

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time B/2012

All the readings of this Sunday in the beginning of Ordinary Time talk about the call to serve God. The call to serve God is different from one individual to another. It is also different according to the circumstances in which each individual finds himself/herself. However, whatever might be the forms of the calls, they all have a same goal, namely to work for the glory of the Lord and the salvation of his people.

In the first reading, the young Samuel is called by God to serve him. The scenario is really strange, because, when hearing the voice calling him three times, he did not realize that it was God. That is the reason why he did go to Eli in order to verify if he was calling him. It was only later on and with the help of Eli that he came to recognize and understand that God was calling him. Finally, God revealed himself to him and he grew up under his protection.

What is behind this text is the idea that God calls us to serve him by serving our fellows. Sometimes, in order to come to the confirmation of our call, we need the help of our brothers and sisters so that we come to the discernment of our vocation. On our part, we need to be open and to ask for help when things do not seem clear to us in spite of the call we hear in our hearts.

Those who are called this way in order to serve the Lord are also called to lead a life of faithfulness and holiness. That is the reason why St Paul says in the second reading that the body of those who belong to Christ is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, they cannot offer their body to immorality, but rather they should glorify God in their body. Moreover, because Christ died for us, we do not belong to ourselves, but to Christ to the point that our bodies are sacred.

All this helps us understand not only what is at stake in today's Gospel as it talks about the first disciples of Jesus, but also the demand of their vocation as they have accepted to live in the footsteps of Jesus.

First of all, the Gospel says that when John the Baptist saw Jesus walking by, he told two of his disciples that he was the Lamb of God. When those wanted to know where Jesus was staying, he invited them to come and see themselves. They followed him and stayed with him. One of them, Andrew, went to tell his brother Simon who, in turn, followed Jesus. In the end, Jesus gave a new name to Simon who became Cephas.

What do we learn from these readings? The first thing we learn is about the mystery of God's call. Sometimes people ask me, "When did you hear or realize that God was calling you to become a priest"? In fact, God does not call us as it were on a telephone. The truth is that we feel a strong impetus that pushes us to engage for God and give our life for him. In that sense, the cause of God seems bigger than our life itself, so that we want to give to God everything we are by serving his people. That is what I felt and that is why, though still young, I wanted to become priest. There is a mystery here I cannot explain. It is the same mystery that is crossing the life of Samuel and other disciples as well.

The second thing we learn is about God's initiative. In fact, when Jesus saw the two disciples following him, he asked them what they were looking for. A little bit later, when they wanted to know where he was staying, he invited them to come and see.

This episode teaches us that whatever might be our vocation, it is always God who is the first to call us. He precedes us in everything we do, because the initiative is his. In fact, when we feel strongly some inclination for God or our hearts are so unsatisfied that we start asking questions about God, it is he who comes to meet us. God does not leave us search for him in the darkness and in the forsaken. He comes always to us with open hands. That is why God is not someone who keeps himself at a distance from us, but rather someone who is near us and is waiting for us. As St Augustine says, we would not even have begun to seek God unless he had already found us.

The third thing we learn is the importance of detachment. In fact, in the Jewish society, John was a respectful person. He changed the lives of many through his teaching. Given such an honor, we would think that he would stick to his position. However, in the Gospel, he invites his disciples to leave him and to transfer their loyalty to Jesus. And yet, human experience teaches us that there is no harder task than to take the second place when once the first was enjoyed. John, on the contrary, teaches us humility, sincerity and detachment.

The fourth thing we learn is about the importance of building relationship with Jesus. In fact, when Jesus told the disciples to “come and see”, he wanted them to make a connection with him and to be the people who know him from inside and not just from outside. This was true in the past as it is today. No one can make a strong relationship with someone when he cannot enter in his intimacy; otherwise the relationship remains artificial. It was only when the disciples stayed with Jesus and learned from him that they came to understand the demand of their vocation and what they had to pay in order to be true disciples.

The last thing we learn is about the transformation Jesus needs to see in us when we follow him. That transformation is shown in the Gospel through the change of the name of Simon who becomes Cephas. In fact, the change of name denotes a new relationship with God. When a person enters into relationship with God, he becomes a new person. That is why in the past, when someone entered religious life, he/she was given another name.

All this means that, when Jesus looks at us he sees not only what we are, but also what we can become under his guidance. Of course, he knew that Peter was a fisherman, but he wanted him to become a rock on which he would build his Church. That is why, we should not be afraid to work for the Lord in spite of our human limitations. We have to know that the Lord does not look at our present state, but at the potential in us and what we can become for the glory of his name and the welfare of his people.

Let us pray, then, that the Lord may strengthen us in our vocation. May he give us the courage to be open to our fellows who can help us discern our vocation! May God bless and strengthen those who have already responded to his call. God bless you all!

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



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