

## The Second Sunday of the Year.

Imagine the scene. We are at Bethany, on the other side of the Jordan, an inhospitable part of the desert on the banks of the River Jordan. This is where John was baptizing and preparing for the coming of one who was greater than he. He was standing with two disciples and chose to point to Jesus whom he described once again as the "lamb of God". Jesus was there in the same place, perhaps he was one of John's disciples, and John knew his disciples well because they were ready immediately to follow Jesus, which they did and went to stay with him for most of the day. The next day, one of those disciples who was Andrew, took his brother to Jesus and Simon's discipleship began. Both Andrew and Simon needed another believer to point them in the direction of Jesus.

Imagine the scene, Samuel was a boy who had a job looking after the Temple. Being a Jewish child and working in the central place of Jewish worship he would have been familiar with language about God and worship of him. But when the Lord spoke to him, he did not realise it was God. He turned to Eli who, like John the Baptist and Andrew, pointed him in the right direction. Samuel did as Eli had instructed him and said "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening". Like Andrew and Simon, Samuel's whole life changed from that moment. In fact his identity changed as well. Just as Simon's name was changed to Cephas, so Samuel's role was changed from a boy who did odd jobs to the first prophet of Israel who changed the course of its history.

Those two scenes stand at the beginning of our year of listening to the story of Jesus' ministry and his work among his disciples. They describe Andrew, Simon Peter and Samuel in a crucial moment in their lives when they began their relationship with Jesus Christ. As events unfold we see how they grew in their faith in him and became, as they grew, more and more effective witnesses to the presence and power of God in the world. That crucial moment when everything clicked was recognised and enabled by another person who had faith, in these cases either Eli, John the Baptist or Andrew. John the Baptist and Eli knew that in the people they influenced there was a secret place deep in their hearts that was waiting for God and a relationship with him. We know the same thing. In fact it is fundamental to our faith and the teaching of Christianity, that in every man, woman and child there is a place, a component, an orientation, a desire, openness to Jesus who is God. That facility is created within each of us and is at the root of all our hopes, desires and the power and will to survive and grow and flourish as human beings. That is why St. Paul can speak of the human body, the human person being a temple. We are made to have the life and power of God within us, designed for it and we need the faith of others to help us bring it to consciousness. Or, as St. Paul who put it "And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him".

That capacity within us to love God and to trust him needs others to bring it to growth and fullness. In isolation from the faith of others our own love for God falters and weakens. That is why Jesus put those two great commandments of love of God and one another together. It is why St. Aelred of Rievaulx,

whose memory we celebrated this week, put the love of friendship and the love of God together in the search for God.

One of the temptations is to think that our faith in God is our concern and has nothing to do with anyone else. It is certainly our personal concern and responsibility but it most certainly does influence others by supporting their own faith and trust in God. It is essential to believe that believing and loving God is not something we can do on our own because we need the others that God gives us.

It is illustrated in our belief and teaching that when a baby is baptized the parents and the community must accept the responsibility of helping the child grow in consciousness of the promise and presence of Jesus.

It is illustrated in our "Journey of Faith" which supports others in their search and growth into the Catholic Church and their love for Jesus. The catechists who do this work have their own faith in Jesus as their fundamental tool and qualification.

It is illustrated in the importance of the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist, which is at the heart of our life as a community. Our coming together nourishes our relationship with Jesus and our growth into him through the power which comes from eating and drinking his body and blood and through the witness of the faith of others. Each Christian community, with the Eucharist at its heart, gathers people of faith together and in doing that brings to greater consciousness the presence and power of Jesus in our lives.

"You are not your own property; you have been bought and paid." With those words St. Paul is pointing to the great power that is with each of us. Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist claims us for Jesus and imparts to us massive potential for helping others to grow as human beings and in their life giving relationship with God. Our bodies, which are the sites of our personhood and the place where everything about us becomes recognisable are sacred because they are Temples of the Spirit. If we can only live our lives in faith, we can influence others for good in ways which we cannot imagine. Do the reverse and the damage is unlimited.

Paul speaks specifically of our sexual powers. They are to be used as expressions of our faith in Jesus Christ and as manifestations of his love in us. And that can be applied to all the powers we have, especially those which communicate. All our communicating, whether in those invisible manifestations like honesty, forgiveness, gentleness, hospitality and respect for another or, in those things that can be seen and heard like speech, listening, looking, touching and embracing, must communicate above all our own relationship of faith with God.

Today is a day of prayer for Peace. As we remember that the peace for which we are praying is the gift of Jesus Christ, the gift of life renewed and restored, let us resolve to impart that gift of peace to others by lives lived in faith in Jesus Christ.

