

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Does the thought ever go through your mind that God might be too big or too busy to have time to be concerned about you? Do you ever think that God would not possibly have something to say to you as one insignificant little individual in this big world of ours? Some of us may be able to answer those questions by relating a story where we have known that God has spoken directly to us. Others may say that they believe that God is interested in every one of us because God can only be like that.

Our Scriptures are full of stories where God relates to individual people. Our reading today from the First Book of Samuel is one of those stories. Samuel was only a boy learning how to listen to God and be God's servant when God called him in the middle of the night. He thought that it was the holy man Eli who had called him. He couldn't imagine that it was God speaking to him. After the third time that he ran to Eli, the old man was able to tell him that it was God who had called him. If he called again, Samuel was to say, "Speak Lord, your servant is listening". You and I need holy people like Eli to help us to know when God is speaking to us and to know how we might respond.

The response that Samuel made to God is the kind of response that we would want to make every day. We want to be open to God's Word, no matter how that Word comes to us. I'm sure that we would love to be described as Samuel was described. "Samuel grew up and the Lord was with him and let no word of his fall to the ground." Oh, that we could catch every word that God speaks to us.

Whenever I listen to the Gospel reading chosen or each Sunday I try to watch out for things might surprise me. And there are a few in today's reading. For a start we are listening to the gospel according to John, not Mark as I would have expected. We begin to listen to Mark from next week. What we heard is described as day three of the ministry of Jesus in John's Gospel. John the Baptist has a role to play in each of the first three days of Jesus' ministry. Today he points

Jesus out to two of his own disciples. One is Andrew. The other is unnamed.

There is a beautiful sense of movement in this gospel. The disciples are described as standing with John. Jesus walks past them. The two disciples begin to follow Jesus when John describes him as the Lamb of God. Jesus stops and turns around. He asks them, “What do you want?” or what are you looking for. Their answer is disappointing. Despite what John had revealed to them they call Jesus “Rabbi”, which we are told means “teacher”. What surprised me was that the gospel’s author translates the word “Rabbi” for us to make his point that those first disciples should have seen more in Jesus than just a teacher. They ask Jesus where he lives, expecting that he is going to be like any other teacher and have a base from which to teach.

Jesus makes that beautiful invitation for them to “Come and See”. It is an invitation that he makes to all of us who are his followers. He wants us to come close to him and to see what he offers to us. He wants us to be at home in his company and to learn how to live from him.

The few hours that Andrew spent with Jesus were enough for him to seek out his brother Simon and to tell him “We have found the Messiah.” This was the next thing that I had not noticed before. The commentator that I read said that Andrew was telling a lie here. Andrew had not found Jesus. Jesus had found him. It may be a small point, but I think that we can all learn something from this. In our relationship with Jesus it is always Jesus who takes the initiative. We are followers of Jesus only because he has called us to follow him. Our love for Jesus is always a response to the love that Jesus has for us. Whatever we give to Jesus has already been given to us in abundance.

Twice more in today’s gospel the narrator translates words for us. He tells us that “the Messiah” means the Christ. He seems to be making the point that Andrew still has a lot to learn about Jesus. Even though he calls him the Messiah, it is his image of what the Messiah should

be that he knows at this moment. It will be a long time before the disciples of Jesus know what kind of Messiah he really is. Most of us are very good at creating God in our own image. We find it very difficult to imagine that God can do anything more than we do. We think that God can only forgive as much as we can forgive. We think of God's mercy as being not much more than the mercy we show to others. We dare not imagine the kind of love that Jesus has for us.

When Jesus meets Simon, we are told that he looked hard at him and said, "You are Simon son of John; you are to be called Cephas." Jesus knew who Simon was, where he had come from. But he knew too where he was going, who he would become. At the initiative of Jesus, he was going to become Cephas the rock upon whose faith the Church was going to be built.

Are we free enough to allow Jesus to look hard at us? Can we risk allowing Jesus to know us so well that he can speak to us not just about who we have been and who we are now, but also to speak to us about who we can become when we let Jesus take the initiative in our lives? It is a risk worth taking. Jesus can only look hard at us and speak to us with great love.