

[Readings: 1 Samuel 3:3b-10, 19; Ps. 40; 1 Cor 6:13c-15a, 17-20; John 1:35-42]

I like the story of the young woman who wanted to go to college, but her heart sank when she read the question on the application blank that asked, "Are you a leader?" Being both honest and conscientious, she wrote, "No," and returned the application, expecting the worst. To her surprise, she received this letter from the college: "Dear Applicant: A study of the application forms reveals that this year our college will have 1,452 new leaders. We are accepting you because we feel it is imperative that they have at least one follower."

In today's Gospel, Phillip comes to Nathanael and proclaims that he has found the one whom Moses wrote about. He is Jesus of Nazareth. While we do not know what expression Nathanael had on his face when he responded, I think that it is safe to say that his response revealed a cynical sneer. "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Answered Phillip: "Come and see." Something good can come from being a follower.

There's a lot to be said for following an inherited religion -- the kind many of us received from our parents if we were baptized as infants. It shows, first of all, that someone cared about us enough to represent us in the reception of the greatest gift of all: our membership in the life of Christ. Someone loved us and nurtured us in a living faith, perhaps sending us to parochial school or religious education/faith formation classes to learn more about what it means to be a Christian and a Catholic. Someone may have seen to it that we got all of our sacraments in order: Reconciliation, First Communion and Confirmation.

Maybe your family prayed together at meals or at bedtime, or attended Mass together on Sunday morning. Think about the religious images that were available in your home: a crucifix, a statue of the Blessed Mother, a picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Maybe you shared Bible stories together or the lives of the saints. Maybe family members modeled the works of charity, forgiveness, and service for you in ways that impressed you and enlivened your faith.

But those among us who didn't have the advantage of an inherited faith --those who may have come into the Church as adults -- are not really at a

disadvantage. They have been granted something that those with an inherited faith may not experience: the priceless moment of decision. Religious faith is something they once felt the absence of and then actively sought.

Attaining membership in the Church and coming to the Lord's Table in the Eucharist are privileges they keenly appreciate. The moment of decision, in which one deliberately chooses to follow Jesus as a joyful, missionary disciple, is a precious hour that shapes everything that comes after it. When we reject with clear vision the empty promises of worldly power, and embrace the path of love and service, the life in front of us will never look the same.

In the Bible, it always sounds so black-and-white and immediate. One minute, Samuel is asleep in his bed, dreaming a young boy's dreams. He is not waiting for God to call. He won't recognize the voice of God when it speaks to him! But after his priest-mentor Eli tells him how to respond to the Lord, Samuel finds the words and the courage to say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." From then on, Samuel will grow in stature as one of the great prophets of Israel, the anointer of kings and mouthpiece of the Most High.

The time of decision comes to Paul on his way to Damascus, his hand clutching papers permitting him to arrest and slaughter Christians. He is struck to the ground, blinded, as the voice of Jesus demands that he answer for his actions. Paul, a zealous Pharisee, was *not* looking for Jesus! But Jesus was looking for him, and so Paul accepts the invitation to become the great apostle to the Gentiles and most-quoted writer of the New Testament.

The disciples around John the Baptist had made up their mind to follow the great Baptizer on his mission. Imagine their surprise when John points to Jesus and shouts, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" Two of John's disciples transfer their allegiance at once to Jesus. One of them, Andrew, even goes home to fetch his brother Simon Peter.

And from that day, men who made their living fishing found a new vocation they had never dreamed of in the service of the Teacher. One would become the leader of a new community of faith, and both would die for their beliefs.

Those of us with an inherited faith may feel a little cheated at the idea that we never got the chance to decide, once and for all, that this Jesus was for us. Even those who came to the Church through the RCIA may sense that their journey in faith was more gradual and less dramatic than the stories we hear in scripture. Faith in God may never have been a question for many of us.

For some of us, becoming Catholic may have been more for the sake of convenience than a burning desire to celebrate at the Lord's Table. Maintaining Church membership may be more about habit than conviction.

And to all of us, in whatever situation we find ourselves, faint or fervent, Jesus walks into our lives today and asks, "What are you looking for?"

What is our answer? Do we want religion as usual, something comforting and unchanging and unchallenging? Or do we want to know, as the disciples did, where Jesus is headed? To their question, Jesus replies only: "Come, and you will see." *Come* -- don't just stand there, don't expect things to stay the same. If we want to see where Jesus is headed, we have to *follow* where he is going. Discipleship demands that we are willing to move out of our complacency and familiar comforts and ask new questions of ourselves. It will necessarily mean change and sacrifice. Our time of decision, we see, implies movement.

Who in your life has been a mentor and helped you hear the voice of God? Who has been instrumental in helping you discern your life's calling?

How is God speaking to you most powerfully in your life today?

Can you name a time during the past year when you helped someone listen for God's voice in their life?

"Speak Lord, for your servant is listening."

"Glorify the Lord in your body."

"Rabbi, where are you staying?" "Come, and you will see." AMEN!