdom of God through the Person of Christ. He is concerned of the new hearts and human spirit she has created within us, desiring that our freedom of choice will cooperate with His Divine Will and we will be assured our redemption. As we contemplate on his word and respond to his call we ask the grace from the Lord not to hesitate to respond to him but give him our life and strength to complete his divine task. Just as he asked the first disciples what they were looking for, so also Jesus is asking us today what we are searching. If we are looking for him, the way, the truth and the life, then we must fix your eyes on Jesus. We must answer our calling by living

our lives in harmony with the nature of our new human spirit that coexists within us with the indwelling Divine Presence of the Holy Spirit.

The Indian sage Ramakrishna Paramahansa, in his wisdom teaching narrates a beautiful story of vocation in a person's life. The story is about a young man who wanted to leave the world to become a sanyasi or a mendicant. His sister was getting worried about him and she told her husband that she was worried about her brother who had been planning to leave the world for the past three months. He had been sacrificing daily some food items, some of his comforts at home and giving up his rich and delicate clothes and so on. He husband looked at her and smiled and told her, "My dear, you need not be worried about your brother. The people who plan in this way to leave the world in this way by sacrificing little by little will not leave at all. You can rest assured that he will be with you for a long time to come." The wife was surprised at her husband's words and asked him, how one leaves the world to devote himself or herself to God. The husband looked at her and said to her: "My dear if you truly want to know how a person leaves the world and becomes sanyasi, I will tell you." He then got up; tore his flowing garments and wore a loin cloth; took a begging bowl in his hand and a walking stick. After this he bowed to his wife and said, from now on you and every woman to me is like a mother. He left the house never to return.

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