

HEARING AND RECOGNIZING THE LORD

(A Reflection for the 2nd Sunday, Ord Yr B, 17.01.21 by Fr Galadima Bitrus, OSA)

With the celebration of the Baptism of the Lord last Sunday, the Christmas season ended and we began the liturgical ordinary year cycle B. The ordinary liturgical year consists of 33 to 34 weeks, divided into two: Ordinary Time I, which begins from the Monday after 6th January to the beginning of Lent, and Ordinary Time II, which begins from the Monday after Pentecost Sunday and ends on the Saturday before the 1st Sunday of Advent.

During ordinary time, we have the opportunity to deepen our understanding of the mystery of Christ, focusing our attention each Sunday on a particular aspect of the message of Christ and the ways in which such message must shape our everyday life.

In this 2nd Sunday, the readings focus our attention on hearing and recognizing the Lord when he speaks to us or when we see him, so as to grow in our understanding of his will and purpose for us.

In the 1st Reading (from 1 Samuel 3:3-10.19), we read the account of the call of the young Samuel, who was in the service of the Lord under Eli and will become a judge and a prophet of the Lord. In a time when the word of the Lord was rare and prophecy was not widespread, the Lord calls Samuel at night, as he was asleep besides the Ark of God while the lamp of God still burnt.

Through the help of the old priest of Shiloh, Eli, Samuel was guided to listen attentively to the Lord and to receive his word; being encouraged by Eli, he was able to deliver accurately the Lord's message without fear or favour, even when it was an unpleasant message and the person concerned was his own tutor and benefactor.

Now, the night is a frequent time for revelations in the Hebrew Bible (see Genesis 26:24; 46:2; 2 Samuel 7:4; 1 Kings 3:4-15; 2 Chronicles 1:7-13; 7:12; Daniel 7:2; Psalm 17:3; Acts 23:11; 16:9; 18:9). Sleeping in the sanctuary besides the Ark reflects an ancient Near Eastern practice whereby a person seeking guidance would sleep in the sanctuary or a holy place, hoping to receive a divine visitation in a dream.

The fact that Samuel was inexperienced and the word of God was rare and prophecy not widespread, explains why they did not understand at once that it was the Lord calling until the third time, which is a number of divine completeness and perfection in the Bible, especially prominent in the New Testament (see Luke 22:54-62; 24:7; John 21:15-17).

The call of Samuel, therefore, helps us to understand that although the Lord speaks to us individually and personally, we may just need time and others around us to make fuller sense of the Lord's voice and call. It also encourages us to learn to honour our duty to speak and bear witness to the truth that the Lord has revealed to us. For truth to be truth, it must be as blind as madam justice, equally served to all, irrespective of persons and affiliations.

In the 2nd Reading (1 Corinthians 6:13-20), the apostle Paul makes the case for bodily purity. Corinth was a prominent trade centre and an important place of Greco-Roman civilization, characterized by lots of fun seeking, such that among its temples were some dedicated to Aphrodite, the goddess of love. Paul had to redefine the concept of love for the Greco-Roman converts to Christianity, as we can find in the famous love poem in 1 Corinthians 13:4-13. He

also had to face squarely the question of sexual immorality that was central to the Corinthian love culture, arguing as we read in today's 2nd reading, that our body is not meant for sexual immorality (Greek *porneia*). He puts forward three arguments to drive home this teaching:

+ Our body is united with Christ as a man becomes one with his wife and vice versa. Sexual intercourse unites the two partners in a real way and makes them one (vv. 13-17).

+ While other sins are committed outside the body, fornication is all the more grievous because it is sin against one's own body (v. 18).

+ Our body is also not ours but the temple of the Holy Spirit, bought or ransomed through Christ's crucifixion, hence, the need to use it to glorify God rather than abusing it for carnal gratification (vv. 19-20).

Thus, the 2nd Reading underlines our call to holiness, especially as it pertains to our sexual conduct.

In the Gospel (John 1:35-42), we read of the call of Jesus' first disciples. Andrew was among the two disciples of John who were directed to Jesus by their own teacher John when he pointed at Jesus as "the lamb of God" (1:35-36), a possible allusion to the Passover lamb associated with redemption. In John 1:29, Jesus as lamb of God is qualified as "the one who takes away the sin of the world." The two disciples of John who asked Jesus where he lived were invited to "come and see" and they "came and saw" where he was staying and remained with him (1:37-39) and even invited others to come and see the awaited Messiah (1:40-42).

Clearly, therefore, the other is significant in our journey to finding God and finding his purpose for us. Just as Eli was instrumental for Samuel in making sense of God's voice and call in the 1st reading, in the Gospel John is instrumental for Andrew and the other disciple in their finding Jesus, and Andrew is in turn instrumental for Peter finding Jesus and therefore his own vocation.

May we recognize in each other the path to God and his voice calling us by name and entrusting us with our own responsibility towards making our world a temple where God is acknowledged, worshipped and adored!