

2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

(Year B)

<i>First Reading</i>	1 Samuel 3:3B-10, 19
<i>Response</i>	Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will.
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalm 40:2, 4, 7-8, 8-9, 10
<i>Second Reading</i>	1 Corinthians 6:13C-15A, 17-20
<i>Gospel Acclamation</i>	We have found the Messiah: Jesus Christ, who brings us truth and grace.
<i>Gospel</i>	John 1:35-42

The Second Sunday in Ordinary Time for Year B is one of those occasions in which the Church substitutes a reading from John's Gospel for the ordinary reading from St. Mark. So in this case, we have a very important, very famous story of when Peter and Andrew first meet Jesus. It's in the Gospel of John 1:35-42. So let's read the Gospel together and then we will go back and try to unpack it, and look at it in light of the Old Testament, as well as the Responsorial Psalm. So in John 1:35-42 we read these words:

The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples; and he looked at Jesus as he walked, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!"
The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.
Jesus turned, and saw them following, and said to them, "What do you seek?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying; and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two who heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his brother Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him, and said, "So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter).¹

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible citations/quotations herein are from *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. New York: National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 1994.

Great episode here, lots we could say about it. I'll try to offer a few observations that I think are interesting, significant. First point about this story that's worth highlighting is the fact that John the Baptist had disciples. It's really important for us to remember. Sometimes we think about John as a prophet, out in the wilderness, you know, dressed in camel's hair, eating bugs for dinner, locust of course, the locust with honey. We kind of imagine him as a solitary figure, right, and certainly not one that we would necessarily want to spend any time with — although obviously the crowds went down to him to be baptized — but the reality was that John himself wasn't just a prophet, he also had a circle of followers. He had a circle of disciples. The Greek word for disciple is *mathētēs*, it's from the Greek word *manthanō*, that means, to learn. So it literally means a student, or a learner, and so these two disciples are followers of John, they are members of John's entourage, member of the circle of Jewish men. It's probably mostly men here who are living out with him in the desert, who would have listened to his teachings and accepted his baptism of repentance, obviously, but also heeded his words, listen to what he had to say to them.

In this case the two disciples aren't named yet, we're going to find out in a minute that one of them is Andrew, one of them is Simon Peter's brother; the other disciple who is unnamed, scholars have speculated as to his identity; many scholars actually think that this is the first reference to the author of the Gospel of John himself, to the beloved disciple St. John, who will frequently refer to himself in the third person, and will not always identify himself explicitly. Is there any way to prove that? No, we don't know for certain. One of these is an anonymous disciple, the other one is Andrew but, in either case, they point out the fact that John the Baptist had disciples. So in that context then, he's ministering and he sees Jesus and he tells his disciples behold, in other words, “Look...” (*ide* in Greek) “... Behold the Lamb of God!”

Okay, now for us as Catholics, we are so used to that language because we hear it at mass all the time during the communion rite, whenever the priest elevates the consecrated host, Body and Blood of Christ, and he says “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those who are called to the supper of the Lamb,” and we respond, and we go to receive communion. So we are used to the theological symbolism of Jesus as the Lamb, who offers his life in

sacrifice for the sins of the world. But put yourself in Andrew's position or the other disciple's position at this point. John points to this guy and says "look, there's a sheep," I mean effectively, that's what he's saying; that's a weird thing for John to say. It's another example of John the Baptist, himself, using the Jewish custom of riddles and parables in order to teach his disciples about mysteries. So a couple of chapters later in John's Gospel, he's going to say, if you want to know who the Messiah is, look for the bridegroom, because the one who has the bride is the bridegroom. Now that's not a very helpful way to point to Jesus because Jesus isn't married, he doesn't have a wife, right, so it's a riddle; the same thing is true here.

So John is alluding, in all likelihood here, to two images. First, Exodus 12, which is the Passover lamb, in the book of Exodus. Through the sacrifice of the Passover lamb the people of Israel were delivered from death and they were set free from slavery to Pharaoh in Egypt, and they begin their journey home to the promised land. And that sacrifice later became to be associated, in certain ways, with a kind of atonement for sin; it's the one that breaks the bondage of their idolatry and slavery to Pharaoh. Another image is from Isaiah 53, the suffering servant, who literally takes the sins of the people upon himself, and it says that he was led to the slaughter. He was silent like a lamb, led to the slaughter. I think in this case it's actually probably the more direct reference that John is identifying Jesus as the new Passover lamb, but also as the suffering servant, who's going to take away the sins of the people, because John's baptism was focused on a ministry of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, and here is the one who is the Savior, here's the one John's been pointing to; you know, someone greater than me is coming after me, he's going to be the Savior, the deliverer.

Alright, so what that means, basically, the two disciples here, Andrew and the other disciple, obey their master and they start to follow Jesus. Now in this case, John always in his Gospel operates on multiple levels of meaning, so when he says they follow Jesus, literally what it means is they walked behind Jesus. So Jesus is walking, they start to walk in his wake, but on a deeper level this is the beginning of them starting a new discipleship, no longer following John as their teacher and master, but following Jesus. So Jesus, in that sense, turns and sees them following him and he says "what are you seeking?" Or some translations say "What are you looking for?" The Greek there is very powerful, *ti zēteite*, it literally means what are you seeking/what are you searching after, right. Think about a heat-seeking

missile; it's a missile that searches after and follows the heat – it pursues it. That's the imagery Jesus is using here, what are you pursuing, right? And so they respond to him by saying "Rabbi...", which means teacher, it is a Hebrew word meaning teacher, "...where are you staying?" So they don't answer his question, notice that, they don't say what they're looking for. They respond to his question with a question, asking, well where are you staying? Which would literally mean where is your home? Where are you residing for the night? And so Jesus, then, in response to them, says a second word here, "come and see." It's an invitation to join him as disciples, to come and see where he's staying.

Now there are so many things going on in John's Gospel, the symbolism is always multilevel. But in this case, first, the literal, what's happening here? Well they're meeting Jesus. They ask him, they start to follow him, he turns and sees them, he says, "What are you looking for?" because obviously they're looking for him. They say, "Where are you staying tonight?" He says come and see; He invites them to be part of his circle, right, to be His disciple and to come and stay with him, wherever he's residing for the night. That's the literal sense. But on a deeper level, what's really going on here? Well Jesus isn't just asking them what are they looking for or why are you following me? He's trying to get them to say, "what are you really seeking", and we'll see the whole rest of the Gospel is going to be Him playing out that question. What are people really looking for — just like with the Samaritan woman in John 4, what is she really thirsting for? She's thirsting for the water of life. What are these disciples really seeking? Well obviously they're seeking the truth, but they are also seeking after the Messiah, seeking after the suffering servant that John has been preaching about, and now encountering Jesus, they have found Him.

The other level of meaning here that's interesting is that when the disciples say "where are you staying", the Greek word that they use there is *menó*, it literally means "to remain", and throughout the rest of John's Gospel that word is going to have great theological significance. To remain or to abide is going to be a key theme. Jesus will say things like, he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, or abides in me, and I abide in him. Or in John 17, Jesus will say, he'll pray that the disciples will remain in him as he remains in them, that they will still stay in him as he stays in them. So the imagery of remaining means staying in close proximity to Jesus, being in intimacy with Him as a disciple, as a believer. Interestingly, in John's Gospel we'll see some people will believe in Jesus but they won't remain with him. In other words, they'll accept the teachings about them but

they don't stay with him. Other people, like Jews, are going to stay with him, to remain with him, but they are not going to believe in him. So you have to both believe in Jesus and remain in Jesus. There was a great thesis just as a side note, this is not my insight, Fr. Bryce Higginbotham did a thesis under me at the Seminary where I teach, where he studied this in the Gospel of John. It's really a brilliant, wonderful insight into this theology of believing and remaining in Christ. And so this opening passage here with John, in John, with Jesus and his disciples, is about much more than them saying, hey where are you staying for the night. It's all about discipleship. It's about the fact that they're not going to be students of John the Baptist anymore. Now they're becoming students of Jesus. Now they're becoming followers of Jesus. In order to be a follower of Jesus, you don't just have to believe "hey, he is the Lamb of God," you have to remain with him, you have to stay with him, you have to abide in him. So Jesus invites them into that and says come and see, come and see where I remain, come and see where I abide, so you can learn to live like I live.

Ultimately in John's Gospel as we'll see, Jesus abides in the bosom of the Father, and that's where he wants his disciples, like the beloved disciple, to remain in him. So much rich theology going on here, you wouldn't think that just a few words could do it, but that's how John's Gospel is. And by the way, too, if you notice their in verse 39, it says that when this whole exchange took place it is around the 10th hour, which is about 4 o'clock in the afternoon. So you might think, why is John telling me that this happened at 4 o'clock? Well on the literal level he's telling you that because it was 4 o'clock, but there also might be a deeper significance here to that. Within the Jewish context of the first century A.D., they would've found a place to stay before sunset, especially if it's like a Friday afternoon, the eve of Sabbath. So they're asking where are you staying for the night because they're not going to be necessarily able to get back to another town before sunsets if it's already 4 PM in the evening. So they're going to dwell together in the custom of ancient Jewish hospitality and that's going to begin their process of discipleship, begin their life of discipleship – with one addition. After Andrew and this other disciple accept Jesus' invitation, he immediately then goes and calls his brother Simon and tells him that we have found the Messiah. Note this, this is fascinating. All he did was meet Jesus, but because John the Baptist told him this was the Lamb of God, he recognizes Jesus is the Messiah. The Greek word there is *Messias*, it's just a Hebrew word that has been transliterated, but it's a translation of the Greek word *Christos*, that means anointed one, the long-awaited

king of Israel. So notice Andrew here, this is important; he has faith in Jesus as the Messiah even before Peter has faith in Jesus as the Messiah. This is kind of cool, because, I don't know if you've ever thought about this, Andrew, the apostle, is the great apostolic patriarch of the Eastern churches of the Orthodox churches; they trace their apostolicity back to Andrew, the brother, the younger brother, so to speak, of Peter, who was the head of the Western church. So it's interesting that the father of Eastern Christians, Andrew, believes before the father of the Western Christians. Just like the Eastern Christians themselves brought the faith to the West. That's just kind of an interesting spiritual meaning there, but Andrew brings Peter to Christ. And Jesus looks at Peter and says "so you are Simon, son of John", which was, by the way, his birth name. He's a Jew. Peter's Jewish. So his name is Simeon, which is one of the patriarchs of Israel. It's one of the twelve tribes of Israel. He's named after Simeon, which comes over from the Greek as Simon, and Jesus says "oh so you're Simon, son John, you shall be called Cephas", which means Peter.

Now pause there, what's going on? Well language, language, language, it matters. The word *Cephas* is the Aramaic expression for "rock". Aramaic was an ancient Semitic tongue. It's very similar to Hebrew, but not identical, and Cephas was the word for rock. So at this moment, Jesus, in a sense, prophesies that this man that he's just met is going to be the rock, he's going to be Peter, and John makes sure you get that because he translates the Aramaic for any of his readers that might not understand it, by saying "which means Peter" or Petros in Greek, also just the Greek word for rock. So it is fascinating that already on his first encounter with Jesus, Jesus is renaming Peter, or he's stating that he's going to have a new name, it's going to be Cephas. Now, you might be thinking hold on, I thought Jesus renamed Peter after Peter made a profession of faith at Caesarea Philippi, after he had been his disciple for a while. And that's true, in the Gospel of Matthew 16, Peter does make that profession of faith. But what John tells us is that Jesus already knew who Peter was and what his role was going to be from the very first time they encountered one another. We don't actually get to hear what Peter thinks or what he says here because John just brings the story to an end, but it's important because it does actually correct the statement that people sometimes have. You might hear a non-Catholic Christian say, for example, that when Jesus says to Peter in Matthew's Gospel "you are rock, and upon this rock I will build my church" that Jesus is actually pointing to himself. That he is the rock, but not Peter. Well John 1 shows that's just not true. Jesus is very clearly here identifying Simon as the one whose name will now be rock; this is all about Peter becoming the rock.

All right, so that's the Gospel. One last point, before I forget. Remember, Andrew and Peter are brothers, but it's fascinating that Peter has a Jewish name, Simon, but Andrew has a Greek name; his name is Andreas. Andreas, to this day, is a Greek name, it's not a Jewish name. So we see that Peter and his brother probably come from a family that is devoutly Jewish, but also has been influenced by the Gentile culture of Galilee, to where he takes a Greek name like Andreas. And we'll see later in the Gospel of John when the Greeks, in chapter 12, when they want to talk to Jesus they go to Andrew because not only does he have a Greek name, but he probably speaks Greek, and so they go to him as a kind of connector, conduit to Jesus. In any case, that's probably too much information, but I love the Gospel of John and I can't help myself, there is so much in this book, it's just so rich. Alright, but that's the Gospel for the Second Sunday in Ordinary Time, and you can see here that what the Church is doing in giving us this Gospel at the beginning of Ordinary Time, is starting off the public ministry of Jesus, in a sense giving us the back story to Jesus' call of the disciples, which we're going to actually see next week for the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time.

For now though, let's go back to the Old Testament. So the Old Testament reading for today is from the Book of Samuel, actually 1 Samuel 3:3-10. This is a very famous story of the prophet Samuel when he was a boy being called by God when he was in the Temple. This is with the first reading says:

Samuel was lying down within the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. Then the LORD called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" and ran to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down. And the LORD called again, "Samuel!" And Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, `Speak, LORD, for thy servant hears.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. And the LORD came and stood forth, calling as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for thy servant hears."

And then the lectionary skips down to verse 19 and says:

And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground.

Now, why is that story chosen for the first reading for this Sunday in Ordinary Time and what's going on in it? Okay, I'll take the second question first. What's going on in this story is nothing less than the vocation or the call of one of the great prophets of the Old Testament. Samuel was, in a sense, the prophet who anointed the first two kings of Israel: Saul, and then after him, King David. So he was a kind of transition figure between the time of the judges and the time of the monarchy of King Saul, which was around 1020 BC or so. So about 1000 years, a little more than 1000 years, before Christ. That's the time of Saul and David. So Samuel was a very important figure. He acted as a prophet for many, many, years over Israel and, in this case, we are having the story of his call, the story of a theophany, in which God appears to Samuel and calls to him and begins this relationship of doing what God does with prophets, which is speaking the word of the Lord to him. It's a very beautiful story too, because you have a little boy here who is receptive to God's word, receptive to His will. "Here I am, Lord. Speak, your servant is listening." Those have become very famous words to kind of reflect the posture of how we should respond to God when God speaks to us; that we should be receptive to His word and obedient to His will – that's what Samuel represents.

But I love this story too because in the original Hebrew, there's more than one level of meaning going on, there are puns taking place. Let me explain how. It's real simple, because the name Samuel in Hebrew literally means "he who hears God", and the name Eli in Hebrew literally means "my God" – 'El' means God, 'I' means my. So if you read the story that way, what you are reading is the story of a little boy called "he who hears God" hearing God and then going to a priest and saying "my God, did you speak" and then the priest, Eli (my God) telling him "no, go back, I didn't say anything." So it's 'punny', literally, because it's punning on the fact that God IS speaking to Samuel and Samuel IS listening to his God, but he thinks it's the priest named 'my God' instead of the actual my God, right, the true Eli. And so when Samuel says, "speak Lord, your servant listens", in a sense, he's embodying what his very name means. You can even hear it; the Hebrew *shema*, Deuteronomy 6, 'hear oh Israel', right, Samuel is from the same root there as

shema – to listen or to hear. So it's a beautiful story there about receptivity to God's word and you can see that in the final statement, that Samuel grew, but he didn't let any of the words of God fall to the ground; he took them in, he responded, he obeyed. And so the reason this reading is chosen for this week is because it's about a call, about a call to a mission. It's about a call to be a prophet of the Lord, to consecrate his life to serving the Lord. And that's what we saw in the Gospel as well; basically it's the beginning of Andrew and Peter's call to follow Christ, to serve him, and to begin to listen to his teachings as the Messiah.

If you have any doubts about that being the theme, you just need to look at the Responsorial Psalm, which makes it very clear. In Psalm 40, the refrain is:

“Here I am, Lord; I Have come to Do Your Will.”

So for example in Psalm 40 verse 6, it says:

Sacrifice and offering thou dost not desire;
but thou hast given me an open ear.
Burnt offering and sin offering
thou hast not required.

Or in verse 8:

I delight to do thy will, O my God;
thy law is within my heart.

So what's the Psalm telling us? That at the end of the day the sacrifice that God really wants is an open ear and obedient heart. That's what he wants. He wants us to be open to His will because he always knows what's best for us, desires what's best for us, and has a mission and a plan for us in the history of salvation that we need to accept, just like Samuel here accepted his call to be a prophet over Israel.

Alright, so those are a few insights. In closing, I'd just like to make two main points from the living tradition. First and foremost, there's a great quote from St. Basil of Seleucia — he's not a well-known Church father from the 5th Century — just about the fact that, although we sometimes forget it, Peter and Andrew, especially Andrew, he was a disciple of John, were not just ordinary fishermen, they were Jewish men in the first century who were, as we would say today,

‘religious’, or they were ‘devout’. They were waiting for the coming of the Messiah, otherwise what are they doing acting as disciples and students of John the Baptist. If you are following John the Baptist, you are serious about your spiritual life, you're serious about the prophecies of Scripture. And so St. Basil has this beautiful quote where he says this:

Having recognized the prophet foretold by the prophets, Andrew led his brother to the one he had found. To Peter, who was still in ignorance, he revealed the treasure: “We have found the Messiah” for whom we were longing. *How many sleepless nights we spent beside the waters of the Jordan, and now we have found the one for whom we longed!*²

That's from one of St. Basil's sermons. Andrew when he recognized Jesus as Messiah, it wasn't just because Jesus had some kind of nimbus cloud around him or something, it's because Andrew was already looking. Andrew was already waiting. Andrew's heart was already prepared by the ministry of John the Baptist to encounter the one that Israel had been longing for. So that's the first point. In other words, the apostles had a spiritual life that made them ready for the call. I think that's important to remember.

The second thing that's interesting to know from the tradition here is from St. Augustine, who points out that we need to remember that when Jesus calls Peter and tells him his name, there's no contradiction between John's account and Matthew's account in chapter 16. Sometimes skeptical scholars will say things like “Ah look, John says that Jesus renamed Peter at the beginning of his ministry, but Matthew tells us it was in the middle of his ministry,” as if they both couldn't be true. St. Augustine dealt with this over thousand years ago when he wrote:

Neither is there anything contradictory here to that other passage where Matthew tells us how the Lord said to Peter, “You are Peter, and on this rock will I build my church” (Matt 16:18). *But we are not to understand that that was the time when he first received this name.* We are rather to suppose that

² St. Basil of Seleucia, *Sermon 3-4*; trans. E. Barnecutt

this took place on the occasion when it was said to him, as John mentions, “You shall be called Cephas...”³

And that's in Augustine's famous work the *Harmony of the Gospels*, book 2, which Augustine takes all of these apparent contradictions in the Gospels and he just walks through them one by one and shows you how both accounts are true but in different ways. It's a really fascinating work that was written in response to ancient Pagan critics who were already saying the same kind of things that contemporary skeptics will say about the Gospels. They'll make up contradictions, which really aren't contradictions at all because there's nothing impossible whatsoever about Jesus meeting Peter on that first occasion, prophesying you shall be called Cephas, in other words in the future, and then bringing his own prophecy to fulfillment at Caesarea Philippi when Peter finally confesses Jesus's Messiah-ship and divine Son-ship saying you are Peter now, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it; I'll give you the keys of the kingdom and so-and-so forth. All that doesn't happen until later in the ministry; so again, there is no contradiction.

And then last but not least, this isn't from the living tradition but it's something that I think about. I think it's really interesting that John's Gospel gives us Jesus' first words being these: “What are you looking for?” “What are you looking for?” And I like to imagine that this year, as we begin our journey through the Gospel of Mark, maybe you can take that and ask yourself what am I looking for this year? Or imagine even better, imagine Jesus asking you what are you seeking? What are you looking for? Is it me? Is it the truth? And then him inviting you in, as well, to come and see, right. Whatever it is you're searching for, whatever you're seeking after, discipleship to Jesus is where you're going to find peace. Discipleship to Jesus is where you're going to find happiness. And Jesus never forces anyone to be his disciple, he just invites, right: come and see, come and see.

³ Augustine, *Harmony of the Gospels*, 2.17.34; trans. In J.C. Elowsky, p. 81