

SECOND SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME—B12

The story of Samuel in the first reading and the story of the apostles in the Gospel are both stories of the meaning of God's call to follow him. Samuel's "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening," sharply contrasts with the priestly impropriety of Eli's sons which is mentioned immediately before this passage and who obviously were not listening. As we have seen today the clergy need to be rebuked for their sins just as well as anyone else. The disciples' response in the gospel entails leaving John the Baptist and following Christ himself. St. Paul in the second reading points out the contradiction present in the way the Corinthians answered their call to follow Christ. The Corinthians, in effect, were saying what many say today: "I am very spiritual but I don't need a religion to tell me how to live."

Let us therefore examine the response of Samuel, the disciples of Jesus, and the Corinthians to discover the true meaning of discipleship.

The threefold summons and Samuel's response points to the unquestioning and transparent submission of Samuel to God's will. Sentiments such as these will characterize the prophet's life. Samuel prayed a lot in front of the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark held the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments and was a sign of the bond between God and His Chosen people. Samuel is even sleeping next to the Ark. It is in prayer in the presence of God that we are called and then nurtured when we answer the call.

The gospel story tells us something else about discipleship. The verbs "to stay" and "to see," are much more than a cordial invitation to the disciples. Jesus "stays" (the exact same word) with the Father and the

Father with him, just as true believers “stay” in Jesus and his love. For the two followers to “stay” with Jesus, they must enter into a new communion of life with Son and Father, brought about by the Holy Spirit.

I think Tony and Maria In West Side Story help us understand what “communion” means. Tony and Maria sing “Somewhere.” Sick to death of all the violence they long for a new way of life: “Somewhere, we’ll find a new way of living....we’ll find a way of forgiving.....there’s a time for us, time together with time to spare, time to learn, time to care.” Just as they learn by being together, the disciples learn by being together “in communion” with Christ, “listening” to him when he speaks, “watching” him when he acts, “imitating” him in the new way of life he is showing them.

We know that the disciples did not get it immediately. Several times Jesus says, “How long have I been with you, and you still do not understand.” In the gospel passage we probably have a telescoped picture of how the disciples progressed in their recognition of Christ. He is first recognized as Rabbi, then Messiah, Son of God and King of Israel, and finally, as revealed by Jesus himself, the link between heaven and earth. It took time to get it.

We too, the longer we live with Christ, the more we experience of life, the more we choose his new way of life, *gradually* recognize more deeply, profoundly who Christ is and what he asks of us.

Jesus asked something special of Peter. Andrew brings his brother Simon to Jesus. Jesus by changing Simon’s name to Rock gives Peter the unique vocation of being the link between heaven and earth that Christ was. That is why we call him “the Vicar of Christ.” The Church is meant to be the Word of God, Jesus, made visible, approachable, leading us to heaven

and to salvation. The Church, in the words of Vatican Council II, is the sacrament in which we encounter Christ. The Church is the voice of Christ calling us to learn a new way of living, to spend time, to “stay” with Christ, to “see” where he lives. It takes *time* with Christ, *time* to spare, *time* to learn, *time* to care.

True discipleship always begins with *Christ* calling *us*. Jesus would state explicitly later in John’s Gospel “It is not you who chose me. No, I chose you.” In the passage about Samuel, it was God calling. Do we recognize that it is God who called us to our vocation? We often think of God “calling” only to the vocation of the priesthood or religious life but he has called each of us to our vocation. If it is Christ who calls us, he has a special plan for our lives. We must “stay” with him in order to understand how to live it out. We must “see” where Jesus lives, i.e., see the way he lives. John Paul II was fond of reminding us that it is Christ who teaches us who we are. We are human, we are creatures but we also have a touch of the divine in us. That calls us to a new way of living.

Jesus asks all of us: “What are you looking for?” We want what Jesus has. God the Father, His Son Jesus, and the Holy spirit live in “communion” with one another. Whether we know it or not that is what we are looking for “communion” with God. We want, we were created to want, we were created in the image and likeness of God to want to remain in one another. Father in Son, Son in Father, Holy Spirit in each, they in us and we in them as Jesus prayed at the Last Supper.

Throughout John’s gospel “coming” to Jesus is used to describe a living faith. The disciples went to Jesus to see where he was staying and they “stayed on.” Jesus encouraged them *and* he rebuked them from time to time because even though they had *chosen* to follow him, they still did *not*

understand, and, even though they *were* “staying” on, they still were not wholly committed to him. The psalmist today prays to God: Sacrifice or offering you wished not, but ears open to *obedience* you gave me. Holocausts or sin-offerings you sought not.... in the written scroll it is *prescribed* for me, / *to do* your will, O my God, is my *delight*.”

St. Paul found that the Corinthians who have become Christians had not wholly committed themselves to God’s will. Corinth is a seaport. I’m sure many that got off the boat in Corinth left saying, “What happens in Corinth stays in Corinth.” The residents that lived in Corinth were the ones providing these “happenings.” That is why St. Paul insisted that residents and non-residents of Corinth who had joined the church recognize that their bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, that they are *not* their own. Their salvation has been *purchased* with the *Blood* of the Lamb. *Glorify* God in your body, he told them.

The Corinthians probably were the first “cafeteria” Catholics. They went to church but they believed what they wanted to believe. To them the “soul” and the “body” were separated. They saw no contradiction in what they did on Sundays with what they were doing the rest of the week. Somehow they believed that God did not see that. All He was interested in was their attendance at church. Not so! God wants a total commitment of us. *He* was totally committed to the church and asked that *each* member of his church be totally committed to him. Just as Christ knew the thoughts of the Pharisees and scribes who tried to trip him up, he knows our innermost thoughts. He knows if we are listening to him or not. He knows if we are ignoring him.

He was not fooled by the Pharisees, to whom he said: “woe to you, scribes and Pharisees.....you pay tithes of mint and dill and cumin, and have

neglected the *weightier* things of the law; judgment and mercy and fidelity. But *these* you should have done, *without* neglecting the others. Blind guides, who strain out the *gnat* and swallow the *camel*.

We do each other a favor when we bring the sins we commit to each other's attention. It means we are concerned about the salvation of our souls. Love always desires the good of the other. Any correction we give must be done with that in mind. However, whoever is *not* answering the call, whoever is *not* saying to the Lord, "Speak, Lord your servant is listening," whoever is *not* leaving one way of life behind and answering Jesus' call to "come and see" *his* new life, is not a true disciple.

Because Samuel listened to the Lord and was obedient to his will, our reading says, "The Lord was with him, not permitting any word of his to be without effect." I don't know who said: If Christians really acted like Christians, the whole world would be Christian. Look at what happened after the resurrection when the apostles received the Holy Spirit. They not only fearlessly preached the word they also practiced it.

Three hundred years later, Christians had transformed the pagan culture into a Christian culture. In our time an aggressive secular culture is striving to remove religion from the public square, taking us back to a godless culture. We need to listen with *greater* attention to the Lord speaking to us. We need to live with *greater passion* the life he has taught us. We need to be more than *counter* cultural. We need to *convert* the culture by our lives just as the first Christians did. We have a right and a duty to be involved in our culture. We were meant to be salt of the earth, light of the world. The lives of true disciples are the instruments God uses to change the world.

