

2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time B (January 14, 2024 STM: 9:15)

One of the best inventions to ever come along was caller ID. Now, believe it or not, for all of the younger people in church today, there was a period when you had no idea who was on the other end of the phone! And that was our home phone, a land line, because that was really the only one there was. No cell phone or anything. So it was always a surprise when you picked up the phone. The closest we came to caller ID was letting the phone go the answering machine-not voice mail. At that time it was an actual machine with tapes that you had to erase or replace from time. When the phone rang we would either answer it or let "the machine get it." And then you would screen the call and pick up the phone if you wanted to talk to the person. Of course these days with caller ID at home or on our cell phone we have the ability to see who is calling. We can either answer it or let it go to voice mail. We have that option-the option to answer.

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ Jesus, today's scriptures seem to be about a call and a response. In the first reading we learn how Samuel hears the voice of the Lord calling him several times. Each time the Lord calls Samuel answers and in the final interaction he says "Speak O Lord your servant is listening." Samuel hears and answers with an open heart. He puts his faith and trust in God and places himself in the Lord's hands.

In the gospel today we hear about the call of Simon. He was one of the disciples of John the Baptist. He and John and another disciples come upon Jesus who they address as "Rabbi" and ask where he is going. Jesus simply invites them to "come and see." Simon and the other disciples come with the Lord and begin the life of discipleship with him. Simon becomes Peter, the rock upon which the Church is built. Simon Peter responds to the call to faithful discipleship. The Lord invites and he comes.

Today we are asked to think about answering a call. We are invited to think about our vocation. The word "vocation" derives from the Latin "vocare" which means "to call." Fr. Henri Nouwen, the late famous priest and author, once explained that God calls each of us to come together into one people fashioned into the image of Jesus Christ. It is by Christ's own vocation that we are gathered. And vocation does not just apply to priests and nuns. *Vocation is a God's call to every human being to come to the fullest and best realization of themselves in Christ.*

God wants us to simply be the best we can be as people formed in his own image and likeness and we do so as disciples of the Lord. The Lord calls us like he did Samuel and invites us to answer. He says to us as he did to Simon Peter "come and see." Listen for my voice and come and see what I have prepared for you. The Lord invites us to consider our vocation-our calling-how we are chosen to live our life on this earth.

However, to hear God's call we need to make sure we are listening. Sometimes we hear a lot of things, but we do not listen. Legend has it that President Franklin D. Roosevelt got tired of smiling that big smile and saying the usual things at all those White House receptions. So, one evening he decided to find out whether anybody was paying attention to what he was saying. As each person came up to him with extended hand, he flashed that big smile and said, "I murdered my grandmother this morning." People would automatically respond with comments such as "How lovely!" or "Just continue with your great work!" Nobody listened to what he was saying, except one foreign diplomat. When the president said, "I murdered my grandmother this morning," the diplomat responded softly, "I'm sure she had it coming to her."

How often do we actually listen? To hear the call of the Lord is to allow it to guide our choices and to shape our future. We have to make sure we are not spiritually deaf! We have to make sure we are open to discerning what the Lord is asking of us. And there are so many

things out there to distract us from what is important. So, we need to make a serious effort at remaining sensitive to the divine presence in our lives. We have to hear, discern and respond.

How can we best listen when the Lord speaks? Well, it is rarely an audible voice. You'll remember the story in 1 Kings about a prophet named Elijah who was told by the Lord to wait on a mountain top. Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. God sometimes speaks through a gentle whisper. Generally, God speaks in the quietness of our own hearts through Holy Spirit, who we now understand as Christians dwells within us.

Rabbi Burt Visotsky says, "You know, I'm actually surprised to be surrounded by people who so readily hear voices. I'm a praying Jew, so I talk to God all the time, but I don't usually hear answers. It's a much more subtle process with me. God may tell Abraham and Sarah to get up and go and change everything about their lives. But nobody ever says that to me. If I hear God at all, it's somewhere between the lines of a page I've been studying for hours when I am reading Torah, and all I ever hear is, 'Burt, turn the page.'"

I think this is probably the way it is for most of us. God speaks to us without words. He speaks through experiences. He speaks in the silence of our own thoughts. He speaks at times when we may be at our wit's end. He speaks in our time of prayer. And you know what? God already knows our concerns before we enunciate them, but it is still important that we bring them to Him. It is important for us to voice those things and see if God has something to say to us. So give God the chance to speak. Take time for silence in prayer. You may not hear God in an earthquake or wind or fire, but often in the small voice whispering the silence of your soul.

And here is one other suggestion about listening: It is also important that we take time to listen to one another, particularly in the family.

How often do we truly give others our full attention? Two men were talking over coffee one day. One said: "I'm concerned about my wife. She talks to herself a lot these days." The other said: "Mine does too, but she doesn't know it. She thinks I'm listening." It is important when someone is speaking to us, particularly someone we love, that we look them in the eyes as a signal that we are giving them our full attention. We might scare people if we gave them that much attention, but you get the point.

Listening may be the most important sign of love. Let me say that again: Listening may be the most important sign of love. Samuel listened to the voice of the Lord and became a great man. We will become greater people if we, too, listen for the voice of the Lord speaking to us and if we strive to listen to one another. Amen.

Portions adapted from: King Duncan.

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