

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As we look about us, we realize that we are now back in the liturgical season of Ordinary Time, or *Tempus per annum*, in Latin. Last Sunday, as volunteers gathered to disassemble the beautiful and festive Christmas decorations and Nativity creche, one could visibly see the starkness of the sanctuary unfold. There were comments of sadness that all the joy and excitement our holiday conjures up had to be put away for another year. One child and one senior made a similar comment: “Wouldn’t it be great to keep the decorations up all year?” This is a perfectly understandable sentiment, one which many of us have felt at some time or another, especially as children. Yet, alas, we return to a more “routine” experience (if that is even possible these days). The Church affords this time for reflection and meditation in preparation of the great seasons of Advent and Lent. We reflect upon the divine mystery within the context of salvation history. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops states,

“Christmas Time and Easter Time highlight the central mysteries of the Paschal Mystery, namely, the incarnation, death on the cross, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, and the Descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The Sundays and weeks of Ordinary Time, on the other hand, take us through the life of Christ. This is the time of conversion. This is living the life of Christ.

Ordinary Time is a time for growth and maturation, a time in which the mystery of Christ is called to penetrate ever more deeply into history until all things are finally caught up in Christ. The goal, toward which all of history is directed, is represented by the final Sunday in Ordinary Time, the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe.”

Particularly as we enter this time of reflection and contemplation, the readings today are perfectly situated as we consider our call to discipleship. In the first reading, we see the stirring account of God calling young Samuel to service. In understanding the significance of the call of Samuel, *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* offers this scholarly insight: “The skillfully told story portrays the classic situation of the oppressed woman. Barren and childless, she is scorned by her rival within the household. No attentive listener could miss the echoes of Sarah’s situation (cf. Gen 16: 1-5). The overall impact of the story is clear: Samuel is the Lord’s gift to an oppressed woman in Israel. His life is God’s gift; in return, his life is given to God. To an oppressed Israel under Philistine threat, his can only be a figure heavy with significance for the future.”

At first, Samuel is confused by the summons of God and believes it is Eli who is speaking to him. It is telling that amidst this confusion Samuel still has a readiness and heart for service. He gets up immediately and says to Eli, “Here I am. You called me.” This disposition of generosity is foundational to Samuel’s ability to fulfill his prophetic mission. During this season of Ordinary Time, may we echo in our own hearts as disciples of Jesus, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”

In the summons of the first disciples, John gives several names in which Jesus is identified: “Lamb of God”; “Rabbi”; and “Messiah.” Immediately upon meeting Jesus, the disciples knew he was the Son of God. As lamb, Jesus is the one who lays down his life in perfect obedience and service to His Father’s will. As rabbi and teacher, Jesus leads, through his public ministry, others to the Father. Jesus posits this question to his first disciples and which he poses to each of us as a response to our Baptismal call: “What are you looking for?” They seek knowledge of something beyond their everyday existence. They know there is more to life and they find this “new life”, this transformative

grace, in their divine encounter with Jesus. They inquire of him: “Rabbi, where are you staying?” To which Jesus responds, “Come, and you will see.” These words of Jesus are echoed later when Saint Paul says, “Let me show you a more excellent way.”

Indeed, companionship with Jesus Christ is life changing. It changes our very identity; for some, like Peter, when Jesus changes the name inscribed upon his heart. As John tells us, it is inevitable that those who encounter Jesus Christ will bring others along. This is one of the blessings of discipleship and the call to evangelical witness. When others see that our lives are rooted in gratitude and thanksgiving for all the riches God has bestowed on us, these attractive qualities make others want to follow. When we live within a framework of service to others, being forgiving and understanding, trying to be light-hearted and joy-filled even in the most difficult circumstances, others will want to follow this example.

May we rekindle in our hearts the wonderment of the first companions of Jesus. Let us seek the things that are above. In our discernment and daily examination of conscience, let us listen to the words of Jesus spoken to us: “What are you looking for?” Let us take time for prayer and reflection on what motivates us to get up every day, what is it that brings us the greatest satisfaction and hope? May we spend time with the Lord, asking where he is staying and hearing his response, “Come, and you will see.”

I invite all our parish family to visit the new Adoration Chapel in the Candle Room. It is open daily from 9:00 am to 9:00 pm. It has been astounding to see how many people have visited the chapel thus far. This is a grace-filled treasure and it is wonderful to see how people have come to pray, to find comfort and consolation, simply to spend time with Jesus.

In extending my sincere thanks to all who worked so hard to make our Christmas Season truly joyful and beautiful, I was remiss in not specifically thanking our Altar Society, which takes such good care of our sacred linens. I most grateful to them!!!!

Fr. Tom