

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time B2024

I want to talk today about the mystery of God's call. Sometimes, people ask me, "When did you realize that God was calling you to become a priest"? Tell us how you became a priest? How did it happen? In my answer, I always say that there are two things: what I can explain and what I cannot explain. What I can easily explain is about my background and the environment in which I grew up: Catholic family, Catholic school, cantor in our parish choir, server of the Mass, etc. In such an environment, I did not see my life otherwise fulfilled than to be a priest.

However, I was not the only one of my age to be born in a Catholic family, to be a server of the Mass, to be in the parish choir, or to go to Catholic school. Why did not all my friends in the choir or servers of the Mass become priests? That I cannot explain. In the end, it comes to the truth that there is a deep mystery at the basis of each vocation we cannot explain.

God does not call us as it was on a phone by dictating us things to do for him. He neither sends us from heaven a copy of message with things he wants us to do. What is happening is that we feel a strong motivation that pushes us to engage for God and give our life for him. That motivation for God leads us to push aside other choices and opportunities so that the desire of serving God becomes the only focus of our life.

That motivation contains even a moral appeal to live a holy life in such a way as to please God at all time than to sadden him by immoral behavior. Such a stance corresponds more or less to what St Paul says in the second reading: "You are not your own", (...) "You are the temple of the Holy Spirit", (...) "Avoid immorality".

In that sense, the cause of God becomes bigger than our life itself so that we want to give him everything we are and have by serving his people. That is what I felt and why, though still young, I wanted to become a priest. There is a mystery here I cannot explain. It is the same mystery that crosses the life of Samuel and other disciples as well. Samuel thought he was dealing with Eli who was calling him. And yet, as he later realized, it was God himself.

The situation of the first disciples, though slightly different, contains the same element of mystery. When Jesus told them to come and see, there was the whole range of unknown before them, perhaps they would discover later by staying with him. Moreover, by asking them to come and see, Our Lord was inviting them to build relationships with him, to try to know him from within and not just from outside. That was true in the past as it is today. No one can build a strong relationship with someone when he cannot enter into his intimacy; otherwise the relationship remains artificial. It was only when the disciples stayed with our Lord and learned from him that they came to understand the demands of their vocation and what they had to pay to be true disciples.

In each vocation, the initiative comes from God and not the recipient. It was that way with Samuel and it was that way with the two disciples that our Lord invited to come and see where he was living. It is always God who is the first to call us. He precedes us in everything we do, because the initiative is his.

When we feel strongly some inclination for God or our hearts are so unsatisfied that we start asking questions about God, it is he who comes to meet us. God does not let us

search for him in the darkness and in the forsaken. He always comes to us with open arms. He does not keep himself at a distance from us, but rather is near us and is waiting for us. As St Augustine says, we would not even have begun to seek for God unless he had already found us.

Sometimes God uses human mediation to reach out to the one he is calling. In the case of Samuel, it was the prophet Eli who helped him discern God's call. In the case of Andrew and Peter, it was John the Baptist who introduced the two disciples to our Lord. In other cases, it could be the effort and the encouragement of parents or family members, to their children that can nurture a vocation. Where that encouragement and effort are lacking a vocation can die.

The fact that God has the initiative of the call does not mean that things will be easy. No vocation is easy. Vocations are demanding; they require sacrifice and discipline. Once someone responds to God's call, the devil tries always to divert him. Vigilance is really required. The disciples who followed Jesus had to abandon their master, John the Baptist. John himself had to let go off his disciples and accept to be humble in the presence of Jesus. In Jewish society, John was a respected master. He changed the lives of many through his teaching. Given such an honor, we would think that he would stick to his position. However, in the Gospel, he invites his disciples to leave him and to transfer their loyalty to Jesus. And yet, human experience teaches us that there is no harder task than to take the second place when once the first was enjoyed. John, on the contrary, teaches us humility, sincerity and detachment.

In the same way, the disciples had to change in order to adapt to the new situation demanded by Jesus. They had to let themselves be transformed. That transformation is shown in the Gospel through the change of the name of Simon who becomes Cephas. The change of name denotes a new relationship with God. When a person enters into relationship with God, he becomes a new person. That is why in the past, when someone entered religious life, he was given another name.

However, we should not be afraid because the call is demanding. God will never call us to some mission without giving us the grace to fulfill it. We have always to remember that the Lord will help us in spite of our human weaknesses. Knowing our weaknesses, we might be afraid to work for God. But, we have to know that the Lord is with us. He does not look at our present state, but at the potential in us and what we can become under his guidance for the glory of his name and the salvation of those to whom he is sending us.

Let us ask the Lord to strengthen us in our vocation. May he give us the courage to be open to our fellows who can help us discern our vocation! May God bless and strengthen those who have already responded to his call.

1 Samuel 3: 3b-10, 19; 1 Corinthians 6: 13c-15a, 17-20; John 1: 35-42



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