



Fr. Samuel's Homily

**2nd Sunday of Ordinary Time
January 14, 2018**

One of the most basic things that the Church teaches us, as people of faith, is that all of us are called. God has for each of us a purpose. We each have a destiny that, to quote Cardinal John Henry Newman, "is ours and ours alone." And it is up to us in the courses of our lives to respond to God's call and to live out that destiny. But what does it mean to be called? How can we know that what we might think we are called to become and to do are really from God and not just from those other voices that come into our lives seeking to distract us from our true purpose? How might we make ourselves ready to hear God's call to us in the first place? And once heard, where do we go from there?

In the readings for today we have two accounts of calls. The first is the call of Samuel from the 1st Book of Samuel. The second is the call of the first disciples from the gospel of John. I have always liked the account of the call of Samuel, and I have identified with it in my own life and not just because I share that name. For Samuel the call came in the still of the night. In the quiet he heard his name being called. The stillness and the quiet are important but I will get to those later. At this point I want to emphasize his being called by name. That is important—for God does call us by name. That is to say the name by which God knows us—our true identity. That, by the way, is why being called can be frightening. We tend to live our lives in this world creating our own identities or assuming identities that others impose on us. God goes deeper than that. He calls us by the name that tells us who we really are. And to respond might mean radical changes in our lives. Another thing of importance here is that Samuel did not know that he was being called by God. He thought that it was his mentor, Eli, calling him. One commentator that I read this week raised this question about this passage. He asked how it could be that Samuel confused God's voice with that of the old man who was sleeping in the room next door. For heaven's sake would not one know God's voice when one hears it? However the account tells us why. It tells us that at that time Samuel did not know God. So, he needed help, and it was Eli, his mentor, who helped him. He told him to go back into the quiet and to listen and, when the voice came again, to simply respond, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." God called him again by name. Samuel responded as Eli instructed and God led him to his destiny.

In the gospel passage for today two of John the Baptist's disciples are with him as Jesus passes by. John, too, is serving as mentor as he says, "Behold the Lamb of God." Like all good mentors he merely directed the attention of his disciples. It was up to them to be open or not. And they were. They decided to check Jesus out. So they followed him. Jesus, noting their interest, asked them a very important question, "What are you looking for?" There are several possible layers to that question. One might be simply Jesus asking them, "Why are you following me?" However, on a deeper level, we might read this as Jesus asking them, "Are you seeking the deepest desire of your hearts? Are you seeking God? Is

there something about me that seems to answer that desire?" At that point they did not really know anything more than there was something about Jesus that did touch their hearts. What that was they could not yet say so they just stammered out, "Where are you staying?" That is what happens to all of us when we encounter God's call in our lives. We know that something real in us is being touched but we just don't know where it will lead us. So, Jesus' response to their question applies to us as well. He said, "Come and see." And they did.

That is the way it works. God does call each of us in the contexts of our lives on this earth. He calls us to a journey of faith. He does lay not out his plan for us. Rather he calls us to live each moment of our lives open to where he will lead us in the next. It is a journey of trust that he knows what is best and that we will come to know moment by moment more fully the deepest desire of our hearts as we live in greater and greater unity with him and with one another. And he will surprise us, for the life we can live in that manner is far greater than any we might make for ourselves on our own.

But it takes listening. That can be a challenge because we live noisy lives in a noisy world. There is the noise of so many words coming at us from so many sources. There is the "noise" of all of the things that we believe that we have to do in the contexts of our daily lives. There is the "noise" of our fears which seek to keep us in a state of not trusting. There is the "noise" of our ambitions and worldly desires that keep us in a state of constant striving and instability. Those and so many other forms of noise seek to keep us from doing the most essential thing of all. And the most essential thing is the simple act of just stopping all of it, finding where we can be still and quiet, where we can simply listen. Eli guided Samuel to that when he told him to go back to bed and to be quiet. John the Baptist did that in how he guided and prepared those first disciples for the moment when Jesus walked by. Samuel and those first disciples listened with their hearts and they heard God's voice. And through that hearing they took the first steps into the lives that God had in store for them. Samuel grew up to become one of the greatest of the Old Testament prophets and the last of the Judges who lead Israel before Saul became king. Those first disciples, fishermen by trade, became the foundation of the Church.

There is a great deal more that I could say about this, but I think that it is best to leave it at this. Unless we can come to silence and stillness in our spiritual lives we will never hear God calling us. With that I simply encourage all of us to set aside, in our own lives, in the midst of all of the busy-ness and business of our days, time for just being quiet so that we might listen for God's voice. I would encourage us all, as well, to be open to accepting the guidance that God will send to us. For you see, while God speaks to us in the stillness of our hearts, we must prepare those hearts in the context of faith community. And that preparation is not about the rules of faith community but about how we can learn to live in ways that help us to be open to the presence of God in our lives, just as those first disciples were open. That enables us then to be able to respond, as did Samuel, with "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." And it enables us to continue listening as our destinies and our lives, the lives we are born to live, unfold before us.