

Homily Resources Sunday January 14, 2018

Readings: 1st 1 Sam 3:3-10,19; 2nd 1 Cor 6:13-15,17-20; Psalm 40; Gospel: John 1:35-42

1. Central thought: Today's theme is vocation. What is a "vocation"?

The word, "vocation" comes from the Latin, *vocare*, which means "to call." Every one of us has a "calling". For example, Samuel received a calling to be a prophet for Israel. Any priest has received a calling to his particular life's work. Everyone has a call to chastity and holiness. God has a plan for your life. It is important to discern that calling and fulfill it.

2. In order to "hear" our calling we must be ready to "listen" to God, a willingness to respond to Him, a willingness not to be concerned with oneself but with God and His Spirit. This, in turn, calls for a clear conscience and a pure life, far from the desires and drives of sensuality and all that which opposes the presence of the Lord (See Heb 12:1 and our responsorial psalm, "Here I am, Lord. I come to do your will."). Let us reflect on elements in "hearing" God's call.

The Readings:

3. The first reading: The book of Samuel begins with a long narrative of what we might call ancient Israel's middle history. Moses, Aaron, and Joshua were gone from the scene. The period of rule by Judges had begun (at about 1200 BC).

4. Background. The first chapter describes how Samuel was born to a profoundly faithful but long-barren couple by divine intervention. They dedicated him in his early childhood to God's service in the Temple at Shiloh, as an apprentice to the priest Eli. The boy's duties included attendance during the night near "the Ark of God," a most sacred cult object and a place of unique Divine presence among the people. God called Samuel one night and Samuel thought it was his master Eli. Twice God called, twice Samuel went to Eli and twice Eli told him to go back to sleep. The third time God called and Samuel went to Eli, the old priest realized what was going on, and told Samuel, "Next time, say, '*Speak, Lord, Your servant is listening.*'" The threefold repetition of God's call indicates genuine experience rather than hallucination. Eli knew the proper response for all God's followers: "Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening." Samuel became an illustrious figure, ranking with Moses and David as a man of God.

5. When can such communication with God happen? It may be a very ordinary time. What was Samuel doing? He was sleeping. God can communicate with us in very common moments. We need to be aware that God wishes to communicate with us a lot.

6. How can we help this communication to occur? We can be listening to Him. Note that Samuel was sleeping near the Ark of the Covenant. He was in sacred space. He was in a right relationship with God. We need to put ourselves in a good position to be available to God. In prayer, in adoration, in spiritual reading; all these may facilitate our communication with God. Matthew Kelly calls on us to be particularly aware during the Mass. Listen for the one thing that God wants us to get to become the better-version-of-ourselves that God wants. It could be like Professor Scott Hahn, when he went to Mass before his conversion, at Marquette, noticing the devotion and spirituality of people going to Mass.

7. We may need help discerning what is going on. The lesson for us is that God often calls ordinary people, including the young, to serve within the community. Consequently, we need guidance in discerning and responding to His will. In this reading, Samuel needed Eli. In the Gospel reading, the disciples needed the testimony of John. Our lives as God's followers revolve around seeking, finding and responding to God's calls. Listening to the call of God is to hear, understand, and accept it in word and action.

8.. Finally, God is more likely to speak to us if we have an attitude of holiness in our hearts. In the first reading it was noted that at the time of Eli, “a revelation of the Lord was uncommon and vision infrequent” (ch 3). This follows a description of the evil ways of Eli’s sons, and Eli’s unwillingness or inability to discipline his sons who were abusing their position as priests. Because of the evil of Eli’s sons, and Eli’s failure to discipline them, God did not speak to the people very much (See Heb 12:5-11 on the importance of a father’s discipline). This is why this godly little boy was called to this service. Note that Samuel’s first prophecy, that which came to him on this night when he was first called, was to Eli about the condemnation of his sons (3:11-18). If we expect God to communicate with us, we must seek to be holy and without sin. That is the subject of our second reading.

9. The second reading: We are not free to respond to the calling of God if we are tied down by sin (See Heb 12:1-4), especially sexual sin (See 1 Cor 6:18) (See also Mal 2 and 3).

10. Background to the reading. The letter is addressed to all members of the church at Corinth. Corinth was a bawdy seaport in cosmopolitan Greece and the center of intellectual ferment. The vices of every seaport, plus the philosophical ferment of ancient Greece, were all part of these peoples' lives, and gave rise, in part, to the need for this letter. One of the greatest besetting sins of the pagan port-town of Corinth was prostitution. A few Christians even tried to justify prostitution as part of the Christian liberty which Paul had preached to them. Corinth was a difficult place to preach a new doctrine and a new morality, but Paul had dared to preach both, provoking intense controversy. The pagan Corinthians believed that the soul of man was the important part and the body a mere piece of matter. They looked on the body as unimportant. Therefore, they argued, one ought to let the desires of the body have their way. Some of the Christian Corinthians had apparently picked up these pagan ideas. So Paul reminded them that they were "*sanctified and called to be holy*" like all who call on the name of Jesus. Just as God called Samuel and Jesus called his apostles, the Corinthian Christians were called to lead a life of holiness (Concerning a right understanding of the importance, holiness, and sanctity of our bodies, see St J.P.II’s “Theology of the Body”). See also 1 Thess 4:3.

11. In the Gospel, John the Baptist selflessly directed his disciples to Jesus. Notice how in our Gospel reading, the first disciples responded to John’s guidance. They were already seeking the Messiah. But in the Fourth Gospel, they listened to John’s counsel and followed Jesus. They were fundamentally holy and chaste men, seeking the Messiah, willing to listen both to the words of Jesus and to receiving guidance from John the Baptist.

12. These passages dealing with our calling are also very related to stewardship. Our Bishop wants us to be growing in Stewardship. Stewardship is very much like discipleship. This deals with our entire lives, time, talent, and treasure. Time we often think of primarily in terms of prayer or devotion, our relationship with God. Talent refers to our capabilities, our skills, and how we can use them to build up Christ’s work here on earth. Treasure refers to our money and possessions and how we use them responsibly to support Christ’s work, especially the Church and its mission.

13. In conclusion: What do you think is your calling from God? How open are you to listening to God? I encourage us to pursue the three guidelines of Stewardship, involving our time, our talent and our treasure as we seek to serve Jesus through our Church. Although your final goal on earth may change, everything that you experience may contribute to your effectiveness in your calling and help you get to heaven.