

Sunday2.09

Today's readings are about God's calling us and therefore coincide with the theme of this past week when we were asked to pray for an increase in vocations to the priesthood, because even though we know that every single human being, simply because he or she exists, has received a call, a vocation, from God, nevertheless when we hear the word vocation, we think first of all of the call to the priesthood.

In today's first reading God calls the boy Samuel while he is sleeping, but Samuel doesn't recognize who is calling him because, as the reading tells us, "Samuel was not familiar with the Lord, because the Lord had not revealed anything to him as yet." But his mentor, Eli the priest, tells Samuel what to do: "Go to sleep and if you are called, reply, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'"

Today's Gospel, taken from the Gospel of John, tells the story of the call of the first disciples. It is different from this same call as it is portrayed in the other three gospels. In Matthew and Mark Jesus walks by the Sea of Galilee and calls Simon, his brother Andrew, and the brothers James and John. In Luke Jesus uses Peter's boat

to preach from and then tells Peter to put out into the deep and let down the net for a catch. After the miraculous catch Peter and James and John become his disciples. Here in John Jesus meets two disciples of John the Baptist. One of the two is later identified as Andrew, who then goes and gets his brother Peter. So there are differences in the way in which the four Gospels describe Jesus' calling his first disciples, but they all share the same bottom line: Jesus called certain men to be his companions in his work. And if we wanted to go back to last week's gospel, the baptism of the Lord, we could also say that this scene portrayed the Lord's vocation, for in all three accounts of Jesus' baptism, the divine voice speaks and identifies Jesus as the beloved son. To be such was Jesus' vocation.

As you well know, the lack of vocations to the priesthood is of great concern today. There has been some increase in numbers in the past year or two. Nevertheless, the ratio of priests to people is not what it used to be. Today there are far more people to be served by far fewer priests. We are asked to pray for more priestly vocations. Some would say that there are many vocations among married men and among women which the Church refuses to recognize. As John XXIII said, with one stroke of the papal pen the priesthood could be opened to married men. The situation with

women is more problematic. John Paul II, as you know, did not believe that the church had the right even to consider the ordination of women since Jesus chose only men to be his apostles. Time will tell if he was right. Let us all pray for divine guidance in this matter, and in the meantime, given the restrictions, let us pray that we may do as well as we can do. To become a priest today is certainly a counter-cultural act and offers little of the social prestige once associated with the priesthood. In that sense the choice of it by a man today is more daring and perhaps even purer, more Gospel inspired, than it was fifty or a hundred years ago.

But the message of today's readings is for all of us. Each of us, by the fact that we exist, has a vocation. We have been called into existence out of nothingness. We have been given our lives with all their opportunities and limitations. All of this is a call from God. And to what does God call us? To Himself, to life, for God is life. As the Lord himself said, God is a God of the living, not of the dead. All are alive for Him. So, let us listen to God calling us to life. We know that life consists in the keeping of the great commandments, love of God and neighbor. So we ask ourselves each day: Where is there a lack of love in my life? True, it is not always easy to recognize what is true love, and what is the truly loving thing to do in a particular situation. We may fail at times.

But at least we are using the right norms and can therefore correct ourselves.

It would also be in order today to pray for our new president as he begins his work. May he see it as his vocation, as God's call to him to do what is good and just for us and for our world.