

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Homily Given by Fr. Roy Joseph, SJ

Mass of Thanksgiving – June 25, 2016

(1 Kings 19: 16b, 19-21); (Galatians 5: 1, 13-18); (Luke 9: 51-62)

Today's readings that the Church gives us all have something important to say about our *calling or vocation* as Christians...as Catholics. Most of you probably know that vocation comes from the Latin for "call" or "summons". In our context, it isn't just any call but a call *from God* and a call *for everyone*, not just religious sisters, brothers, and those ordained.

It's an awesome thing to contemplate, really: Almighty God, the Creator of the Universe, created each one of us, without exception, out of love; gave each one of us the dignity of being called Children of God; and made each one of us in His own image and likeness. If that weren't enough, God ultimately calls each of us, *with the aid of God's grace*, to praise, reverence, and serve God, to love God and neighbor, and to save our souls and be with Him forever.

The call of God, then, is not only the calling ultimately back to God *at the end of life*, but also the big and little calls *during life*. Big vocation calls include one's state of life—whether one lives out one's life as single, ordained, in religious life, or in married life. Within these big vocational calls, there are "calls within a call", like how Blessed Mother Teresa described her call within religious life to serve the very poor of Calcutta...or your own call as single or married, to teach, to volunteer, to serve others in the many ways you do.

And then, of course, there are the small vocation calls we hear and respond to every day – *small responses* of "yes" that make the *big responses* of "yes" to vocational calls possible.

And that's where the difficulty lies...in the human response to these wonderful callings of God. I used to think in my own vocation how nice it would be if God sent someone to announce to me exactly what I should do; like if I had my own Annunciation of sorts with Archangel Gabriel, everything would be clear and easy. Now a little wiser, I realize that it most likely would have been neither clear nor easy! I'm convinced of that as I reflect on the Scripture and see that it wasn't clear or easy, even for the most revered followers of God. Still, God calls us in our humanity, knowing our human weaknesses and difficulty in responding.

In the first reading from 1Kings, we have Elisha receiving from Elijah (the archangel so to speak) the call or summons to follow him as prophet. He's a farmer, likely not very educated, and not the first person one would guess, perhaps, to succeed the great prophet Elijah. Still, God chose him. Elisha's response was very human; he wanted to say goodbye to his parents, which in those days could have taken weeks.

But then the story continues that Elisha completely changed the course of his life to answer this call of God that came through God's messenger, Elijah. He literally burned the bridge to his past by burning the yoke, slaughtering oxen, and feeding others in the process. You see already how he did away with the yoke, *symbolic of what weighed down his past life*, and how his decision was able to bear fruit for others.

We see from the Gospel that even when God speaks *directly* to us, our human response still falls short. Earlier, Jesus Himself *called* James and John, and here *rebukes* these two “sons of thunder” who weren’t at the moment responding well to God’s call in wanting to call down fire from Heaven to consume the Samaritan village. In their case, pride and a desire to avenge God seemed to consume *them*. But we also know that they would eventually give their lives to spreading the Gospel, being among the first martyrs of the Church.

Sometimes the obstacles to following God’s call are not obviously bad or sinful, like we see in the three would-be followers of Jesus in the rest of the Gospel we heard. The first was enthusiastic about responding to Jesus’s call, but had to come to terms with being *out of his comfort zone*, having a difficult, long journey with Jesus that would not quite end at home with a good night’s sleep. The second and third potential followers of Jesus wanted to *postpone doing* so until they took care of family issues. Of course, taking care of family concerns or trying to stay comfortable are good things to do. Jesus, however, is aware of the difficulties of our human response and knows that *our natural desire for comfort and for addressing family concerns* can easily lead us to *not* hear or respond to God’s call as we should.

So we are constantly called by God in big and small ways, even in our weakness, and sometimes are faced with choices between several good things. This is where our tradition calls us to *discern*, to take time to reflect prayerfully what God is calling us to. I imagine that Elisha, James, John, Peter (who denied Jesus), Thomas (who doubted Jesus), and all the great women and men we revere in the Church, had moments of discernment like this.

We have to have the freedom to discern, and, as St. Paul says, we are *called for freedom*, meaning that we are called to *live according to the Spirit*. It is *only with the Spirit* that we can truly discern and respond well to God’s calls to us. Indeed, it is *impossible to say yes to God’s call without the Spirit*—even Mother Mary had to be filled with the Holy Spirit in order to give her “Yes”. The Spirit enables us to *stay true to our conversion and attentive to God’s call*. The Spirit guides us so that we *stay on God’s path*, not pulled off track by where the oxen pull us because we keep looking back to our former ways of life.

Dear sisters and brothers, in this Year of Mercy, as we experience the compassion of God and experience conversion towards God, let us pray to be *filled with the Holy Spirit* so that we may have the grace to *step out of our comfort zones and not to postpone our response* to God’s unique calls, big and small, for each one of us.