

“FIRST IMPRESSIONS” 2ND. SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B)
JANUARY 16, 2000

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

Dear Preachers:

First an announcement:

Our PREACHERS’ EXCHANGE” webpage has been updated: On it you will find an article on preaching Mark for this new liturgical year, plus a book review, information for justice preaching; material related to Dominicans and preaching; a book review and a summary of a recent meeting of the Catholic Coalition on Preaching. Check it out at: <https://PreacherExchange.com>. (go to “Preaching the Gospel”).

I was wondering why the first "ordinary Sunday" of the new year should have a Gospel from John and not Mark, since we will be in Mark throughout these "ordinary Sundays." It might have to do with this Sunday following the Baptism of the Lord. The Gospel last week was about Jesus' vocation declared in his baptism in the Jordan. Perhaps the John passage was selected to turn our attention to our own call, our own Baptism and its consequences. Thus, the Gospel takes us back to the Jordan, but now disciples are following Jesus, which is what we do as a result of our own Baptism.

The readings are about vocation; they tell us about the bond of discipleship. They seem to suggest that being a disciple is about being attentive and this has to do with listening and learning. Samuel is in the Temple and there he hears the voice of God. He is already a follower, since he is working in the Temple. But God is going to call him to take further steps in following God. In the Temple, the sacred flame had to be lighted from dusk to daybreak. It was a sign of God's presence. Samuel's task may have been that of guarding the Temple flame as it burned through the night. That's a wonderful image for the preacher to play with--in the world, when it is dark, we are watching to keep God's light burning and told to listen to what God has to say. Perhaps, if we listen in the dark, we will be guided to know how to carry the flame of God into our world. In our preaching, we might want to develop the role of the believer as one who keeps the light going in the dark.

One such believer was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., whose holiday is tomorrow. In a dark world of racial inequality, he tended the flame of non-violence and racial

equality. His preaching and work lead to the passing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964. But today his dream for justice for all is far from fulfilled. We can't expect that only some have to be concerned about issues like peace and justice. Don't we all have some part to play in large or small ways to help further the dream of Dr. King? Doesn't his dream coincide with the dream God has for humanity: that all be treated equally; that justice be the hallmark of our daily dealings with others? What part do we have in this work of justice at home, where we work and in our society? Tomorrow's holiday may give us an occasion to ask God the role we have in fulfilling the dream the life of Dr. King recalls. Are we, like Samuel, asleep in the temple while God is trying to get through to us? At this eucharistic celebration we make Samuel's words our own prayer, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." We also pray at this liturgy that we have an attentive heart to hear God and a courageous heart to respond.

Another approach.

I worked in my uncle's machine shop through high school and part of college. I learned to be a machinist by first being an apprentice. Other machinists taught me how to work the machines, how to check the results myself and when to ask for help. I watched and listened to them, for they had the experience I didn't. We all learn our roles in life by listening and watching how others do it. We need mentors. Samuel did. He did not know what to do when he first heard the voice in the dark. Eli, though initially a bit slow, teaches Samuel what he must say when God speaks again. Say, "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening."

We, like Samuel, are already in God's service. Today, Sunday, we are actually in the Temple "tending the flame" of our faith. But God is calling us to hear more and to follow further. Our lives are not stagnant, nor is our response to God. Our response to God takes various modifications throughout our lives. God may be calling us to a new hearing. Today might also be a good day to give thanks for the mentors in our lives who have taught us how to live our faith and guided us to know what really counts in life. During the Mass we call some of them to mind and give thanks for them--- these gifts from a God who calls and instructs us through others.

Notice too, the mercy of God in this passage. Samuel doesn't get it at first, so God calls over and over again. God does not abandon us if we don't hear or if we have gone looking in the wrong places. Rather, God calls again and again, if necessary.

The notion of vocation goes through the second reading as well. The Spirit of God dwells in us and makes us holy. God inhabits our human flesh and so we have a dignity given us by God. We aren't made for immorality, nor can we reduce another person to an object. We must see one another as who we are or can become. Remember too, that sexual union is a favorite Hebrew Scripture image for intimacy with God. Our baptismal vocation is a call to holiness and to see the dignity of each person God has created.

The Gospel has others who are searching for God and who hear a deeper call. The people in today's story already are people looking for God. John the Baptist, a mentor to his disciples, points them to another who will be their teacher ("Rabbi"). John uses a favorite image for Jesus, "Lamb of God." It is rich in many biblical meanings, and the commentators warn us not to settle on just one. We too have had our own titles, names, for Jesus. How do we know these titles are still valid for us? Haven't we changed, haven't our lives grown? Who is Jesus for us now and how do we call him? We, like the disciples of John, are being invited to follow Jesus at this time in our lives, to spend time with him and to discover who he is for us at this stage of our lives. Only finding ways to "stay with him" will enable us to find him anew. Can the preacher suggest concrete ways for very busy people to "stay with Jesus"?

John's disciples have been seekers, and it is late in the day for them. They need rest (from their search?) and Jesus is offering it to them--the "four in the afternoon" image may be referring to the beginning of the next day's Sabbath. These disciples will find rest in abiding with Jesus and in that Temple they will find God's rest and presence for them. The invitation is to deeper friendship with the Lord, "Come and see."

The results of being with Jesus are immediate; the new followers go out and call others. They become witnesses to what they have experienced. Which brings up the possibility of not being so shy to talk about our faith around others. It is not of our tradition to go around knocking on doors for Jesus (maybe some of us should), but we could be a little more open with others when the chance to explain what we believe occurs in daily conversations.

A SPECIFIC APPLICATION FROM TODAY'S SCRIPTURES:

(Connie Schoen, O.P. from the Dominican Parable Conference submits the following addition to today's reflections.)

The Dominican Family in the US has been asked to participate in the Iraq Food Basket Advocacy Project the week of January 17-26, 2000. The Project is intended to draw attention to the fact that the UN imposed sanctions against Iraq, now in their ninth year, are causing the death of 5,000-6,000 children each month due to complications of malnutrition and starvation directly linked to the sanctions. The action is to prepare and deliver food baskets containing the weekly rations received by Iraqis (one adult or child)--5 lbs. wheat flour, 1 lb rice, 1 lb sugar, 2 oz lentils, 1 oz tea, 1 oz salt, 8 fluid oz cooking oil, ½ oz cheese (for children under 1 year-old add 2 lbs. of milk powder and 6 oz of weaning cream)--to each member of Congress. The point being that no one can or should have to live under such inhumane conditions. The ultimate objective is to urge and persuade Congress to de-link economic sanctions from the military sanctions currently in place against Iraq.

Some thoughts and ideas for linking the Iraq Project and preaching for the Second Sunday of Ordinary Time:

Although one does not generally focus on the Psalm for the homily, Psalm 40 is a good place to begin this Sunday. The Psalmist is clear that our sacrifices, offerings, and worship are of no significance to God unless we have listened and heard God's voice and are obedient in action to what we have heard. Ours is to contemplate and reflect on God's laws, literally taking them and holding them in our hearts. The power of this "heart knowing," revealed by the action of the Holy Spirit, moves us to delight (which does not mean that we do not struggle) in doing God's will. Thus, filled with the joy that truth brings, we are compelled to proclaim what we have heard. And we have no alternative but to announce it, not in some quiet and secluded place, but in the busiest centers of our lives, the places where we meet to decide how we shall live together--our centers of worship and the halls of political power.

We gather for Eucharist to hear and to celebrate the Just Word. We remember how that Word was enfleshed in Jesus. Like the first disciples, if we truly seek to know Jesus, the Rabbi, the Teacher, and to understand where he lives, that is, to glimpse the God-heart out of which he speaks and acts, we too hear the invitation, "Come, and you will see." Like Samuel, we are called to be attentive and to respond, with open hearts and minds; ready to be awakened to a new way of being. We need not travel or to stay with Jesus very long before we discover a new order--forgiveness, freedom, healing, life, the way of the beloved--the old order has passed away; we

are a new creation.

Eucharist is both a remembering and a realization. We remember from whom we come and to whom we belong. We realize the Spirit of Christ alive in the Body of Christ present. If we truly "live" where Jesus "lives" we are to be the bearers of the new order both in word and action--life and healing, not death, for the children of Iraq.

Connie Schoen, OP

QUOTABLE:

At the beginning of the century, as at the end, too many of our businesses have strained to avoid the competition they claim to value. Through trusts, monopolies and mergers, and with legal bribes to politicians, our capitalist elites have maneuvered to escape taxation, corner markets, rig prices and otherwise trick customers and taxpayers. In 1999 as in 1900, the profit motive that we employ to inspire us ends up also corrupting us—until with deductible charities we try to repurchase conscience.

That charity remains essential to the survival of so many Americans is a further constant of our century. One study in 1900 concluded that about 10 million Americans—or 13 percent—were “failing to obtain sufficient necessities for maintaining physical efficiency.” That’s a pretty good parallel to our contemporary “poverty line,” the federal standard of minimally adequate income for a family of four. And behold: the current standard of \$16,000 defines a needy population of precisely 13 percent.

We would appear even more cold hearted if we quantified the disparity between the richest and poorest Americans or between the median income of American families —\$39,000 and the vast majority of the families around the world. Surely the 21st. Century will be no less transforming than the 20th. I can foresee human habitats in space and beneath the seas, artificial environments to grow our crops and transcontinental parliaments, courts and cops. But however great our progress, I fear we will still not properly share our bounty with the poor. It is a blind spot as great as that of our forebears who insisted, only yesterday, that wars, and even slavery, were necessary to their prosperity.

---Max Frankel in “New York Times”, 12/26/99, page 22.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

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Thank you.

“Blessings on your preaching”,

Jude Siciliano, OP

FrJude@JudeOP.org