

## HOMILY FOR THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD

Sunday, 17 January 2021

- Fr. Jim Fredericks

Part One: the readings for the day

Part Two: reflection on the readings

Part Three: guidelines for *lectio divina*

### PART ONE: READINGS FOR THE DAY

Lectionary: 65

#### **Reading I 1 Sm 3:3b-10, 19**

Samuel was sleeping in the temple of the LORD where the ark of God was.

The LORD called to Samuel, who answered, "Here I am."

Samuel ran to Eli and said, "Here I am. You called me."

"I did not call you," Eli said. "Go back to sleep."

So he went back to sleep.

Again the LORD called Samuel, who rose and went to Eli.

"Here I am," he said. "You called me."

But Eli answered, "I did not call you, my son. Go back to sleep."

At that time Samuel was not familiar with the LORD,

because the LORD had not revealed anything to him as yet.

The LORD called Samuel again, for the third time.

Getting up and going to Eli, he said, "Here I am. You called me."

Then Eli understood that the LORD was calling the youth.

So he said to Samuel, "Go to sleep, and if you are called, reply, Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening."

When Samuel went to sleep in his place, the LORD came and revealed his presence,

calling out as before, "Samuel, Samuel!"

Samuel answered, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

Samuel grew up, and the LORD was with him,

not permitting any word of his to be without effect.

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

R. (8a and 9a) Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will.

I have waited, waited for the LORD,

and he stooped toward me and heard my cry.

And he put a new song into my mouth,

a hymn to our God.

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

Sacrifice or offering you wished not,  
but ears open to obedience you gave me.  
Holocausts or sin-offerings you sought not;  
then said I, "Behold I come."  
R. Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will.  
"In the written scroll it is prescribed for me,  
to do your will, O my God, is my delight,  
and your law is within my heart!"  
R. Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will.  
I announced your justice in the vast assembly;  
I did not restrain my lips, as you, O LORD, know.  
R. Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will.

**Reading II 1 Cor 6:13c-15a, 17-20**

Brothers and sisters:  
The body is not for immorality, but for the Lord,  
and the Lord is for the body;  
God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power.  
Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?  
But whoever is joined to the Lord becomes one Spirit with him.  
Avoid immorality.  
Every other sin a person commits is outside the body,  
but the immoral person sins against his own body.  
Do you not know that your body  
is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you,  
whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?  
For you have been purchased at a price.  
Therefore glorify God in your body.

**Alleluia Jn 1:41, 17b**

R. Alleluia, alleluia.  
We have found the Messiah:  
Jesus Christ, who brings us truth and grace.  
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

**Gospel Jn 1:35-42**

John was standing with two of his disciples,  
and as he watched Jesus walk by, he said,  
"Behold, the Lamb of God."  
The two disciples heard what he said and followed Jesus.  
Jesus turned and saw them following him and said to them,  
"What are you looking for?"

They said to him, “Rabbi” — which translated means Teacher —,  
“where are you staying?”

He said to them, “Come, and you will see.”

So they went and saw where Jesus was staying,  
and they stayed with him that day.

It was about four in the afternoon.

Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter,  
was one of the two who heard John and followed Jesus.

He first found his own brother Simon and told him,  
“We have found the Messiah” — which is translated Christ —.

Then he brought him to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said,

“You are Simon the son of John;  
you will be called Cephas” — which is translated Peter.

## **PART TWO: A HOMILY**

I talk to people – wonderful people – all the time who tell me that they are searching for God. I don’t mean to suggest for a moment that there is anything wrong with this quest. In fact, I believe the search for God is the most humanizing thing we can do. Moreover, for me to be able to play some small part in your search for God is, without doubt, the greatest grace I have ever received.

But can we pause the search for a moment? Let’s pause the search for God just long enough to realize something equally important:

God is in search of us. In fact, he’s knocking on our front door and calling out to us.

Pausing the search and coming to this realization can have a significant impact on our lives. Realizing that God is in search of us can be life-disrupting. Perhaps this is why we sometimes prefer to search for God rather than to recognize that God has found us.

Take the Prophet Samuel for example.

In the first reading, we meet Samuel as a young fellow, minding his own business, working for Eli, a priest charged with guarding the Ark of the Covenant in Shiloh. I suppose Samuel was a priest-in-training.

Samuel was sleeping in the temple of the LORD  
where the ark of God was.

Don’t be misled by the reference to the “temple.” This story takes place before King Solomon built the temple, and even before King David, his father, established Jerusalem as his capital. In

the time of Samuel, the Ark of the Covenant was far from Jerusalem, housed in a tent, as it always had been when the Hebrew people were wandering in the desert with Moses.

And the Lord God came in search of Samuel.

The LORD called to Samuel, who answered, "Here I am."

Samuel, like a good trainee, runs to Eli, thinking that it is his boss who wants him, and says,

"Here I am. You called me."

And Eli, the priest, tells him to "Go back to sleep."

Again the LORD called Samuel, who rose and went to Eli.

"Here I am," he said. "You called me."

But Eli answered, "I did not call you, my son. Go back to sleep."

The third time that the Lord comes in search of Samuel, of course, is the charm. Eli sees that something unusual is going on.

... Eli understood that the LORD was calling the youth.

So he said to Samuel, "Go to sleep, and if you are called, reply, Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening."

The story of the call of Samuel ends with words worthy of our reflection:

Samuel grew up, and the LORD was with him,  
not permitting any word of his to be without effect.

Samuel is the first of a long line of Hebrew Prophets. The lad will eventually go on to anoint Saul the first king of Israel. Through him, God will find David, the shepherd boy in the hills around Bethlehem. Samuel will go on to do a lot of other stuff in service to God as well.

The Prophet Samuel is by no means the only figure in the Old Testament to say "here I am" when God finds him. In fact, this story is an example of a pattern found widely in the Hebrew Scriptures.

The most famous case is that of Abraham. With no explanation or context, God comes in search of Abraham (Genesis 22:1), saying,

"Abraham, Abraham!"

And Abraham replies,

“Here I am!”

In this case, God was asking Abraham to put everything on the line:

“Take your son, your only son Isaac whom you love, and slay him unto me as a burnt offering.”

The call of Moses is another example. When Moses saw a bush burning mysteriously in the desert near Mount Sinai, God calls out to him saying,

“Moses! Moses!”

And Moses (who by the way was wanted for murder back in Egypt) responds to the call of God, saying,

“Here I am.”

I don’t have to tell you about Moses. He went back to Egypt and told old Pharaoh to let God’s people go.

I could give more examples from the Hebrew scriptures, but I hope you get the idea. Abraham, Moses and all the others are going about their business, not bothering anyone, when God comes in search of them. And in every case, disruption is the result.

“Here I am” – this Biblical phrase has come into the sacramental rites of the Church as well. In the rite of ordination, the people gather with their bishop around those who are to be ordained priests. The candidates are called by name, just like in the stories of Samuel, Abraham and Moses. And, in keeping with the Biblical pattern, each candidate answers (in Latin),

*Ad sum* (Here I am).

Why all this fuss over the words, “here I am”?

I recommend that you reflect on all these “here I am” passages in light of the story of Adam and Eve. The very first example we have in the entire Bible of God coming in search of a human being is found in the story of the Garden of Eden.

In this marvelous story, Adam and Eve eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

And when they heard God walking in the garden in the cool of the day,

The man and his wife hid themselves from the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

Then something remarkable happens,

The Lord God then called to the man and asked him, "Where are you?"

And Adam answered his Creator, saying,

"I heard you in the garden; but I was afraid, because I was naked, so I hid."

We have been hiding from God ever since.

Rest assured, we are all experts at hiding from God. I don't mean any offence to you, but I must say that even those of us who are sincerely searching for God are experts at hiding from God. All of us are now living "east of Eden." Hiding from God has become a part of the human condition.

But the fact that we hide from God is not my point. Neither is my point the (undeniable) fact that we are in search of God. My point is that, just as God went in search of Adam and Eve in the Garden when His two creatures had hidden themselves from him out of guilt, God continues to come in search of us.

I also think we should keep in mind the fact that, when God sets out in search of someone, He always finds the one He is looking for.

God is calling out to us as He called out to Adam and Eve,

"Where are you?"

And the answer, alas, is that we are hiding from God. We hide among all the trivial pursuits that intoxicate us so. We hide from God within the illusions we have created about ourselves and about our enemies.

I say again: Adam was not able to answer God's question. He could only stammer an excuse. It is Abraham who is the first to answer God's question to Adam. Abraham is the first to say,

"Here I am."

This is the only true answer to God's question. With Abraham, Moses and, of course, with Samuel, we must learn to say what Adam was unable to say,

“Here I am. Here I am in my actual life. I am not as good as I want to think I am. I am not as bad as others might think. I am not a god. I just can’t stop thinking that I need to be a god. I am your creature. Yes – here I am.”

Are you in search of God? I hope you are, for this is good. But don’t be afraid to pause the search. It’s the “cool of the day, and God has come walking in the garden.” And God is calling out to us, saying,

“Where are you?”

Be careful how you answer this question. There is only one right answer. And in giving this one right answer, life will certainly be disrupted.

### **PART THREE: INSTRUCTIONS FOR *LECTIO DIVINA***

I suggest that you use the readings and my reflections as an opportunity for practicing *lectio divina* (“divine reading”). This is an ancient spiritual practice that started with the great monks in the Syrian and Egyptian desert back in the early days of the Church. It is really quite simple.

Step one: calm your mind (my Buddhist friends describe the mind as “a mango-tree full of chattering monkeys”). I find that paying attention to your breath for a few minutes is a practical and effective way to do this.

Step two: read the readings slowly and attentively. Savor the words as if you were tasting a great Pinot Noir. Don’t rush. You are not looking for information or instructions. You are making friends with a sacred text which will bless you abundantly if you will only open your heart to it and let it speak to you. In *lectio divina*, we are not actually “reading” the Bible. Rather, we are “listening” to the Bible as the sacred words speak to us.

Step three: repeat step two.

Step four: read the reflection on the readings.

Step five: Ask yourself a few questions:

- What particular words in the readings call out to me most forcefully?
- What is going on in my life such that these words call to me so forthrightly?
- How am I being asked to change, both interiorly and exteriorly?
- In light of this *lectio divina*, how am I being invited to be of service to the world today?