

SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME-JANUARY 17, 2021

**READINGS: 1 Samuel 3:3b10, 19;
Responsorial Psalm-Psalm 40;
1 Corinthians 6: 13c-15a, 17-20;
Gospel of John 1:35-42**

Discipleship: The Strength in the Community

We begin our reflection with a couple of questions. Who do you consider as your best friend-- is the person your spouse, parent, child, a sibling, a classmate, a colleague at work or a member of your parish community? What makes this person so special to you? During the course of our lives we have lots of encounters with people. Even though most of these encounters turn out to be of little significance, some encounters turn out to be of great significance. These encounters can lead to great friendships that can influence our lives. On this Second Sunday in Ordinary Time, the readings describe stories of another form of encounter-- the spiritual encounter with God.

We begin with the Gospel reading from John. Today's Gospel passage comes after the passage we read a few weeks ago on the Third Sunday of Advent. We learned that John the Baptist described himself as: "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord". As part of his mission of preparing the way of the Lord, John the Baptist performed a baptism of repentance. Because the people considered the baptism offered by John the Baptist as something unique, they thought that John the Baptist was the Messiah. However, John the Baptist made it clear to his contemporaries that he was not the Messiah. He told the people that he "was not worthy to untie the thong of the sandal" of the Messiah-- signifying that John the Baptist was of a much lower status.

Today's passage begins with the statement--"John was standing with two of his disciples". This statement is to alert us that John the Baptist had his own followers when Jesus began his ministry. As Jesus passed by John the Baptist and some of his followers, John the Baptist referred to Jesus as the "Lamb of God". The two disciples of John the Baptist left him and followed Jesus. During the encounter of the two disciples with Jesus, one of them Andrew learned much more about the identity of Jesus. Andrew learned that Jesus was the Messiah. Andrew went to bring his brother Simon to Jesus. At Jesus' encounter with Simon, Jesus changed Simon's name to "Cephas" (which is translated Peter). We can describe the encounters of Jesus with Andrew and Simon as of great significance.

A similar type of an encounter of great significance is described in the first reading from the First Book of Samuel. The story is about Samuel's encounter with God. Who was Samuel? Hannah, the mother of Samuel was barren. She promised God that if God would let her bear a child she would give that child to God for the whole of his life. Hannah gave birth to Samuel. She had given her young child Samuel to God as a way of fulfilling her promise to God.

Today's passage picks up the story after Hannah had given Samuel to Eli, the priest of a temple at Shiloh. The young Samuel was serving the Lord in the temple. While sleeping in the temple, one night God called him at different times. Samuel didn't know much about God. Therefore, he thought that Eli was the person calling him. Eli figured out who was calling Samuel. The priest taught Samuel how to respond to God when God called him again. Eli told Samuel to say "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening". This encounter of Samuel with God began the ministry of Samuel as a servant of God.

How are we supposed to interpret God's encounter with Samuel and Jesus' encounter with Andrew and Simon Peter? The two encounters are similar to each other. Eli's role in God's encounter with Samuel was similar to the role that John the Baptist played in Jesus' encounter with Andrew and Simon Peter. Eli helped Samuel to get to know God. John the Baptist helped Andrew to get to know the "Lamb of God" and Andrew helped his brother Simon Peter to get to know the "Lamb of God".

The expression "Lamb of God" is a reference to two Old Testament passages. In the Book of Exodus, God instructed the Israelites in Egypt to put the blood of a lamb on the top of the door frames of their homes. The blood would be a sign to the angel of death to pass over the homes of the Israelites during the last plague that killed the firstborn children in Egypt. The blood of the lamb saved the lives of the children of the Israelites. In describing Jesus as the "Lamb of God", the fourth Evangelist was referring to the fact that Jesus' blood gives life, eternal life.

The Evangelist used another Old Testament passage, a passage from the Book of the Second Isaiah-- the Suffering Servant song--"Like a lamb led to the slaughter, or a sheep before the shearers, he was silent and opened not his mouth (Isaiah 53). After Jesus' death and resurrection, the words of the Suffering Servant song were understood to be about Jesus, the servant of God who suffered so that all nations might come to know God.

The Evangelist John wrote his Gospel toward the end of the first century AD. During this time, the expected second coming of Jesus had already passed. The early Christians had started to wonder about this second coming. They asked the question "Where is Jesus?" In describing Jesus as the "Lamb of God" in today's narrative, the Evangelist taught that Jesus was already present in the midst of the early disciples. The early Christians encountered Jesus through the life of their communities.

In Baptism, we encounter Jesus, an encounter so significant to lead us into developing a spiritual relationship with Jesus. This type of a relationship is what Paul talks about in his First Letter to the Corinthians in the second reading. Paul taught the early Christians that their bodies were temples of the Holy Spirit. Paul reminded them that their lives were bought "with a price"-- by the death of Christ. He therefore encouraged the early Christians to live so as to glorify God by their lives.

My dear friends in Christ, what do the three readings tell us as people of faith? Scripture scholars see the stories of Samuel, Andrew and Simon Peter as stories of

discipleship, a vocation-- our call to serve. When we do the readings in the light of each other, we can discern that they give us some components of a life of Christian discipleship.

Perhaps we might be wondering how we encounter God. In what circumstances and situations do we experience the presence of God in our lives? According to Scriptures, we encounter God in every person we meet, in our homes and in our communities. As Christians, we respond to our relationship with God through our actions based on our faith. In this same Gospel, Jesus refers to his disciples as friends because "I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father" (John 15:15). As friends of Jesus, Jesus said he has appointed us as his disciples to go and bear fruit-- fruit that will last.

Today's three readings hold up models of discipleship for us to consider and to imitate. We have seen how relationship, service and fidelity act as models for discipleship. Today's readings encourage us to develop a loving relationship with God. From the readings we also see that as disciples we serve one another. In all our actions, we remain faithful to God as disciples of Jesus. Discipleship builds community based on the love and peace of Christ.

Fr. Yaw Acheampong

Please note that this homily has been prepared for a congregation at a distance.