

2nd Sunday Ordinary Time B
January 14, 2018

Hearing the Call: *Waiting for the Whispers*

Readings: 1 Samuel 3: 3-10, 19; 1 Cor. 6:13-15, 17-20; John 1:35-42

It's a bit strange what comes to mind when we speak of receiving a call. It means many things to many people. Those of us who remember the late 1960's and 1970's, recall the excitement when a long-distance call came in, even as we could instantly recognize an incoming long-distance call by its hiss and static. It was an event! We were amazed at being able to speak to someone in Florida and knew that every minute counted and added up.

For many priests and religious, they speak of the calling that they received, that moment when they decided to give the seminary or religious life a try. A call is another word for a vocation. Rarely is the "call" in question a thunderbolt, but like Samuel in the famous passage in the cave, it is a slow and steady whisper that builds until such time as it is recognized.

Whatever the case, the sense of receiving a calling is critically important, but just as easily misunderstood. Every Christian is given a universal call to holiness, and the Second Vatican Council taught so clearly. It is described as a journey to holiness and as such is general in nature. Then there is what we do on that path to holiness. It can include your sense of calling to be a doctor, a teacher, truly feeling that this is the best way you can serve and live out your faith. But that too is different than a call to marriage, for that would be one's primary vocation or state in life. It is a permanent state and not transitory as might be a job.

The call to the priesthood for me was slow and steady, nurtured over time, and even with a few miscommunications along the way. I still recall the figure of Fr. Tiffany, assigned to my home parish as an assistant. He was the first to mention priesthood to me, and he did so in a clever way. He took me aside after daily Mass one day, and gently (though firmly) corrected me for telling the other servers what to do. "That's my job," he said. "But, Father, they were doing it

wrong,” I replied. “John, that is not the point. It’s my job!” I learned an important lesson that day, but he followed up his corrective with a question. “Have you ever thought about being a priest?” I remarked that indeed I had. He was the first to mention it and it made a deep impression.

When I got to high school, I moved on to other thoughts and other interests. But then the sense of call came back again as a senior in high school. There was a program in which we could sign up to go to lunch with an alumnus depending upon what career we placed on the card. I had initially written down *lawyer*, but changed my mind and decided to go out on a limb, but only if another friend would go with me. We peppered him with questions for the better part of two hours until he had to excuse himself to get back to the parish! One of my main questions: “I know what you do on Sunday, but what about the rest of the week?”

It is difficult to hear God’s voice amidst the cacophony of sounds with which we surround ourselves all too often. It is nearly impossible to even visit with the person sitting next to you anymore at most sporting events, a sad commentary on our culture. I can barely manage to watch a television news interview because everyone talks over each other. We have made a virtue out of always being busy and running about to and from. We can’t handle silence.

As an 18-year-old Freshman in the college seminary, I thought I would go crazy in trying to spend even five minutes in silence. And then a fellow seminarian invited me to a First Friday at the Little Sisters of the Poor. They went each month for a Holy Hour, and then we usually went out to Bridgeman’s for some ice cream or perhaps for a pizza. I must say that the beginnings of a more serious spiritual life were kindled in me on those Friday evenings.

If a young man asked me if I could promise him an exciting life as a priest, I would reply by asking him a question in return. “What is exciting to you?” “About what or whom are you passionate?” No,

my life does not have the excitement of a forty second run down a twisty hill of ice, in a contrived course. But my life has brought me tremendous joy and satisfaction and I am convinced that God will continue to allow me to bring Christ to people who hunger and thirst for Him, even those who may not know it now.

But what do you priests do all day? This is a legitimate question. Anointing of the Sick call, funeral, Knights of Columbus, spending a couple of hours with first year students at The Saint Paul Seminary, writing a bulletin article, meeting with architects to design a final plan for the Dayton Ave. building, preparing a talk for our RCIA class, marriage preparation sessions, some counseling sessions and attending a Catholic school banquet. Every day is different and yet there is a continuity of purpose, especially with respect to hearing confessions each and every day. That is a significant part of our ministry here. Like you I need good spiritual food to nourish the soul, and if I get too busy or too lazy, I will dry up. Yes, it happens, and we need to rekindle the flame.

These were all good works, corporal works of mercy, financial stewardship and education, the sacraments. But each must be seen in a larger context of “Speak, for your servant is listening.” No one can run on fumes, and our spiritual life, while different according to each one’s state in life, remains at its core an act of listening to the Lord. It is no different for us than for Samuel.

May the Lord will continue to bless our parish with vocations to the priesthood and religious life, through the faith-filled example of our families. God has planted many seeds in the hearts of our young. May they be free from fear to consider God’s call, and may they do it by listening to the quiet whispers of God’s divine voice calling them to holiness and to service of His holy People.