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Winter 2009

Celebrant's Guide and Commentary and Reflections for Sundays and Festivals (January 18, 2009)

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Celebrant's Guide and Commentary and Reflections for Sundays and Festivals

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SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
January 18, 2009

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INTRODUCTION TO THE MASS

The gifts of God in Baptism provide the foundation for a mission of service in the Church and for the world around us. Throughout our lives we continue to be learners or disciples of Jesus, so as we listen for guidance to fulfill our place in the divine plan.

INVITATION TO REPENTANCE

Failure to respond fully to our vocation must be acknowledged so that we become receptive to the Lamb of God who takes away our sins.

Lord Jesus, you came to gather the nations into the Father's Kingdom.
Lord, have mercy. You come in Word and Sacrament to heal and strengthen us. Christ, have mercy. You will come in glory with salvation for your people. Lord, have mercy.

HEADINGS FOR THE READINGS

First Reading (1 Samuel 3:3-10, 19). Belonging to a community of faith is essential for a person to mature in the service of God. The boy Samuel learned how to respond to God's Word in a prayerful way from Eli the old priest.

Second Reading (1 Corinthians 6:13-20). Soul and body are a unity prepared for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. In gratitude, each person acknowledges that everyone is or should be a temple or sanctuary dedicated to the Blessed Trinity.

Gospel (John 1:35-42). The testimony of John the Baptist to Jesus as the Lamb of God inspires disciples to seek to Jesus. Does our witness of faith point the way to the Lord?

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

President: God provides for the progress of all people toward his kingdom. We acknowledge our need for divine gifts to be faithful servants.

Reader(s):

May the teachings of Pope Benedict and all bishops guide those searching for God's call to faith and loving service of neighbor.

In troubled areas of the world, may the local church be an instrument of reconciliation and peace.

May parents and educators offer careful guidance to the young as they search for their calling in life.

May the sick and injured find healing and comfort through the generous care of others.

May all the faithful departed, especially our loved ones, rejoice in the fullness of life in God's presence.

President: Heavenly Father, enrich in faith all who contemplate your Word. May all who worship this Sunday become listeners to your Son's message of healing and hope. This we ask through the same Christ our Lord.

INTRODUCTION TO THE LORD'S PRAYER

United with Christ, we ask for your guidance to seek your kingdom as the goal of life.

INVITATION TO THE SIGN OF PEACE

Having listened to the Lamb of God, we become instruments of his reconciliation and peace. Share these gifts that flow from the cross and the Eucharist.

COMMUNION REFLECTION

The Lamb of God offers forgiveness and reconciliation so that we may approach the heavenly Father. May we, like Samuel and the disciples, learn to listen to God's Word and share the blessings of the Word-made-flesh with those whose lives we touch.

FINAL BLESSING

May the Lamb of God draw us into the company of his saints. May the Word of God enrich our daily lives.

COMMENTARY

(First Reading (1 Samuel 3:3-10)). The story of Samuel begins with a barren woman's anguished prayer and a promise to God. If she were blessed with a son, he would be dedicated in a special way to the Lord! Eli the priest was suspicious of her conduct in the Tent of Shiloh, but Hanna convinced him that she was sincere, so he blessed her: "Go in peace; the God of Israel will grant the petition you have made to him" (1 Samuel 1:17). The mother's commitment of faith would be rewarded with five more children. What do we learn from her promise and the gift of Samuel to God from childhood? Unlike the child oblates of the early Middle Ages, Samuel's service did not involve a lifetime commitment to celibacy. He raised a family but his sons did not follow his good example (1 Samuel 8:1-3). From the childhood experience proclaimed in this reading the faithful learn how to respond to God's Word: "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening!" (1 Samuel 3:9). The challenge of parenting continues! How can good parents and grandparents share the integrity of their faith with the younger generation?

Responsorial Psalm 40:2-10. The words and actions of community worship are significant to the degree that they flow from a deep personal commitment to God's will in the fabric of daily life. Jesus provided the example and foundation for the authenticity of sacrificial worship (Hebrew 10:5-10).

Second Reading (1 Corinthians 6:13-20). The Greek culture, like our own, included several attitudes toward the body and the soul-body relationship. Athletes and artists celebrated the ideals of bodily

proWess; others proclaimed that the immortal soul was very limited by its temporary residence in a mortal frame that would be shed at death. St. Paul had introduced Athenians to the creative power of God in the future resurrection of the body but many ridiculed him (Acts 17:22-31). However, the faith of the Pharisees was grounded on the unity of body-and-soul and on the goodness of creation (Genesis 1:31). Moreover, Christians believe that Jesus is the best sign, the first-fruit, of the general resurrection. "God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power" (1 Corinthians 6:14). The body is the sanctuary in which the Holy Spirit dwells. *Noblesse oblige!* If only we would stop to think of these truths and of the sacrifice of Christ for the forgiveness of sin!

Gospel (John 1:35-42). John the Baptist refused to take any exalted titles as he proclaimed the message of Isaiah: "Make straight the way of the Lord!" (Isaiah 40:3 in John 1:19-23). He pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God whose mission was to bring forgiveness of sins and to show the way to serve the Heavenly Father. The witness of John led two of his disciples to encounter Jesus and remain with him. Their designation of respect for a teacher (Rabbi) was elevated to that of "Messiah," the Anointed One of God. When Nathanael would proclaim: "Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel (John 1:49). In that time, the term "Rabbi" was used only in direct address; only after A.D. 70 would Jews speak of "the Rabbi" as a title. In the Gospel of John, the titles "Son of God and King of Israel" would be appreciated ever more deeply as the disciples matured in faith. When God gave a new name to Abram, Jacob and others it implied a new mission in his service. So Simon would learn the implications of the Aramaic *Kepha*, translated into Peter, the masculine form of the Greek word for "rock." So he would speak for the Twelve in answer to the poignant question from Jesus: "Do you also wish to go away?... Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:67-68)

REFLECTION

What is the essence of the human vocation? The exalted dignity of each person, created in the divine image, should be the basis for evaluating the meaning of life. Would that this truth were shared by all! No knowledge is worth more to people than this insight into our profound relationship with God. Grasping that we share a common destiny, we should be motivated to treat each other with the profound respect that is the foundation for justice and peace.

The very term "vocation" expresses the concept of "calling", which implies that God draws each person into the divine plan. This Word of God may be misinterpreted or stifled at times, but unless a person obstinately blocks out the divine nudgings or whispers, the persistence of God's voice will evoke a response. We "pray for vocations", not only to the priesthood and religious life, but more fundamentally that all people develop their capacity to hear God's Word, making it the basis for their daily lives.

The books of Samuel begin with the narrative of this prophet's marvelous birth and dedication from childhood to God's service at the Tent of Meeting (Tabernacle) in Shiloh. The Ark containing the tables of the Decalogue was housed in this Tent; as footstool of the invisible God and receptacle for the Ten Words, the Ark provided a focus for Israel's faith that God indeed dwelt in her midst. The boy Samuel gradually learned that *God*, not the elderly priest Eli, was calling him. The response was an indication of his readiness to serve: "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening".

The Fourth Gospel begins with a profound reflection on the hymn of creation (Genesis 1:1-2:4); it shows that the Word of God desires to convey life and light to every human being. To achieve this goal in the manner most consistent with the social dimension of our human nature, this Word and life-giving Wisdom tabernacled in Israel (see Sirs 24:7-12). Then, in the fullness of time, "the Word became flesh and pitched

his tent among us..." (John 1:14). Jesus offered a new opportunity for people to experience the divine presence and to hear God's Word. This was coupled with his role as the Lamb of God, offering himself to take away the sins of the world (John 1:29, 36).

The Baptist knew that, like every human educator, he had to point beyond himself to the greater Teacher. His role was to stand and listen for the Bridegroom, rejoicing greatly at the sound of his voice (John 1:38). Were they looking for happiness, success, a better life? They sensed that his very person embodied all that human beings might be searching for. They wanted to have access to *him* rather than tangible goods or theoretical answers to life's questions. "Where are you staying?" Jesus did not provide an address but made an invitation. "Come and you will see!" Initially they called Jesus by the honorable title "Rabbi" (my great one), designating him as Teacher. After Andrew has spent some time with Jesus he told his brother Simon: "We have found the Messiah," which in Greek is rendered "the Christ" (Anointed One).

To develop the capacity for listening to God's Word in the varying circumstances of human life, we need to cultivate the habit of quiet, attentive prayer. Like Samuel and the disciples we must seek the dwelling-place of the Lord. Of course, we may find this quiet in our home, perhaps even on the way to work... However, the Church offers a unique privilege for experiencing the Word, both to challenge and to heal us, in the Eucharist, the other sacraments and prayers of the Liturgy. In the chapel of the seminary where I studied, the altar cloth bore an inscription: "Magister adest et vocat te". The English translation is "The Teacher is here and calls you" (John 11:28). The Eucharistic presence of Christ is the precious gift that marvelously continues the indwelling of God that Israel and the disciples of Jesus experienced. May Catholics of our generation develop the listening attitude that characterized Samuel and those who heard John the Baptist describe Jesus!