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“What are you looking for?” That is the question today’s liturgy puts before us. It is a question addressed to us, but also one we address to God. It is the question of vocation. Put another way it asks, “What do you and God want to do with the life you have been given?”

Today’s readings invite us to consider the macro and micro dimensions of our individual vocations. The idea of vocation brings us to the heart of our relationship with God; it is based on an assumption that everything we do finds its meaning with the context of that relationship. The macro dimension refers to the life decisions we each make: the choice of career, spouse, way of life. The talents God has given us, combined with our deepest desires and the needs of our times, lead us to discern the macro choices for how to live our vocation. Those choices set the context for all our micro decisions, decisions about our daily opportunities to contribute to the extension of God’s reign among us.

Today’s Gospel invites us to share the adventure of vocation with two of John the Baptist’s disciples. They thought they had found the teacher who would give them the answers they sought. Then that teacher pointed to another, someone they did not know, and said, “Behold the Lamb of God.” John loved them enough that their fulfillment mattered more to him than their companionship. His utter lack of egotism inspired them to try to catch up with Jesus as he walked along.

That was when Jesus turned to them and asked the most important question of their life: “What are you looking for?”

Rather than get tongue-tied or philosophical, they answered with a statement and a question. They made their statement by calling him “Rabbi,” acknowledging that they were looking to him as a teacher. Their question, “Where are you staying?” was a way of saying, “We want to know more.”

St. Augustine taught that our hearts are restless until they rest in God. That means that the human heart always seeks more until we encounter the source of love. At this first stage, the disciples were at home with their restlessness; they let their desire for more nudge them onto the road behind Jesus.

“Come and you will see,” was the invitation into dialogue. When the Gospel tells us it was around four in the afternoon, the implication is that the two disciples went home with Jesus, ate and spent the evening. We could call this the day of their “first Communion.” It was the first time they heard Jesus talk about his vocation, his dreams and his mission. It was the first time they broke bread with him. The Gospel lets us know that they were changed forever by what they

encountered in him.

In response to what they found in Jesus, Andrew felt impelled to go to his brother Simon and tell him “We have found the Messiah!” (That was no full-blown Nicene Creed, these guys lived in an atmosphere charged with hopes and messiah-style leaders.) As so often happens, Andrew had the right vocabulary, but he didn’t yet know what it really meant. His afternoon of following Jesus and his next day proclamation about the Messiah were simply a symbol, a foretaste of how he would spend the rest of his life: listening and proclaiming, learning and doing.

That brings us back to the macro and micro dimensions of vocation. Now and then, we make macro decisions about vocation, decisions that set us on the particular path we think we are called to, a path that we think will lead us to know and serve God. The macro decisions, therefore, have to be incarnated in daily activities, micro choices to be faithful, moments of taking the risk of proclaiming and doing what we really believe to be right.

On this weekend as those in the United States celebrate Martin Luther King Jr., we remember that in 2015, Pope Francis addressed the U.S. Congress and spoke of Dr. King as someone whose dreams continue to awaken what is deepest and truest in the life of our people. Dr. King’s macro vocation was to be a prophet who awakened us to carry out God’s will for justice and the elimination of all prejudice. The micro dimension of our individual and national vocation implies daily responses to that call.

Today’s Gospel asks, “What are you looking for?” We respond to that question through all our choices, large and small. As people baptized and thus consecrated to God, we also must look to God and ask, “What are you looking for?” God responds through the Scriptures and the needs of our times. It is ours to decide if we want to accept the invitation to come and see — and be changed forever.

## **1 SAMUEL 3:3b-10, 19**

We begin the season of Ordinary Time with a classic vocation narrative. For those who know the story of his early life, Samuel’s call is not much of a surprise. His mother was Hannah, a woman dearly loved by her husband. Like Abraham’s wife Sarah or the Virgin Mary’s relative Elizabeth, she was a saintly woman who could not conceive a child. Hannah took matters into her own hands and went to the temple and, in the words of the Letter to the Hebrews, she offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears, begging God to grant her a son.

Eli, the priest, watched and assumed she was inebriated. When she explained herself, he told her to go in peace because God would surely hear her prayer. She then bore the child she named Samuel. In thanksgiving, she promised the child to God; once he was weaned, she left him with Eli in the temple (1 Samuel 1:1-28).

Samuel lived in what biblical scholars see as a time of transition from the age of the judges to the time of the kings and prophets. The judges had been the leaders of the people from the conquest of the promised land, and Samuel was the prophet who anointed the first king. Samuel’s time in history was one in which the people of God had to discern God’s will for them in changing circumstances. Samuel was to be the prophet God sent to anoint both Saul and David as kings of Israel.

Today’s reading opens with young Samuel asleep in the temple. Samuel was awakened by hearing his name being called. He went to Eli three times, thinking that the priest was summoning him. Realizing that Samuel was hearing God’s voice, Eli told the young man to put himself at God’s service by saying “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.” God called again and gave Samuel his first message — telling of the destruction of Eli’s house, a sentence Eli accepted. The vocation story ends with the Hebrew idiom: “God did not permit any word of his to fall to the ground,” meaning that as a prophet, Samuel’s words would reach their intended targets.

Samuel’s story offers multiple takeoff points for reflections on vocation. We could compare Hannah’s dedication of her infant to our practice of baptizing children. Hannah understood, more intensely than many other parents, that her child was a gift from God and belonged to God even more than to herself and her husband. Parents who bring their children for baptism are playing the dual roles of Hannah and Eli, as they accept the responsibility to raise their children with an awareness of their relationship to God, giving them the freedom to follow the vocation to which they are called.

Another line of reflection on this story invites us to remember how we have been called to live our own vocations. Samuel's story presents God as wooing us insistently, calling us from sleep and leading us to others who can help us learn how to recognize the voice of God in our lives. The story invites us to reflect how God is trying to awaken us today.

The culmination of the story is Samuel's willingness to listen to God's voice. He responded with the very words Eli had given him. We understand that response better when we recall that, in biblical terms, the idea of listening is equivalent to obedience. Thus, Samuel's response leads directly into our psalm refrain, inviting us to offer ourselves to God with the simple refrain: "Here am I, Lord, I come to do your will."

## **PSALMS 40: 2, 4, 7-8, 8-9, 10**

Proclaiming Psalm 40 this week allows us to sing with each of the people we hear about in our readings. Every one of them lived out the desire to do God's will. Their example invites us to do the same.

We begin our psalm proclaiming God's goodness to us. This is an invitation to recall the moments in which we have felt God's help and grace. Then come the verses we could understand as a theology of obedience. Verses 7-8 remind us that God has no need or desire for our sacrifices. The only thing God wishes to hear is "Here I am," or "Speak, Lord ...". Verse 9 reminds us that our greatest joy and fulfillment come from becoming all God has made us to be, that doing God's will brings us a delight nothing else can approach.

The final verses carry us from our individual relationship with God to apostleship. As our other readings will indicate as well, anyone who has come to know God's love is impelled to proclaim it to others.

## **1 CORINTHIANS 6:13c-15a, 17-20**

In this selection from 1 Corinthians, Paul is ostensibly dealing with two related problems: sexual immorality and the Corinthians' inflated sense of their freedom. In a much larger sense, he is dealing with what it means to be embodied persons united to Christ. Apparently, some of the community had a dualistic viewpoint that considered the body as having no more eternal value than food, clothing or shelter, thus concluding that sexual activity had no greater moral implications than eating. Paul's response to the situation has implications that go far beyond a narrow focus on sexual morality and can have unexpected relevance to addressing what Bishop George Murry of Youngtown calls America's "original sin of racism."

Paul admonished the Corinthians to remember that their very bodies were members of Christ and temples of the Holy Spirit. He reminded them that as embodied creatures their union with Christ was necessarily a matter of the whole person. He went on to discuss that in relation to sexual activity, explaining that what one does with the body is done as a whole person; it reflects their deepest convictions.

If we apply Paul's teaching to questions of racism or discrimination, we come to the inevitable conclusion that the denigration of any person is a denigration of the Creator. When Paul says that the Lord is for the body and the body for the Lord, he is talking about every body: male, female, large, small, black, brown, red, yellow, white, typical or atypical in abilities. Every body is created for union with Christ. If we accept that the human person is made in the image of God, prejudice must then be understood as sacrilege and/or idolatry. It is sacrilege because it disrespects the temple of the Holy Spirit; anything that maligns a person, any act of disrespect, is a desecration of that temple. It is idolatry because it falsely sacralizes a deficient and purposely constricted image of the Divine.

As those in the United States celebrate the Martin Luther King holiday weekend, this reading from Corinthians is particularly apt for our consideration. As the U.S. bishops are calling us to eradicate the sin of racism, this reading reminds us that our bodies, whatever they look like, are our means of representing Christ in the world. My body and the bodies of every other person are destined to share in Christ's resurrection and are already a dwelling place of God. Disrespect for the body of another, whether in physical abuse or prejudice, is as much a sacrilege as destruction of a tabernacle.

## **JOHN 1:35-40**

This reading, like that from 1 Samuel, leads easily if not inevitably into a reflection on vocation. John the Evangelist narrates the fulfillment of John the Baptist's vocation, gives some explanations of Jesus' vocation and presents two examples of the vocation of discipleship.

John the Baptist's entire vocation was to point to Jesus, the one who was to come after him. We first heard about that in the prologue to the Gospel; now the Baptist fulfills his vocation by directing his disciples to Jesus, the Lamb of God. Earlier, John had spoken of the one to come after him whose sandal he was not worthy to untie. In this scene, John makes good on his rhetoric by sending his own disciples to follow the one he pointed out. By doing that, he acts like the perfect prophet and disciple. Recognizing and imitating the Master, John empties himself for the sake of leading others to God.

The Baptist called Jesus "the Lamb of God." He is the only person in the Gospels to give Jesus that title, and we repeat it in every celebration of the Eucharist. What does it mean? The title must have been commonly understood among the early Christians because the Evangelist does nothing to explain it. The title Lamb of God has sacrificial overtones. It suggests that Jesus is the sacrifice God offers on behalf of humanity. It also calls to mind the sacrifice God provided when the angel prevented Abraham from slaughtering his son. The first time the Baptist used the title, he added "who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29), quite possibly a reference to the Servant Song of Isaiah 53. Although the Gospel of John never again uses that precise word for a lamb, John may have used it to refer to Jesus as the Passover Lamb of the New Covenant.

This Gospel uses three terms to describe Jesus: Lamb of God, Rabbi and Messiah. All three titles speak somehow of Jesus' vocation. Throughout the Gospel, Jesus will act as a teacher or rabbi. The concept of what it means to be the Messiah will go through a process of clarification through the entire Gospel as the disciples come to understand what the title means according to Jesus' own understanding and way of life. Together the three titles offer three different and complementary perspectives on Jesus' vocation.

Finally, this reading presents two examples of how people enter into a life of discipleship. First, we see the disciples John sent to follow Jesus. Of them Jesus asks, "What do you seek?" Implying that they wanted to spend time with him, they asked where he lived, to which Jesus simply replied, "Come and see." Whatever they saw in that one night was enough to convince Andrew to go tell his brother they had discovered the Messiah.

One thing we learn from this reading is that when someone encounters Jesus, the inevitable response is to tell others about it. Discipleship is thus understood as a willingness to seek, to be called forth and to be sent. Underneath it all is an attitude that seeks more than one already knows about the meaning of life. It implies an ongoing willingness to learn and to tell others what you have found. As we will see in all the Gospels, both learning and proclaiming who Jesus is will be the essential and ongoing dimensions of the life of discipleship.

## **Planning: 2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**By: Lawrence Mick**

This is the Second Sunday in Ordinary Time, a period that is rather short this year. Easter occurs on April 1, so Lent begins on February 14. That means we only have five Ordinary Time Sundays this winter.

These Sundays were once called Sundays after Epiphany, and the readings assigned to them echo Epiphany themes. The Introduction to the Lectionary notes:

On the Second Sunday of Ordinary Time the Gospel continues to center on the manifestation of the Lord ... Beginning with the Third Sunday, there is a semi-continuous reading of the Synoptic Gospels. This reading is arranged in such a way that as the Lord's life and preaching unfold the doctrine proper to each of these Gospels is presented. ... Thus after Epiphany the readings are on the beginning of the Lord's preaching and they fit in well with Christ's baptism and the first events in which he manifests himself. (#105)

Planners might consider sharing this information with the assembly, perhaps by citing the Lectionary quote in the bulletin or by a brief explanation before Masses this weekend. It could help them recognize the coherence of these weeks before Lent begins.

The readings for this Sunday might suggest that some attention be given to the topic of vocation. Samuel learns to recognize God's voice calling him in the first reading and responds generously. The psalm refrain echoes Samuel's reply. In the Gospel, Jesus calls his first disciples as he begins his public life and ministry. The second reading is less obvious, but Paul's thoughts about our bodies being temples of the Spirit and belonging to the Lord remind us that each of us is called to serve the Lord in various ways.

Preachers might choose to preach about vocations, not only those to the priesthood, diaconate and religious life but the vocations that all of us receive in baptism. We are each called to make Christ known throughout the world and to share his love and mercy with all people. (Do you hear Epiphany themes here?) Planners can include petitions for various vocations in the general intercessions, as well as prayers for discerning where God is calling each of us.

**Christian Unity:** This is the start of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (January 18-25, actually eight days). What will your parish do to take part in this octave of prayer? Will you offer a joint prayer service with neighboring churches? Can you put a prayer of unity in the bulletin to be used each day of the octave? This will be the 110th year for this observance. Materials for the week can be found on the Graymoor Ecumenical and Interreligious Institute website: [www.geii.org/week\\_of\\_prayer\\_for\\_christian\\_unity](http://www.geii.org/week_of_prayer_for_christian_unity).

## Prayers: 2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

By: Joan DeMerchant

### Introduction

What does it mean to be called, and how should we respond? Today we hear two powerful stories about God's call and those who heard it. In both stories, the call comes without warning, offers no explanation, and requires openness and risk from the ones called. It is safe to assume that we, too, will be called over and over again. When, where, how and why remain unknown. But we can also assume that God is behind it. The rest is up to us.

### Penitential Act

- Lord Jesus, you issued a call to Andrew and Simon Peter: Lord, have mercy.
- Christ Jesus, you invited them to come and follow you: Christ, have mercy.
- Lord Jesus, you call us, too, and challenge us to respond: Lord, have mercy.

### Prayer of the Faithful

**Presider** Let us pray, my friends, for all who are called by God to something greater.

**Minister** For the whole church: that we may be a community always open to God's call and willing to respond wholeheartedly ... we pray,

- For those whose lives are too chaotic to hear God's call, especially those suffering from illness, violence, loss or depression ... we pray,
- For those who do not believe God calls them because they feel unworthy, unprepared or too ordinary ... we pray,
- For those unable to discern God's will for them, that we may provide assurance, clarity, companionship or a willing shoulder or ear ... we pray,

- Make us people who live and promote the value of unity not only among Christian religions but among all those of faith, and let us live this value for more than just one week of the year ... we pray,
- For this community called by Christ to follow him and to serve one another; and for those among and beyond us needing to be served, loved and cared for ... we pray,

**Presider** Gracious God, open our ears and hearts to your voice. Give us the sensitivity to hear you, especially when you speak to us through people and circumstances we do not wish to hear. Make us worthy instruments of discernment for those who struggle to interpret your call. Together, may we respond with one voice, saying, “Speak, your servant is listening.” We ask this in Jesus’ holy name. Amen.

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