

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

There are all kinds of calls going on in the readings today -- and all kinds of people who respond in different ways. Sometimes people are being called clearly, sometimes not. In one case God is doing the calling; in another, someone is calling on God's behalf. And in between the callers and receivers are people like you -- intermediaries -- who either act as a clear conduit or as a telephone operator helping customers with a call.

How am I like Samuel? Am I unsure of something in my life right now but unclear on which way God is telling me to go? Besides God's voice, what other "voices" are competing for my attention as I make decisions -- voices that represent the expectations of parish, family, and friends? Voices from my past? Voices of guilt, fear, or selfishness?

Today's scripture passages involve two fateful introductions: First Samuel, a future prophet, meets the one true God whom he will serve his whole life. And then two disciples of John the Baptist have their attention directed toward an obscure local teacher whom their own famed teacher terms "the Lamb of God."

An introduction is not all there is to these encounters. Once an introduction is made, it's up to the parties involved to follow through to real relationship. Though just a boy, Samuel takes direction from the old priest thoughtfully. The voice is strange to him, yet he offers to listen, to pay attention --the technical word here is to obey. Because he's so willing to attend to God the stranger, Samuel will foster a lifelong relationship with God who is Lord, guide, and companion. As a result, Samuel becomes the most effective judge who ever exercised leadership in Israel.

The disciples who depart from John and approach Jesus make the same choice. They ask where this teacher is staying in a bid to join his school wherever it gathers. One of my favorite verses in the Gospel involves a question and an answer: "Rabbi -- where are you staying?" "Come, and you will see." Where is Jesus "staying" in YOUR life? Is He a welcome guest? Are you bold enough, courageous enough to "come and see" what Jesus has in mind for YOU?

Here is follow-up question: Is there a “right time” to be called by God? Yes, there is, and the time is right now! Regardless of who you are, where you’ve been, or where you are going, God calls you in this very moment.

What does it mean to be called by God? It means that God desires to connect personally with each and every one of us and that our whole life is a response to God. We commit ourselves to a life relationship with a person, a family, or a community, do we not? We seek education in order to prepare ourselves for a certain form of service in the world, do we not? We build a career using the gifts and talents we have been given. In our work, at school, in our family, in our relationships. If they lead us toward God, they are of the Holy One. If they lead us away from God, they are of the Evil One. And we freely choose which One we are going to follow and serve!

For no apparent reason, the Apostles in today’s Gospel immediately drop everything and follow Jesus. Almost immediately, they are rewarded for what seems like a haphazard decision. Jesus turns to the two disciples and asks them a question: “What are you looking for?” (Jn 1:38).

This question of Jesus is addressed not just to those two disciples but also to each one of us. To be a human being is to look for something. To look for that something beyond all things that provides us fulfillment.

We can look for something in the market, making money our fulfillment.

We can look for something in nationalism, making security our fulfillment.

But the disciples had their eyes set exclusively on Our Lord. They do not answer His question directly, but they ask Him where he is staying.

Through this question, they tell Jesus what they are looking for. They are looking to dwell with Him. They do not yet know the fullness of what Jesus has to offer. They do not know that He is the Word made flesh. They do not know that He will suffer and die and rise again and ascend into heaven. They do not know that He will be there whenever two or three gather in his name (cf. Mt 18:20). But they know that their fulfillment, what they are looking for, is Jesus.

They want to dwell with Jesus. “What are YOU looking for?”

Today, with all the talk in the Church related to disaffiliation, maybe we have forgotten that what we most offer is not a political platform, a social program or even secure doctrines that enable us to feel safe in a secular world, but the very person of Jesus Christ. The Church must be a space where people may dwell with Jesus. Dioceses and parishes alike continue to hire consultants who tell us how to better advertise ourselves or organize parish staff for effective evangelization. Fair enough. But those two disciples did not follow a man who had developed a great mission statement or use influencers.

They followed Jesus, Who is the answer to the deepest desires of the heart. They followed the Messiah, the Christ, Who had come to announce that the Kingdom of God was at hand. They followed Him, because they hoped that the Lamb of God might be for them the Shepherd of their salvation.

Yes, today the Church is poorer. COVID-19 has emptied the coffers. We are not the Church of 1955 with flourishing educational institutions and political power galore. But we remain the Church of Jesus Christ. What we offer to men and women and to youth and children must be an encounter with Jesus.

In this new year, in 2021, let us as the Church take up a resolution. We must resolve ourselves not just to better strategic planning or a deepened commitment to our mission statement. Rather, we must resolve to offer men and women the one thing — no, the one person — who fulfills the desire of every human heart. Jesus.

If we are to do this, we must spend our time dwelling with Him. After all, it is not just those two disciples who find their fulfillment in the Lord. It is every man and woman, every youth and child, starting with your presence here today.

Let us start our day in prayer, marking our lips with the Sign of the Cross.

Let us speak His name in prayer throughout the day.

Let us delight in the only Name, in the only Person, who can fulfill the human heart. Jesus.

In these and other ways we give our lives to God. There are also smaller but no less significant choices we make day-to-day in response to God's call:

a kind word to a colleague, an opportunity to enjoy the rain, an extra effort to make a good project great. The key is to be open to God's invitation to connect with God here and now. In this way we open ourselves to think, feel, and act from a graced place.

It can be helpful to have a spiritual friend or mentor with whom you can talk about calling and also to read the stories of how others have been called by reading the lives of the saints. Parker Palmer says that a vocation to the single life, the married life, the ordained life, the religious life, doesn't come from our own person willfulness. It comes from listening. I must listen to and reflect upon the experiences of my life and try to understand what it is truly about. Or else my life will never represent anything real in the world, no matter how earnest my expectations.

"Speak Lord, for your servant is listening."

"Glorify the Lord in your body."

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