

HOMILY, SECOND SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME "B"

Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul

January 14 - 15, 2012

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In the United States, a typical exchange between two persons meeting for the first time includes one person asking the other, "What do you do for a living?" Frequently, we define who we are by what we do. This approach falls hard upon the ears of those many men and women who are presently out of work. Meanwhile, the Gospel calls us to a different way of coming to know ourselves and our value as human beings. We can only hope that our elected representatives learn this lesson.

A priest classmate of mine from Baton Rouge once told me that if a young man brings home his girlfriend to meet the family for the first time, she is likely to be asked three questions: "Who's your people, are you Catholic and can you make a good rue!" ... and not necessarily in that order.

This different approach is demonstrated in today's Gospel of Mark. Two of the first disciples had heard John the Baptist point out Jesus of Nazareth as the Lamb of God, the one expected. Full of curiosity, they tentatively approached Jesus asking, "Rabbi, where do you stay". This introduction, rather than focusing on Jesus' work focuses instead on relationships because in asking him where he stayed, the disciples were asking about Jesus connections, his relationships with people who provided housing for him and friendship. Jesus response is typical of the day. Instead of giving a straight forward answer, he invites these two searching disciples into his life and tells them, "come and see".

The first reading recounting the call of Samuel illustrates another person's search. Fortunately, for the young Samuel, he had the wise Eli to advise him so that he could truly be present to the Lord's call.

The message of the Scriptures this weekend, the second Sunday of Ordinary Time, sets a tone for our discipleship for the remaining thirty-two weeks of the liturgical year and Ordinary Time. These readings identify two important qualities of our following Jesus: listening and responding. They sound deceptively simple yet their challenge is profound. Maybe another way of saying them is listening and seeking.

Listening is different than merely hearing. The family pet hears the same things we hear, but listening is an intentional act. Listening is a decision we make. Listening reflects the importance of the second quality of discipleship which is our desire to seek God. When we listen to someone, we want to know about the other person, to enter into that person's life in some way. It is not just casual listening either. This kind of listening gets at the heart of our most basic desire for love, for life, for God.

One of the stories of the ancient Desert Fathers, the first Christian monks, tells of a young man who seeks the desert way of solitude, and finding one of the older, experienced monks of the desert, begs him to teach him the ways of solitude and prayer. At first, the old abba puts the young man off. Finally, after the young man persists in pestering him, the old monk gives in, and he tells the young man to follow him reflecting Christ's own words in today's Gospel to "come and see". Taking the young man to a pool of water, he instructs the younger one to kneel down next to the pool. Doing so, the newcomer to the desert is very excited thinking that this will lead to some mystical experience that will reveal great truths. The old monk tells him to get closer so that the younger man can actually see his face reflected in the water. Suddenly, the old man, with his old, knarly hand, shoves the younger man under the water and holds him there! Bubbles are coming up from beneath the water as the young man struggles to come up for air. Finally, he burst out of the water, sputtering and coughing, and, when he can catch his

breath, he asks the old man, “Why did you do that?” the old monk looked intently as the stunned neophyte and quietly said to him, “When you want to pray as much as you just wanted to breathe, come back to me.”

Our desire for God, for prayer, for life, for love is related to our desire to listen. The liturgy today challenges us to examine the quality of our listening as well as our desire for God.

We are called to listen to God, to one another, and, indeed, to our own hearts with intention. We can practice this in the patterns of our daily living in brief but important ways....simply reading the Gospel for the day, or simply a paragraph of one of the Gospels each morning planting the seed of God’s Word in our hearts; driving to and from our various destinations not only in silence, but intentionally inviting the Lord’s presence with us; taking a brief walk around the block intentionally for the purpose of listening to God. Reading the Psalms is frequently a help to opening our hearts to God.

Our listening turns up the flame of our desire to seek God actively. Certainly, prayer, brief and regular, can increase our desire. The parish provides a number of spiritual and practical opportunities to exercise our desire for God as we reach out to one another. We must not leave the tasks up to someone else. Participating in St. Vincent de Paul work, volunteering for the Cathedral Kitchen or various projects of the parish, simply making a daily phone call to an elderly neighbor, writing a note to a sick parishioner and praying throughout the week for those mentioned each weekend in the prayers of the faithful are all simple ways of fanning the flame of our desire for God. These are all ways in which we accept the Lord’s invitation to “come and see” where he stays.

Eventually, we begin to realize that Jesus Christ stays in our midst. He resides in the sacraments, in the parish community of faith, in the world especially

among the poor and outcast, in the network of relationships of which we are a part through Baptism, and certainly within our hearts.

In this hour, we are invited to listen to God and to one another as we gather in prayer. In this hour, we come to know how much God desires us to “come and see” that He loves us so much as to send his Son to be with us in his body and blood. In this hour, we can hear his voice and come to know the Savior of the world, the Redeemer of all and the love of our lives. In this hour, gathered around the Table of Word and Sacrament, we follow Christ to the banquet of life, and then into the world where we live and where he lives among us. He helps us to listen to his voice, and in listening to him, we listen to the voices of those in need, the innocent whose joy is unbounded and to those who keep the faith and inspire us.

Our presence here indicates our desire to seek the Lord. He is responding to us even now saying to us, “Come and see”.