

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dear Parishioners and Friends,

Central to the scripture readings we hear this weekend is the notion that God calls certain people to serve him in a particular way. In the OT reading we learn about Samuel and the way the voice of God was addressed to him. We frequently use the word 'vocation' and we understand it to be a specific invitation to ministry in the Church or to a life totally dedicated to God. For a long time vocation was viewed as a calling to the priesthood or the religious life, and it always involved a life-time commitment and dedication. Up until quite recently there were large numbers of women who entered convents or boys who went to the seminary for fear of losing their souls. For far too many the idea of a vocation was tied up with fear of damnation. A refusal to answer a call roused up feelings of guilt. One could not turn God down! Vocations born of fear or decisions taken through compulsion made many priests and nuns very unhappy, sometimes with sad consequences for themselves and those they served.

Today's story of the encounter of Jesus with the young disciples of John on the banks of the Jordan casts the notions of 'vocation/calling' in a very different light. In the version given by the evangelist John, Jesus did not invite. He responded to a request which came from the young men who recognised something unique in him and had grounds for believing that he might be the Messiah. John had described the stranger from Galilee who made his appearance among them as "Lamb of God". The young men asked if they could see where he lived and spontaneously followed him. It was completely voluntary, there was no force moral or physical. And yet Jesus did expect that once that decision to follow him had been taken his disciples would stick with it. Once they had put their shoulders to the plough there was no turning back. And Jesus never denied that following him was an easy option. The disciple must take up his cross daily. He must also be prepared to deny many of life's natural and greatest pleasures – house, family, prospects – and yet continue. The rewards promised can be returned one hundredfold and the ultimate prize is everlasting life in the world to come.

It is important to remember that all of us are called by the Lord even if we do not all hear, like Samuel, that soft voice addressed to us personally. What precisely we are called to is often indicated by the natural talents and abilities we have and by what it is in life gives us joy. Our God wants us to be fully human and responsive to the call to happiness issued at our creation. Jesus, God's incarnate son who rejoiced in his own humanity, also calls. And a 'vocation' to follow Jesus in a life of total dedication to him and his mystical body, the Church, is also issued in the hope that it will lead to the happiness of those who respond. Those young men who asked to see where he lived ended up remaining with him, teaching about him and celebrating his memory until their own lives reached their end.

Father Patrick