



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year B

Vocation

Readings: 1 Samuel 3: 3-10, 19, Ps39, 1 Corinthians 6: 13-15, 17-20, John 1: 35-42

Towards the beginning of last week I was idly listening to a morning radio show where two famous sportswomen were talking about their careers. The thing that grabbed my attention was how early they knew what they were going to do. As one of them said, 'From that moment on I knew I was going to be an Olympic athlete.' There was a clear and unwavering sense of vocation. This is what I am made to do.

Such certainty in the young can be a bit unnerving to older and more pedestrian lives. But we should not be surprised and we should certainly not discourage it. Vocation can be deep seated from very early on. Vocation can come out of a clear blue sky. It can be a mixture. When I was eight years old my Baptist Sunday School Superintendent told me that I was going to be a minister of the Gospel. My mother, who later told me that she feared just such an eventuality, hoped that I would 'grow out of it'. And for most of my teens and twenties I did just that. I was, metaphorically, with Jonah on the voyage to Tarshish – getting as far away from the will of the Lord as possible. But when the call came again there was no question and no delay.

I mention all this for two reasons. First of all our Scripture readings today give us two of the great followers of God – Samuel and John the Baptist – who had astonishingly early vocations. Second, just last week we welcomed the young candidates for First Communion and their parents as they begin the next exciting stage of their Christian journey.

First the Scriptures. We know that John the Baptist was a child of promise. We know that he was born against all odds to his elderly parents and that they knew that he was to be the forerunner of the Messiah. We know also that he was the first to recognise the coming of the Lord when he leapt in Elizabeth's womb at the arrival of Mary with the baby Jesus newly conceived in her womb. You don't get more precocious a vocation than that. From the earliest moments of life children are open to the spiritual. Indeed they are usually more open because they have not become coarsened or distracted by the things of this world.

The story of Samuel is, in some ways, more shocking. His barren mother, whose desperate weeping prayer was mistaken by the High Priest for the hysterics of a drunken woman, has had the child of promise. She names him Samuel – the Lord has heard my prayer. And then she does an extraordinary thing. Once he is weaned (mobile and toilet trained), she offers him back to God. This is not the usual dedication that we saw when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the Temple. That is the duty of all the faithful, to offer/dedicate the firstborn to God. No, Samuel's mother, Hannah, literally gives this toddler to the church. It is as if a woman gave Bishop Mark her 3 year old at the Cathedral and said, 'He is here for life'.

Shocking but true. We need not be surprised then when Samuel turns out to be the one to whom the Lord has chosen to reveal his will. And the old priest, Eli, recognises this. Samuel is serving regularly by now and God speaks to him and Samuel becomes His prophet. What he has to say will bring doom to the House of Eli who, with his sons, has become corrupt. It will take Israel through massive defeat at the hands of the Philistines. The loss of the Ark of the Covenant. It will take them through repentance, victory and return. It will see the establishment of the Kingdom and, eventually, that other unlikely youthful vocation, the anointing of the shepherd boy, David, as king of Israel.

All this begins in the recognition of vocation from childhood.

What am I saying here?

1) Do not be surprised by the holiness of children. They often have a capacity for awe and wonder and simple faith that we have, in our busyness, lost touch with. Their questions and questing can often be a way back in for us to the things of God. Accompany them and encourage them. In so doing, you will be strengthened too.

2) Pray regularly for your children, thanking God for His precious gift to you. Pray regularly for your children, offering them back to God for the fulfilment of their lives and purpose in His vocation. They were His before they were ours – He is their Creator, we are merely pro-creators – and they will be His long after we have journeyed on.

3) We do not want them sleeping in the sacristy here but they do need to be regularly about the things of God. They need to be somewhere

where they can hear the Word of the Lord and with priests and people who can help them discern the will of the Father.

4) Be regular at Mass. It is an obligation not an option. We would not deprive our children of food. We should not deprive them of the food and drink of the soul.

5) Those were the easy ones. This is a hard one. In our homes there should be a quiet corner, a shelf, a surface, something with signs of the Faith – a votive candle, a crucifix, an ikon, a rosary – something that marks our home as a place where Jesus Christ is honoured.

AND.....there should be half an hour each evening when the TV and radio and electronic devices are OFF and we speak to each other and a few minutes before bedtime when we speak to God and pray for one another.

If we want our children to hear the voice of God then we need to do all in our power to allow Him to be heard amid the clatter of the world.

Then, like Mary and Joseph, Elkanah and Hannah, Zechariah and Elizabeth, we can be gratefully astonished by what God will do with our much loved and prayed over children.