

SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME-B

January 14, 2018

First Reading – Samuel 3:3b-10,19

Responsorial Psalm – Psalm 40

Second Reading – Corinthians 6:13c-15a, 17-20

Gospel – John 1:35-42

I wish to start our reflection today with the Responsorial Psalm which goes this way: *Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will.*

It is so soothing to think that our vocation is to obey the will of the Lord. By obeying/doing His will, we will achieve the fullness of our existence. You might be surprised to know that the listening is almost synonymous with obedience.

I am poor in technology but I must admit that I have a Caller ID and a Voice Mail. I guess most of us have both of these advancements in technology to see who is calling us and then decide whether to answer the call or send it to voice mail.

John Henry Newman felt God's call to him in life and reflected on it with a beautiful prayer. But first, who was John Henry Newman? He was a scholar and an intellectual who lived in England from 1801 to 1890. He dabbled with atheism early in his life, but then God called. He couldn't put Him off. He sought God in religion, in the Church of England (Anglican Church). He became an Anglican priest and continued his studies of Christianity at Oxford University. In 1845 he wrote that as he studied more and more the writings of the early Fathers of the Church, he was convinced that the Catholics were the closest followers of Christianity in its original form.

He had a deep respect for the Anglican Church, but he heard God calling him to become a Catholic. This was an extremely difficult decision that affected his life in every way possible. He could no longer teach at Oxford. He could no longer preach in the Anglican Churches. He was a patriotic Englishman who was embracing those people whom he had referred to as "our traditional enemies." But God was calling. John Henry Newman was not about to send Him to voice mail. He became a Catholic and led the movement of Anglican scholars to Catholicism called the Oxford Movement. He became a Roman Catholic priest, and eventually was even made a cardinal.

On September 19, 2010 Pope Benedict XVI beatified Cardinal Newman. Blessed Cardinal Newman wrote this beautiful prayer which is a reflection not just on his life but on all our lives:

"God has created me for some definite service; He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have a mission. I may never know exactly what that mission is in this life. I shall be told it in the next. I have a part in a great work. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for nothing. I shall do good. I shall do His work. I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, even if I do not realize what I am doing. But, if I keep His commandments, I will serve Him in my calling."

What is our calling? The general answer to the question is simple: we are called to know, love and serve God. But how? How are we called to serve God? The particular answer to this question is a mystery, the mystery of our lives. The mystery unfolds every time we respond to God's call. We come before the Lord today and ask for the grace to be attuned to God's call in our lives. And we pray for the courage to answer His call rather than send it to voice mail. We pray that when He calls we will respond, "Speak Lord, your servant is listening."

We all have caller IDs and Voice Mails in our spiritual lives. All of us receive calls from the Lord. Sometimes, we just send God's call to voice mail. We might be afraid of what He is going to ask of us. He might

demand something more than we want to do or give. Maybe, we'd rather deal with Him later. Maybe if we ignore the call enough, we won't have to deal with it at all. And that is the sad truth of our reaction to God's call. If we don't respond like Samuel in today's first reading, "*Speak Lord, your servant is listening,*" we might miss our opportunity to do His will. Maybe the Lord wants us to lead someone who is estranged from Him closer to Him with our kindness. Maybe the Lord is calling us to enter into the path of life where we can best serve Him. God's calls have an impact both on our lives as well as on the lives of other people, even people we might not know.

Today is the perfect time to discuss the call of God that we receive in our lives, our vocation. Usually, when we hear the concept of vocation we think of those who are called to become priests or to enter religious life as sisters or brothers. These are certainly vocations from God, but they are not the only call that God gives.

Many of you are married or are hoping to be married someday. How do you view marriage? If it is just a romantic matter legalized by the state and celebrated in a Church, then you are missing an essential part of the sacrament of marriage. Marriage is a vocation, a call from God to greatness by embracing a life of sacrificial love. Pray to God that you will be a good Catholic wife or husband, concerned with giving love.

Husbands and wives also need to pray for each other. In marriage, it takes two of you to push the receive button on the phone and answer God's call. Young people are full of wonderful romantic ideals and ideas. You date this guy or this girl, and you look forward to a time when there will only be one person in your lives. This is all great. But you must pray for that special person.

Pray that when God calls you to love as He loves, you will answer this call, not send it to voice mail. Many are involved in careers. Why do we do what we do? To make money? It is perfectly correct to receive reward for our labor and to enjoy this reward. But God did not create us for money. God created us for love. We often recognize a call from Him to use our

funds for others. It's easy to send this call to voice mail, but then we will miss an opportunity to do God's will, an opportunity to love.

Now, let us go to the Second reading. Saint Paul wrote these arguments to convince the Corinthians of the exceeding sinfulness of the sin of fornication; partly, because they reckon it among the number of indifferent things, and also because the Corinthians before their conversion to Christianity, were notoriously addicted to this sin. They consecrated a temple to Venus, at which a multitude of virgins prostituted themselves; for which reason St. Paul advised them from falling again(relapse) into it after their conversion.

The first argument is in the words before us, *Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body.* Saint Paul told them that they had put the body to a use for which it was never intended: the belly was made for meats, but the body was not made for fornication, but for the Lord, that is, for the Lord's use and service. Such is the wonderful goodness of God towards us, His creatures. As our bodies are for the Lord's service as well as our souls, so the Lord is for the good of our bodies as well as our souls. Therefore our bodies ought to be employed in His glory for everything.

The true Christian, united by faith to the Lord Jesus becomes one in spirit with Him. In a certain sense, it is similar to that union in which a man and his wife are one body; there is a close and intimate union; they are united in feeling, spirit, intention, disposition. Saint Paul's argument is beautiful. The union of souls is more important than that of bodies; such union is more lasting, dear, and enduring than any union of two bodies. Our union with Him who is a Spirit pure and holy would be severed by fornication.

The union with Christ is more intimate, entire, and pure than that union between a man and woman. Such union with Christ should be regarded as sacred and inviolable.

Now, let us go to the gospel. God's call might be for us to become missionaries. Consider what happened in today's gospel. Andrew and the other disciple became the first missionary disciples. Let us pay attention to Andrew. He shows what missionary discipleship means. He goes to his brother and shares something important. That was Andrew's vocation. Andrew declared to Peter: "*We have found the Messiah*," he says, "the Christ, the Anointed One." He takes his brother to Jesus and Jesus does the rest.

We need missionary disciples like Andrew. John the Baptist calls Jesus the Lamb of God. For sure, like a lamb, Jesus is gentle, but more to point: Like a sacrificial lamb, Jesus offers Himself for forgiveness of sins.

A person might feel fearful about meeting Jesus. We all struggle with sin and guilt. Guilt doesn't belong just to Catholics. I underscore that it doesn't require perfection to encounter Jesus. And we don't need to be perfect to invite others. Like Andrew we want to reach our own relatives, especially our children.

We want to trust Jesus, not ourselves. We want to invite others. Let us make the invitation as best you can. Let us be like Eli. He said to the young Samuel, "*If you are called, reply, Speak Lord, for your servant is listening.*"

We discover that when the two disciples ask Jesus where he is staying or dwelling the question isn't simply about a street address. John the Evangelist uses the same Greek verb (translated as "*staying or dwelling*") when Jesus at the Last Supper tells his disciples that he "*dwells*" in the Father and the Father "*dwells*" in Him (John 14: 10–11).

We also discover that when Jesus says "*Come, and you will see*," the essential meaning of "seeing" is the seeing of faith (John 9). Only with that seeing can the disciples know where Jesus truly dwells, with-in the Father. Andrew was changed. We realize that here is a life-changing implication when Jesus is addressing each of us today in as personal a way as He addressed the two disciples.

John was faithful to his vocation and was preparing the way for the Lord, by calling people to repentance as a preparation for the Messiah. We see the fidelity and humility of John when he said to two of his disciples as Jesus passed by; "*Behold, the Lamb of God.*" These two disciples left John to follow Jesus, and their initial conversation was brief and telling.

It was such an important encounter that they remembered the exact time of the day when they met Jesus, four in the afternoon. Meeting Jesus was life changing for them and the moment they first met Him would never be forgotten. This was the experience of Andrew and the other unnamed disciple. The effect it had on each of them is obvious as they remained followers of Jesus and became two of the twelve apostles. We also know that Andrew was so touched by his initial encounter with Jesus that he went to share the news with his brother Peter.

There is an interesting little parallelism which occurs in the Gospel passage today. The text says that when Jesus passed by John the Baptist 'looked hard at him' and said, 'Look, there is the Lamb of God.'

Then later on Jesus 'looked hard at Peter' and said, 'You are to be called Cephas, meaning rock.' Greek scholars say that the very same word in Greek is used for both. This word 'emlepein' literally means to fix one's eye upon someone. Now, it might seem a very small point. But please know that these two occurrences of the same word ought to be translated exactly the same. And clearly here this word when translated ought to mean something much more than a merely passing glance: this fixing of the eyes by John the Baptist on Jesus and then by Jesus on Peter is a deep recognition by both of them that the object of their attention has real and vital significance.

Clearly identifying the Messiah is the very purpose of John's mission. When Jesus passes him by on that particular occasion John fixes his eyes on Him and in that moment of recognition John becomes fully aware that this truly is the Messiah and the time for Him to be revealed has now arrived.

The very same thing happens when Jesus encounters Peter. He fixes His eyes on Peter and at that moment knows that this is the man who will head the Church once Jesus Himself has returned to the Father. We understand that in this case it is more for Peter's benefit than for that of Jesus. It is a look of recognition and an understanding by Jesus that the right man, the rock, has been found for the work in hand.

What we are dealing with here is a moment of recognition, a critical point when the significance of a person's role suddenly becomes clear and the full understanding of the importance of the object of one's attention is arrived at in a moment of profound insight. John's whole aim and purpose in life was to prepare the people for the coming of the Messiah. It sounds as if he worked very hard to do this and he fulfilled this mission as well as he could. We must not forget that he obviously knew Jesus, who was his cousin, after all. But it seems as though it was only at that specific moment when Jesus walked by that John suddenly understood precisely who Jesus really was. John's two disciples did not need any urging; they have been so well prepared by their master that they simply left him standing there and begin to follow Christ.

My dear people of God. It is at this moment that we are faced with the choice of whether to follow Christ or not, to become His disciple or not. John knows the profound significance of that moment and realizes the completely transforming effect that this encounter has had on him. It led him to dedicating his whole life to the cause of the Gospel and to the spreading of belief in Jesus Christ, the one true Savior of the World.

There is a lesson for us here and it is that we should scrape the dust from our memories and try to recapture that moment when we realized the true significance of Jesus Christ and made the decision to follow Him and do His will. That is our calling.

Amen.