Spirituality



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by Thomas Gumbleton

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Last Sunday we completed the Christmas season with the Feast of the Epiphany. Today we are starting again to review what we call the Ordinary Time of the year, 34 Sundays that make up that Ordinary Time. The Scriptures, especially the Gospel lessons, will help us if we listen carefully and try to take them in, to understand how to be disciples of Jesus. That's what today's readings are really about: becoming disciples. A disciple is someone who is a learner. A disciple follows a leader to learn, to listen, and especially in the case of Jesus, to listen deeply, hear his message and follow him.

Second Sunday of Ordinary Time

January 14, 2018

1 Samuel 3:3b-10, 19

Psalms 40

1 Corinthians 6:13c-15a, 17-20

John 1:35-42

This is true of the prophets in the Old Testament as we heard in the first lesson today. Samuel, even as a young boy, heard God's call. He didn't understand what it was at first, as you heard in the lesson, and he goes to Eli, the person who is mentoring him and tells him, "Did you call me?" because he heard this call three times. Finally, Eli understands that it's God calling Samuel to follow God's way. What does Eli tell Samuel to do? "When you hear the call, respond by saying, 'Here I am, Lord. Speak, I am listening.'"

That's exactly what the disciples began to do when Jesus called them. The first two disciples that he meets ask, "Where are you staying?" He tells them, "Come and see." So they went. John makes a point of saying that it was four o'clock in the afternoon. They went, they saw, and they listened for a number of hours. Then the next day Andrew, one of the two, goes and gets his brother, Simon and brings him to Jesus so that he too can be a disciple and listen.

Perhaps we haven't thought about this regularly or even at all, but that's what we are — we are people who have been called to be disciples of Jesus. He starts right in the beginning of his public life to form a community of disciples, people who are willing to follow him, to listen to him, carry out his message, and transform the world. That's the purpose: to make the world become the reign of God where peace and justice and fullness of life will be for all, every person. It's an extraordinary call to be a disciple.

Most of us, I think, grew up almost automatically being disciples of Jesus without thinking through what it really means. So today as we listen to these Scriptures, it's a good time to really decide: do I want to be a disciple of Jesus? It's a free choice; no one is forced to be a disciple. But if you want to be a disciple, to enter into the work of Jesus of transforming our world into the reign of God, then you say yes and you begin to listen, to listen deeply so that we can follow Jesus, follow his way to peace and fullness of life for everyone.

We live in a time when this is very important — to listen to Jesus and to follow Jesus. Just yesterday something happened (perhaps you heard about it) that could be a reality, but wasn't, thank God. People in Hawaii got a message that a nuclear weapon had been fired at Hawaii. For 40 minutes before it was corrected, people were wondering what to do, where to go. A nuclear weapon is going to hit this state of Hawaii. Thank God it was a mistake; no weapon had been fired.

But we live in a time when this could happen. Threats are being thrown back and forth between North Korea and the United States. We're accusing Iran of developing nuclear weapons, and we're threatening to break the treaty that would prevent that from happening. So it's a very dangerous time and we need especially to listen to Jesus. You may know that every Sunday at noon, Pope Francis speaks to the crowd in St. Peter's Square at the time of the Angelus.

A couple of Sundays ago these were his words. He's listening to Jesus and he's urging us to listen to Jesus. He says, "Is it possible to walk the path of peace? Can we get out of this spiral of sorrow and death? Can we learn once again to walk and live in the ways of peace? Yes, it is possible for everyone! How I wish that all men and women of good will would look to the cross if for only a moment! There we can see God's reply: violence is not answered with violence; death is not answered with the language of death. In the silence of the cross, the uproar of weapons ceases and the language of reconciliation, forgiveness, dialogue, and peace is spoken."

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That's true. Pope Francis is urging us to listen to Jesus. As one Scripture commentator says, "Jesus taught us how to die, not how to kill." Even as you're dying (in the case of Jesus), you forgive those who put you to death. You love them; you love your enemies. That's the only way toward peace — through reconciliation and love and forgiveness. That's the message of Jesus spoken to us clearly, especially from the cross.

Pope Francis is urging us to listen to that message of Jesus, to follow him. That's how we become disciples of Jesus. That's how we will share in the great work, and necessary work of making our world the reign of God, and bringing peace into this world at every level of our lives. So I hope that today we try to understand once more that we are called to be disciples of Jesus, called to listen and to learn, and to bring his way of love and peace into our world and transform this world into the reign of God.

[Homily given Jan. 14, 2018, at St. Philomena, Detroit, Michigan. The transcripts of Bishop Thomas Gumbleton's homilies are posted weekly to NCRonline.org. Sign up here to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.]