

As we move into Winter Ordinary Time, this week's readings deal with vocation – the call that each of us receives from God. Our fundamental call begins with baptism. This is the call to holiness. Each of us regardless of our state in life is called to be a saint through baptism. Beyond this basic call, however, the Lord also calls us to a life vocation. For the vast majority of people that call is to the married life. For some it might be to the priestly or religious life. The only way to discover the call is to listen. Prayer involves two movements – speaking and listening.

Our first reading is from the First Book of Samuel. This is really a beautiful passage because in it we see how God worked in young Samuel's life to a life of service in prophecy. Samuel's response to each call, also shows the strength of his faith because he responded without hesitation – first to Eli and then to God. Samuel's name in Hebrew actually means "heard by God – שְׁמוּאֵל" or "*Shmu'el*". His mother, Hannah, was barren so she pleaded with the Lord who heard her plea, thus she named her son. Now in this passage the one who is heard by God, listens to God – "Speak Lord, your servant is listening."

This response should always be a component of our prayer. God **always** has something to say to us. Our world is so noisy and chaotic; however, it is at times difficult to hear His voice. We have to make time for God. A simple pattern of how our prayer should flow can be found in the pattern of the Liturgy of the Word from the Holy Mass – we begin with contrition (sorrow for our sin), we continue with a reading from Scripture, we listen to the Lord, and we offer prayers of intercession for others. It is not complicated but it does take effort and time.

The second reading also calls us to perfect our discipleship – our call from the Lord. As I said earlier, we are all called to be holy, to be saints. One of the ways we live this out is through our bodies. Our bodies and souls are united, so we must worship the Lord completely. We are not truly his disciples if we simply say we are with our lips and do something else with our bodies. Paul is writing to the Corinthians – a rough crowd – who are apparently confused about the proper use of their bodies. Paul points out that your body is not for immorality (*porneia*) but for the Lord. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit; therefore, everything we do with them should be an expression of that basic call to holiness. Sexual immorality today has become a favorite pass time for many or simply a form of recreation for others. Fornication (sex outside of marriage), adultery (sexual intimacy with a married person who is not your spouse), pornography and masturbation and a host of other sins are rampant and are having a tremendously disastrous impact on marriage, family, and society in general. What we do with our bodies, how we care for our bodies, and how we dress our bodies should all be expressions of our basic commitment to Christ and our desire to be holy. The present culture makes being holy difficult. Only with difficulty can women and girls find modest clothing, advertising and other forms of media are saturated with sexual images – stores sell clothes by showing people not wearing any! All of this militates against faithful discipleship and calls us, therefore, to be ever more vigilant. Parents need to be especially mindful of this and help children to recognize that which is not proper – that which is offensive to the holiness of our bodies and souls.

Finally, the Gospel lays out the basic plan of discipleship as it is presented in John's Gospel. Andrew and John hear about Jesus from John the Baptist. They follow Jesus who invites them to stay with Him, and then Andrew tells another about Jesus, in this case Peter, and brings him to Jesus. We cannot be faithful followers of Jesus if we do not experience Him profoundly in the life of the Church through prayer and the sacraments. We cannot pass on what we do not have. Hence, we need to begin immersing ourselves in Christ. We do this through prayer and the sacramental life. If we have not yet discovered our vocation in life, this is the way to begin doing so. If we are already living our vocation; then, this is the way to perfect it and live it more abundantly. Each of us is called – we just have to learn to listen and respond.