

2nd Sunday Ordinary Time B
January 16-17, 2021

Waiting for the Whispers

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

“Speak Lord, your servant is listening.” Many priests and religious speak of the calling that they received, that moment when they decided to test their vocation in a seminary or convent. Often, the “call” in question is not a thunderbolt, and like Samuel, involves a few missed signals before recognizing God’s voice. The sense of receiving a calling is critically important, but just as easily misunderstood. The call to the priesthood for me was slow and steady, nurtured over time, even with a few miscommunications along the way.

It is difficult to hear God’s voice amidst the cacophony of sounds with which we surround ourselves all too often. Apparently, whispering is passé. Just shout over the noise, because if it is loud, you must be having fun, right? Apparently, if we are not bombarded, we must be bored. I will never understand this, nor do I accept it. But it is reality, at least today.

As an 18-year-old Freshman in the college seminary, I went stir crazy in trying to spend even five minutes in silence. Once 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 usually went to Bridgeman’s for some ice cream or out for a pizza. I joined them once and kept returning. The beginnings of a more serious spiritual life were kindled in me.

My ministry has brought me joy and satisfaction and I am blessed that God has allowed me to bring Christ to people who hunger and thirst for Him, even those who may not know it now. In the mind of someone who may be open to priesthood, they wonder—**What do priests do all day?**

This is a legitimate question. While things are quieter due to the pandemic, in this past week I have met with a couple for marriage prep via Zoom, celebrated a funeral, attended another, and prepared for yet

still another early next week. I took part in a College of Consultors meeting, a smaller group of priests who provide counsel to the Archbishop on certain matters. I serve on the Board an organization that provides scholarships for our Catholic Grade schools. We are currently strategizing about how we can grow the mission.

I celebrated confessions 90 minutes each day, watched as a professional took beautiful photographs of our recently restored sacristy floor and coordinated regarding final preparations for the Pro-Life prayer service on Friday. In my own quiet time in prayer, I felt called to write my bulletin column about loneliness, something that many are dealing with these days and visited with a few people who were in some difficulty.

But each event must be seen in a larger context of “Speak Lord, 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. Just as Eli helped Samuel to interpret God’s voice, it is critical that we assist young adults in discerning God’s call. But the constant barrage of noise can stop spiritual growth cold in its tracks.

And what do we need now in the Church? We need courageous young people unafraid to go against the tide. The Church values the unique perspectives of young women of faith, who should know that there are communities of women religious eager to welcome their gifts, whether in education, health care or in parish and diocesan life. There are thriving communities established right here in our own Archdiocese.

The Church needs young men who are healthy, motivated, unafraid to work and who understand that priestly ministry is as demanding as it is rewarding. We priests ought to be upfront about the challenges, inviting selfless young men who have learned that a living relationship with Jesus Christ is so much more satisfying than an endless series of experiences.

This is one of our greatest challenges– letting people know that sacrifice is actually the greatest path to freedom, not its obstacle. Samuel misread the signs; he is hardly alone. It is very easy to misreads the signs and the signals. But God calls and for those willing to slow down to listen, he has a message, a saving message from them to consider.

May the Lord bless this parish and our Archdiocese with vocations to the priesthood and religious life, through the faith-filled example of our families. We are currently blessed with some seminarians from our own homes and I pray for more. God has planted many seeds in the hearts of our young people. 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.