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God's call is about more than joining a religious order

by Thomas Gumbleton

The Peace Pulpit

As we listen to these lessons today, especially the first lesson and the Gospel lesson, it's obvious that we're being asked to reflect on the whole idea of vocation, a calling coming from God. We hear about Samuel -- he is called and misunderstands, but then finally hears and understands that God is calling him. Then Jesus, calling the first of His disciples, Andrew, Peter, Phillip and Nathaniel; these four are the very first ones that Jesus calls.

So we are being asked to think about vocation, a calling from God. When we hear about vocations, I think most of us, because of the way we used to have vocation days and priests or religious men and women would come and speak to young people about joining a religious order, becoming a priest or a nun, becoming a diocesan priest, we think of vocation as a call to religious life. As we listen today, we realize, in the Gospel, Jesus is calling these people to religious life. He is calling disciples, followers.

1 Samuel 3:3b-10, 19

Disciple means a learner, one who is learning -- or, as we hear in the first lesson, one who is ready to listen. "Speak, God. Speak." Obviously, that's from Samuel, and Samuel is ready to say, "I'm listening. I will follow. I will do what you ask." Jesus is asking these first ones to be his disciples. Jesus continues as you go through the Gospel, calling disciples, and of course, that's what the church is. It's a community of those called by Jesus to be His disciples. Some would be in religious life, but the vast majority are obviously not.

Full text of the readings

So what does it mean to be a disciple? Since all of us, by our baptism, have chosen to embrace the Gospel message of Jesus, to follow Jesus, to be His disciple, what does this mean? First of all, it means as we hear so clearly in Samuel, "Listen. Listen to what God speaks. Listen so you understand who Jesus is, what Jesus teaches."

Every Sunday, we have the opportunity to listen to the Scriptures, to hear God speak to us. As we do this this morning, at least briefly, we listen. What is God asking of disciples, asking of us today? First of all, if you really begin to listen to what Jesus says, you begin to pay attention to how He acted by reading the Gospels.

You begin to understand that Jesus is asking us to live in a way that is dramatically different perhaps than the way we have lived or are inclined to live, the values that we are inclined to accept into our lives and to make the values that are important to us in our lives. In fact, Jesus is asking if we're going to be His disciples to make a dramatic change in our lives. In the Gospel of Mark, which starts immediately with the public life of Jesus, Jesus says, according to Mark, at the very beginning of His public life, "The reign of God is at hand. Change your lives."

Jesus is talking here about a dramatic change in our lives, turning around completely. What might be some of the things that Jesus is asking us today in the present time and circumstances of our lives? All of us, I'm sure, are very aware of what's going on in our world. In fact, there's a survey that was just done very recently that shows that the main concern of people in the United States is what is happening with the vast imbalance between a few who have so much and so many who have very much less, the gap between the rich and the poor.

It seems very clear that greed has taken hold. One of the things that Jesus says in the Gospel of Luke is very powerful: "Beware of greed of every kind." Greed is wrong, having an excess of wealth and constantly trying to get more and more, the thing that our very culture seems to be telling us all the time: It's important to get more, to be rich. So obviously, we have to be on the side of those who are trying to change their lives so that they have enough, but not constantly keep trying to have more, that we find ways to make the distribution of wealth much more fair so that gradually everyone has enough.

Blessed are the poor, those who understand that every gift, everything we have, comes from God, is a gift from God, not for us alone, but for us to share. That's the message of Jesus: a hard message, but an important message to hear today. Another one that comes to my mind because it is so prominent in our current public life is the situation of refugees or immigrants. Jesus was very inclusive. He tried to draw all into His community of disciples.

Everyone was recognized as a son or daughter of God. We have to reach out and welcome, not turn away, those who are in desperate need, trying to find a better way of life for themselves so they can stay with their families and raise their children. That's the situation in our country that we need to look at with the eyes of Jesus if we're going to be His disciples. Of course, the final thing that I think is very important in trying to follow Jesus today is to understand that Jesus totally rejected violence.

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We have to discontinue thinking of war as a means to solve our problems. Jesus, when His own life was threatened and someone tried to protect Him with a sword, He said, "Put away the sword. Those who live by the sword will die by the sword." Jesus totally rejected violence of any kind. This is again a very

challenging call by Jesus, one that we've heard many times before, but today is a time when we are being asked to commit ourselves as disciples of Jesus.

We must learn these values, follow these values and make them our own. That is how we become disciples of Jesus, and when that begins to happen, then what Paul pleads for when he's writing to the Church of Corinth, this community of disciples, is that they try to follow the way of Jesus so that they will be holy, that they remember that they are part of the Body of Christ, something sacred. So they must live in a way that shows profound respect for themselves and for all other people.

Paul reminds them that the Holy Spirit lives in us. You are a temple of the Holy Spirit. This will become very real for us when we live according to the values of Jesus, follow His teachings, follow His example and follow His way. Then we really will be temples of the Holy Spirit. We will be what Jesus was, a light to the world, and we will then share in the work of Jesus of transforming our world into the Reign of God.

That's the call that we receive today. As we celebrate this Eucharist, we must pray with great fervor and enter into the Eucharist, this saving act of God's love, and commit ourselves, to pray that we will be faithful disciples of Jesus for the rest of our lives.

[Homily given at St. Leo Parish, Detroit, Mich. The transcripts of Bishop Gumbleton's homilies are posted weekly to NCRonline.org. **Sign up here** to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.]

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