

FIRST IMPRESSIONS 2nd SUNDAY (B)

I Samuel 3: 3b-10, 19 Ps. 40: 2-4, 7-10 I Cor. 6: 13c-15a, 17-20 John 1: 35-42

By: Jude Siciliano, OP

Dear Preachers:

Although Samuel was young, he was already living in the temple. Hannah, his mother, had not borne any children so she went to the temple in Shiloh to pray. She made a promise that if she had a child she would dedicate the child to God. She received the gift she prayed for and, when he was weaned, she presented Samuel to God's service at the temple. Eli, the aged prophet, was to care for and train the boy whom, we are told, "At that time Samuel was not familiar with the Lord." It was in the temple, while asleep, that Samuel first heard God speak.

Like Samuel, we may experience God's presence and voice in the "temple", i.e. while at worship or during a brief visit to a church to offer a prayer. During such times we might hear a message through the proclaimed scriptures; from a hymn; during a quiet moment. Perhaps the reception of the eucharist energizes us or a prayer in the liturgy consoles. Like Samuel, we too have our "temple experiences" when we hear the Lord calling us.

However, unlike Samuel, we do not spend all our time in a temple or church. It is good to remember that God's revelation is not reserved to a select few or to a special place. So, we can ask ourselves: when have we experienced God's nearness? When have we heard God's voice? For most of us it was probably when we were busy about the usual details of daily life. We might get an insight or a sense of God's nearness while feeding an infant; a feeling of fulfillment when visiting a sick person; a deeper sense of commitment while stuffing envelopes for a worthy cause. At those moments we pause and invite the One who wants to draw close and, using Eli's encouraging words, pray: "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."

Like most of you, I learned the basic prayers when I was a child: the "Lord's Prayer," "Hail Mary," and the child's prayer before going to sleep, "Now I lay me down to sleep." But Eli's suggestion to Samuel today may be an even more basic prayer. "...if you are called, reply, Speak, Lord for your servant is listening."

In moments of urgent need, we sometimes say to a nearby person, "Don't just

stand there, do something!” True enough. But there are other moments when we are facing a situation that we do not have a clue about what to do. At those times we might tell ourselves, “Don’t just do something – stand there.” Before we rush in and mess things up even more; before we set out on a journey of our own imagining; before we dispense advice drawn from our own leanings and tendencies, we might invite the Lord to speak, to show us the way, to give us a wisdom we need, but don’t have on our own.

At the heart of all this is a believer’s confidence that we are not alone; God is in partnership with us in our efforts to live faithful lives in accordance with God’s will. In many ways, no matter how old or experienced we are, before the great mystery of God, we are all beginners. We are like the young Samuel, asleep in the night – while the Holy One is trying to get through to us. Eli gives Samuel some good advice. We can’t force God’s hand or make God speak up when we want but, as Eli suggests, “...if you are called, reply, Speak Lord, for your servant is listening.” We could try practicing that prayer this coming week, during all the daily routines, when concerns begin to circle us or when we want to know how and where God is calling us into service.

The Psalm Response expresses similar sentiments for those moments when we are baffled and ask ourselves, “What shall I do?” The psalmist sums it up, “I have waited, waited, for the Lord.” Notice the double use of “waited” – it must have been a difficult time and a long period of waiting for the psalmist. Instead of giving up on God, the faithful servant kept waiting...waiting, trusting God would come to help. And God does, for the psalmist adds immediately, “...and God stooped toward me and heard my cry.” The psalmist sums us a key biblical message, one we heard in I Samuel today: what God wants from us is “ears open to obedience.” Later, with open ears and a willing heart, the psalmist now can respond, “Behold I come...to do your will.” We act upon the Word we have heard.

We invite God to speak; we attend to God’s Word at this Eucharist and then we respond. I don’t mean to make it sound like a quick and easy process; listening to God and responding is a life-long process, with many trials and errors. “I thought I was doing God’s will,” how many times have we said that in our lives? The life of a believer is summed up in our gospel today. When the Baptist points out Christ, to his disciples, they follow him. Christ turns to them and asks the question we are all asked, “What are you looking for?”

They don't have a ready-made answer; they just know they want and need to be close to Christ. They respond, "Where are you staying?" It will be more than enough if they go and spend time in Christ's presence, where they hope to experience firsthand what it means to be Christ's disciples. They will stay with him and do what all disciples must first do, become listeners. "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening." They will first "be" then they will know what to "do." What changes must I make in my daily routine so that I can be a better listener to God's Word?

John the Baptist not only sees Jesus – he has insight about Jesus and points him out for Andrew and the other disciple. John names Jesus as "the Lamb of God." In our eucharistic celebration we invoke Jesus by that title. In our Gloria we pray: "Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us." At the Breaking of the Bread, we pray three times: "Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world have mercy on us...have mercy on us...grant us peace."

The image of the child Jesus in the manger is everywhere during the Christmas season. But when the Baptist names Jesus as "the Lamb of God," he is helping us shift our attention to another identity for Jesus. Who is Jesus? The Baptist tells us he is the Lamb of God – which is a multi-layered biblical image. For his Jewish hearers and us the title evokes a rich and challenging meaning.

Remember in Exodus, the blood of the lamb was smeared on the doorposts and lintels of the homes of the enslaved Jews to protect them from the Angel of Death. The gospel tells us that Christ, the Paschal Lamb, will free us from sin and death. Isaiah, in his Servant Song (ch 52), describes the servant as a lamb who is led to the slaughter for our offenses. A contrasting image of the lamb is in the Book of Revelation. Here the slain lamb is victorious, with power to defeat death and end the world of evil.

At our communion rite the presider will hold up the consecrated bread and wine and, with these words, invite us to come forward to eat and drink: "This is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. Happy are those who are called to his supper." It's a kind of altar call, isn't it? An invitation to come forward to profess our faith in the One who invites us, as he invited Andrew and his companion, "Come and you will see." We come forward because we want to see, as the first disciples did – "to see" where Christ dwells ("Where are you staying?" they asked him.) Our dwelling with Christ and his being with us, will

open our eyes so we can come to know and follow Christ and his ways.

The Lamb of God chose the way of a servant, so that we could come to know God in Jesus' life with us. The Lamb did not stray from his way, even when it meant his life – so much did he want us to know God's love for us. The Lamb was victorious over sin and the darkness of the world, so that we could be freed from what holds us captive and see our way through the darkness and distractions our world throws at us.

We, like those very first disciples, choose to follow Jesus and make our home in him. We know his life is life for us; his way is light for us. We come forward to receive him so that, in Paul's words today, we can be strengthened and as "members of Christ," stay "joined to the Lord" and become "one Spirit with him."

QUOTABLE

The Good News of Christ cannot be proclaimed to the modern world unless, at the same time, both the unalterable dignity of every human being, each of whom is called to be a child of God, is proclaimed and unless that injustice is indited which is imposed by our society as a heavy and intolerable burden on the poor. Our ministry brings hope to the poor, but it admonishes the powerful!

-the General Chapter of the Dominican Order at Walderberg, 1980.

FAITH BOOK

Mini-reflections on the Sunday scripture readings designed for persons on the run. "Faith Book" is also brief enough to be posted in the Sunday parish bulletins people take home.

From today's 1Samuel reading:

When Samuel went to sleep in his place, the Lord came and revealed God's presence, calling out as before, "Samuel, Samuel!" Samuel answered, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

Reflection:

In moments of urgent need, we sometimes say to a nearby person, "Don't just stand there, do something!" True enough. But there are other times, when we are facing a situation that we do not have a clue about what to do.

Then we might invite the Lord to speak, to show us the way, to give us a wisdom we need, but don't have on our own. At those moments we pray Samuel's prayer: "Speak, for your servant is listening."

So, we ask ourselves:

- How do I include God in my daily decisions?
- When I must make an important decision, how much time do I give to prayer?

JUSTICE BULLETIN BOARD

"Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening"

(1 Samuel 3:3b-10)

Within a few days, our country will have a new president and vice-president, and national, state and local officials will begin the job of leading our country, which has been so richly blest, and which is facing unparalleled problems. We hope that Samuel's words in today's first reading will be the constantly repeated prayer of all who are elected to public office. Our own prayers and participation on behalf of the common good are also essential.

Prayer for President-elect Barack Obama and all Newly Elected Officials

"Let us pray today for our nation and for our new President, Barack Obama as he prepares to assume the monumental task of leading this great country. We ask God our Father to bless him in this historic moment in our nation's history. And we give thanks and rejoice with all Americans in the significance of the election of the first African-American president."

May the Holy Spirit guide President Obama, Vice-president Biden and all of our nation's new leaders with wisdom, compassion, fortitude and a profound commitment for the dignity and sanctity of all human life. We pray that these new leaders will use the powers of their office to defend the most vulnerable among us. And, may our Heavenly Father help all of us to put aside our differences, heal divisions and work together for the good of all people. Amen."

(Bishop Kevin Farrell, Diocese of Dallas)

Did you know?

• Pope Benedict XVI sent a personal message to President-elect Barack Obama congratulating him and offering his prayers for Obama and for all the people of the

United States. The message referred to the "historic occasion" marking the first time a black man has been elected president of the United States. The Holy Father assured Mr. Obama of his prayers that God would help him with his high responsibilities for his country and for the international community. The pope also prayed that "the blessing of God would sustain him and the American people so that with all people of good they could build a world of peace, solidarity and justice."

What can I do?

- Pray daily for our new president and for all public officials. (Cut out the prayer above and use it regularly.)
 - Be active in working for local and national policies and laws, which "build a world of peace, solidarity and justice".
- (Submitted by Anne and Bill Werdel, from the parish bulletin of Sacred Heart Cathedral, Raleigh, N. C.)

POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES

Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I post in this space several inmates' names and addresses. I invite you to write a postcard to one or more of them to let them know we have not forgotten them. If you like, tell them you heard about them through North Carolina's, "People of Faith Against the Death Penalty." If the inmate responds you might consider becoming pen pals.

Please write to:

- William J. Moore #0290914 (On death row since 4/26/2006)
- George T. Wilkerson #0900281 (12/20/2006)
- Eugene J. Williams #0441044 (5/1/2007)

---Central Prison 1300 Western Blvd. Raleigh, N.C. 27606

ANNOUNCEMENTS

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Thank you.

"Blessings on your preaching", Jude Siciliano, OP - FrJude@JudeOP.org