

Second Sunday of Ordinary Time – B
Fr. Chad S. Green
Holy Family Catholic Church
Kirkland, Washington
14 January 2018

1 Samuel 3:3b-10, 19
Psalm 40
1 Corinthians 6:13c-15a, 17-20
(John 1:41, 17b) John 1:35-42

God Calls Each of Us to Love

In this, my first year of priesthood, people often ask me about how I decided to become a priest. *How did you get the call? Have you always wanted to be a priest? What made you change from being an engineer to being a priest?* And, even before this year – ever since I left for seminary ten years ago – people had been asking me these same types of questions.

In that summer ten years ago that I left for seminary, I had about five weeks to make the transition from my life in Seattle to my new life at the seminary in California. One of the things that I was nervous about in that transition was telling my boss that I was leaving. For a couple days I practiced how I would say it; struggled to find just the right words; and was waiting for just the right moment. Not at the beginning of the day, because that'll ruin the day. Not at the end of the day, because that's a hectic time with finishing work and rushing to get out the door. Maybe sometime midmorning just before lunch would be the right time...

But, you know, there really isn't a "smooth way" or "right moment" to tell your boss that you're quitting – you just have to say it. And the sooner, the better. When I finally built up the courage to tell my boss, he was surprised and not happy that he was losing me – but he was also excited for me and I'll never forget what he said to me. After the initial shock wore off he said, "Wow, Chad, that's really awesome! I'm happy for you! Tell me, what's it like? Is it like hearing a call from God?"

I wasn't ready for him to ask me that question. I thought we'd be discussing more pertinent things like my last day of work or plans for turning over my projects to coworkers. I wasn't ready for him to ask me that question: *Is it like hearing a call from God?*

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On the one hand, yes, it did seem like a mysterious calling from God to leave behind my career, home, family and friends in order to pursue seminary and priesthood. On the other hand, it wasn't like the scene in today's Gospel: Jesus walked by; Andrew and John immediately began to follow Him; and He invited them to come see where He was staying.¹ It wasn't quite that clear. In whatever ways Jesus had been calling me throughout my life, I certainly didn't leave everything immediately and follow Him like those first Apostles did. It took some time to recognize His call and, once I recognized it, it took some more time to gather the courage to respond.

So, when my boss asked me that question, I didn't quite know how to explain it to him in that moment. But his question really got me thinking then, and has kept me thinking ever since:

Did I hear God's voice calling me to follow Him as priest?...

Back in college there was the priest who encouraged me to think about priesthood – *was that God's voice calling me?*

People at church had been asking me more and more if I was thinking about becoming a priest – *was that God's voice calling me?*

When I was watching Pope John Paul II's funeral an inspirational thought welled up in my heart: "I wonder if I could be a priest..." – *was that God's voice calling me?*

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All these years later, now that I am a priest, I can look back on those moments – and many others – and answer my old boss's question with confidence: "Yes, it is a call from God." And he was right: hearing God's voice is awesome! It's awesome, but it's not surprising – or, at

least, it shouldn't be surprising. God is always calling each one of us. God's voice calls to each one of us in personal ways and at different times in our lives.

In my years as a seminarian and now as a priest, I've had the privilege to meet many people in parishes, hospitals, schools, prisons, mission trips – and it's inspiring and an honor when people share with me the ways that they have heard God calling to them – particularly in big moments of their life. How God called them to get married; to become a parent; to get involved with a ministry; to pursue a different career; to change their life in some important way. How God called to them through their passion for a profession; in their studies; through the beauty of nature. How God called them to get Baptized; to receive the Eucharist; and to be Confirmed. Yes, there are many awesome ways in which Jesus is calling each one of us in a particular way to follow Him!

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Maybe God's call was clear at one time, but maybe there are other times when it starts to fade.ⁱⁱ Life gets busy or stressful and God becomes more difficult to hear. That happens to all of us. In those times we might not be so sure if God is really calling, or how to hear Him if He is. It's important, therefore, to keep reflecting on that question my boss asked me ten years ago: *Am I hearing God's call in my life?* Am I acknowledging that God is the One Who is calling me in a personal and particular way?

One time a gentleman came to me after Mass in which the readings were on this same theme of hearing God's call. He looked downcast and regretful, as though he had missed out on something in his life. He said to me, "I guess I've never really felt called by God to anything in particular." I was surprised to hear him say this, because he was very devout and committed to the parish. He appeared to be actively and regularly responding to God's call in his life by the

way that he faithfully served our community. Maybe, though, he was simply not recognizing that God was calling him.

The First Reading today demonstrated that we all need help at times in recognizing God's call.ⁱⁱⁱ Three times Samuel heard God's voice; three times he didn't recognize it was God.^{iv} His mentor, Eli, helped him recognize that he was experiencing God calling to him, and this helped him to respond with faith.^v

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Last night I celebrated Mass at my childhood parish in Federal Way, Saint Theresa. Like Eli did for Samuel, Saint Theresa is someone who can help us recognize God's call in our lives. Her insight into the Little Way helps us understand that God calls to each one of us in "little ways," in "the ordinary, day-to-day experience of which every life is made."^{vi} It's in these ordinary, day-to-day moments that we experience God's love for us, and learn how to share that love with others.

Being back in my hometown, I was reminded of all those ordinary moments from my childhood. Did I know that I was going to become a priest when I was a boy in Federal Way at Saint Theresa Parish? No, I didn't, but it was in all the ordinary places of Federal Way that my call to priesthood began – just as, in the ordinary places here in Kirkland, God is beginning to call our children – and He continues to call us adults in whatever circumstances and whatever state of life we are in.

In our neighborhood parks: enjoying the beauty of nature and playing with friends and family who love us – that is God calling to each of us. At school: learning from teachers who love us – that is God calling to each of us. On the sports fields: being mentored by coaches who love us – that is God calling to each of us. In the workplace: working on a project with a

coworker or helping a customer whom we are supposed to love – that is God calling to each of us. These ordinary places and moments of life are where God calls to each of us with His love; teaches us about His love; and gives us numerous opportunities to show that love to others each day – oftentimes by simply giving someone a smile instead of a scowl.^{vii}

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Our church needs to be one of the ordinary places of our life. It needs to be a place that we come to regularly, that we bring our children to regularly – at least every Sunday, if not more.^{viii} God calls out to us in all the ordinary moments of our lives, and most especially when we gather together as the Body of Christ^{ix} in this place for worship. Here at Holy Family is where the ordinary intersects with the Extraordinary. We hear about what Love is in the Sacred Scriptures; we see what Love looks like on the Cross; we hear Love forgive us when we make a good Confession; and we are nourished by the Sacrament of Love in the Eucharist.^x Here at church is the ordinary way in which God calls to us with His Love and conforms our lives to His Love, so that we are more and more able to bring His Extraordinary Love to all the ordinary moments and places of our lives.

ⁱ John 1:37-39 (John is traditionally considered to be the other unnamed first disciple. See note at <http://www.usccb.org/bible/john/1:37>)

ⁱⁱ See Fr. Walter Ciszek, from “Humility” in *He Leadeth Me* (1995), 175:

“We see examples of this in lives around us every day. Young people planning to get married, choosing a profession, or answering a vocation to the priesthood or religious life, feel an enthusiasm and an interior joy they never knew before. Then, as the years go by, difficulties increase and there is a constant need for more sacrifice and a renewal of spirit in the initial promise or vow taken. And then it is that the test of one’s humility – the realization of one’s place before God – really begins.”

ⁱⁱⁱ 1 Samuel 3:7

^{iv} 1 Samuel 3:4-8

^v 1 Samuel 3:9-10

^{vi} Patrick Ahern, *Maurice & Therese: The Story of a Love (The Inspiring Letters Between Therese of Lisieux and a Struggling Young Priest)*, 114

^{vii} Saint Theresa’s “The Apostolate of the Smile”, Ahern, 114

^{viii} Exodus 20:8-11, 31:15; Deuteronomy 5:12-15; CCC 2168-2195 (esp. 2180)

^{ix} 1 Corinthians 6:15a

^x CCC 1323, 1380