



Welcome to our Eucharistic Celebration

The Second Sunday of Ordinary Time

January 15, 2017

Saint Mary of the Assumption Parish

Today's Scriptures

Today is the first Sunday that we observe Ordinary Time. The last two feasts of the Christmas season—the Epiphany and the Baptism of Jesus—focused on the revelation that Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God, who would bring salvation to the entire world. The themes of identify and mission, found in the Scriptures for the Epiphany, continue in today's readings.

Today's reading from Isaiah is the second of his four Servant Songs. Scholars have debated whether Isaiah was speaking about a particular individual or Israel itself. Either way, the servant about whom Isaiah speaks is known to God. God himself has given the servant the identity of "servant"—one who does the will of God. The servant's identity has been chosen by God, and formed by him from the Servant's earliest existence. The servant also has a mission: to gather the people of Israel and restore them to God. The servant's obedience to his mission will enable God's salvation to be known to all. Isaiah's words gave the people of his time hope that God would save them and restore their strength, so they would once again reflect God's glory. These same words also have great meaning to Christians who find in Isaiah's description of God's servant, a perfect reflection of the identity and mission of Jesus.

In the opening lines of his letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul reminds them that all those who believe in Jesus have an identity and mission, given to them by God. Paul's identity as apostle was not chosen by him but reflects the mission given to him by the will of God. Paul reminds the struggling Corinthians that they, too, have an identity as the people of God, and as people sanctified by Jesus Christ. Their mission, therefore, is to be holy and to live in unity with all other believers.

In today's Gospel, John the Baptist compares his identity and mission to that of Jesus. John called Jesus "the Lamb of God," saying that his identify as the eternal son of God and Messiah was revealed to him when the Holy Spirit descended and remained on Jesus at his baptism. Even though John was known as a great prophet and had great success at calling people to a baptism of repentance, John knew that he was subordinate to Jesus in identity and mission. Jesus's mission is to take away the sins of the world; John's mission was to prepare the world for Jesus' appearance.

Each of today's Scriptures suggests that God's will for every human person is never random; it is personal and intentional. God chooses an identity and mission for every person but these are never imposed. Instead, God invites us to discover and embrace whom he has called us to be and the role he has for us in helping to build his kingdom.

Sunday Readings and Backgrounds

Reading I: Isaiah 49:3, 5-6

I will make you a light to the nations. To the ends of the earth.

- The first reading from Isaiah is one of a set of songs which portray a "servant of the Lord," who was commissioned by God to bring salvation and whose suffering would redeem God's people.
- In today's passage the servant is called from the womb and commissioned to bring salvation to the nations.
- The Evangelists of the New Testament use the figure of the servant to explain the mission of Jesus.

Responsorial Psalm: Ps 40: 2, 4, 7-8, 8-9, 10.

Here I am, Lord, I come to do your will.

Reading II: 1 Corinthians 1:1-3

Grace and peace of God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

- The second reading begins Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, which will be read for the next several weeks.
- Paul describes himself as an Apostle, that is, "one who is sent."
- Together Paul and the Corinthians form a people "called," or ecclesia, which we translate as Church.

Gospel: John 1:29-34

Now I have seen for myself.

- The Gospel reading is part of a series of testimonies about the identity of Jesus.
- In today's reading, John the Baptist identifies Jesus as the Lamb of God and as the Son of God, God's chosen one.
- The image of the lamb is rooted in the Passover, the deliverance from Egyptian slavery by God's saving power, during which the Jews sacrificed a lamb and put the blood on the door to commemorate the blood that saved their firstborn from the tenth plague.

God's Self-Revelation: Who Are You?

One of the elderly sisters in my religious community used to ask a younger sister that question every day at breakfast. The senior in question didn't have dementia. Far from it! She was challenging the other to continue to dig deeper and deeper into her own identity, to discover and articulate who she really was. The younger one started with her name and went on to other words which described the relationships that called her forth: sister, daughter, friend, etc. Some of the answers had an overtly religious tone while others could include anything from the claim to be a swimmer to a Cardinals' fan. As the days went on, it became quite a challenge to continue to respond with new, honest, creative answers – and a good number of us learned from watching the interchange.

Of course, part of the challenge we all picked up on is that you have to be capable of demonstrating the truth of any word you use to describe yourself. If you say you are a tennis player, you'd better at least know which end of the racket to pick up. Today, for instance, if you followed Paul's lead and said "I am member of the church," what evidence could you offer for that claim? Most of us were baptized as infants, and while we may have a certificate, legal as it may be, it's pretty flimsy evidence. In the Book of Genesis, the first question God asked humanity was "Where are you?" Like a pair of naughty children, Adam and Eve admitted they were hiding. From that moment on, as Eucharist Prayer IV reminds us, God has continued to seek us out, sending prophets, again and again trying to entice us into a covenant of love.

Today's psalm response offers us a challenging mantra for the coming week. After the first reading we will repeat, "Here I am, Lord, I come to do your will." Do we realize that when we pray those words we are claiming to be ready for anything that will come up in God's ongoing project for the universe?

One of the points of today's liturgy and readings is that God's offer of salvation has never been a disembodied proposal. God always chooses to work through creatures who reflect the divine image. When Isaiah heard God's question, "Whom should I send?" he responded with the same emotion as the psalmist: "Here I am! Send me!" Today's selection from the Book of Isaiah reflects on the prophetic vocation emphasizing that God's servants are called from the womb, and that they are always called for the sake of God's people.

As he begins his First Letter to the Corinthians Paul says much the same thing. Paul identifies himself as someone called by God, and he addresses himself to a community of people who share that same dignity and responsibility. The Gospel identifies Jesus as a person so imbued with God's Spirit that he will actually immerse other people in it.

While each of today's readings talks about vocation, giving us good theory, praying the psalm is the dangerous thing. When we pray those words we put our own lives on the line. Sure, it would be more comfortable to hide out with Adam behind some leafy bush, but this prayer calls us to join a great company of friends of God and respond with people like Abraham, Isaiah, Samuel and Mary of Nazareth, all of whom in their own way said with Mary, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord."

When we think about those biblical heroes and our own favorite saints, we recognize what became obvious in the interchange between my two sisters: our response to God and to the others who have called us forth ultimately shapes who we become. Each of the readings we hear this weekend reflects who God created us to be. The first reading reminds us that God called us before we were born. Paul tells us that our vocation is to take up our part in the community God has formed and sent forth for the sake of the world. The Gospel gives us John the Baptist as the model of a servant of God so dedicated that he could recognize God's chosen one and so humble that he could step aside when the time came.

Who are you?

That's the question this week's readings put to each of us individually and as a community that God has called together for the sake of the world. It's a question we need to ask again and again because the meaning of our lives depends on the answers we give. It is only to the extent that we can say who we are that we can also pray, "Here I am, Lord, I come to do your will."

~Mary McGlone

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