



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

2nd Sunday of Advent Year B

The Night Caller

Readings: Isaiah 40: 1-5, 9-11; Ps 84, 2 Peter 3: 8-14, Mark 1: 1-8

I often, rashly, assume that people know what I am talking about. It may be equally rash of me to assume that people think that I know what I am talking about. This surfaced a few weeks ago when a faithful and otherwise well-read parishioner asked me to say more about a major Biblical character, in my sermon, of whom they had never heard. It is a very rash person who invites me to say more.

Anyhow, to cut to the chase, I thought I would take that lesson to heart and, at the risk of boring the well-informed, give a little historical and spiritual filler to our first reading and the vital business of VOCATION – CALLING.

SAMUEL – a charming story of a young child? Well, not quite.

If one had to compile a list of the top half dozen most significant figures in the Old Testament and the long unfolding history of salvation that leads up to Christ, Samuel would have a very serious claim for inclusion. He is, in turn, miracle child, Adviser to the 'Archbishop', priest, Prophet, Kingmaker, last of the great Judges of Israel. He is the hinge on which the history of God's people turns in the critical and formative period between the partial, patchwork settlement in the Promised Land with its

unco-ordinated tribal league and the move to monarchy in Saul and then David. It is no accident that two biblical books bear his name.

You will recall his origin. Desperate barren woman prays so extravagantly at national shrine that the High Priest, Eli, berates her as a drunk. When she explains, he, Eli, blesses her and she returns home and gets pregnant. Result: Samuel.

His name comes from the root of the word 'to hear'. The Lord has heard Hannah's prayer. Same root as the foundational declaration to the people in Deuteronomy – Shema Israel....HEAR O Israel, the Lord your God is One.

Hearing God's Word is to be Samuel's great charism.

Next up. Hannah had promised that, if God answered her prayer, she would give/dedicate the child to God.

Being a fundamentalist, Hannah, once she has weaned the child, ships up on Eli's doorstep, thanks God in a great hymn, which is the prototype of Our Lady's Magnificat, and gives Samuel to God and the care of Eli. Imagine that today. A woman appears with her toddler at the presbytery. 'I promised him to God, father. Now he's all yours.' The Safeguarding officer would have forty fits. Luckily there is a Mrs Eli as we know he has two grown up sons. Also Hannah, the barren, went on to have five more children and visited annually with new clothes for her eldest son.

So, here we are, a few years on. God had long been silent. The boy is bedded down in the Sanctuary when he hears a voice call his name. He has no supernatural expectations so he assumes it's Eli – and wakes him up. On the third alarm Eli twigs what is going on and instructs Samuel accordingly. The words that God imparts to this young boy are devastating. Eli's sons, who have run a corrupt regime, will die. Eli, who has connived at their wickedness, himself will die. The Ark of the Covenant, the very sign and promise of the Presence will fall into enemy hands. It couldn't be much worse.

When Eli asks the boy to tell him what God said, Samuel is understandably reluctant and, no doubt, afraid. But he tells him anyway. Eli instantly accepts this as God's word. Why? Two reasons. Firstly it is the truth. They are corrupt. Second, Eli has been privately told the same by another seer but privately. Herein is an important lesson for spiritual experience. Discernment. The old priest, failing and corrupt as he is, can still recognise the truth and has access to confirmation through other sources. This is the difference between those for whom hearing voices is a mental health issue and those who hear direct from the Lord. Discernment is vital.

The prophecy proves true in every particular. Samuel is recognised as THE MAN of God and rises to central power in the shattered state. He becomes effective ruler in the years ahead and effective king maker. You can read it all yourself in the Books of Samuel. The important point is to recognise that, even in religiously thin times, God still speaks to His people through those who have heard. Those hearings need discernment. Are they corresponding to truth? Is there corroborative

spiritual evidence? Do the hearers seek the wisdom of the Church? Are they consistent with God's previous teaching?

You may assume that this has nothing to do with your experience and such things are extremely rare. They are not so rare as you may think. I am, not infrequently, presented with people's remarkable, but largely unreported, spiritual encounters for spiritual discernment. I do not think I am unique in this priestly privilege.

I accept that, nevertheless, this is a minority experience. Most people's 'vocation' is more like the Gospel account today.

Someone points them to Jesus. In the gospel, John the Baptist calls out Jesus as the Lamb of God, the sacrifice to be made for the salvation of the people. Intrigued, two men follow Jesus. Jesus asks what they want? Embarrassed they don't ask the religious question but rather a practical one – where do you live? Jesus replies simply, 'Come and see'. They are invited and spend the rest of the day with Him.

We should not fear evangelism. Sometimes all we need to do is to invite people to meet Jesus. COME AND SEE.

The upshot is that Andrew goes and calls his brother Peter to meet the Messiah. Jesus stares into the depths of Peter's soul and re-names him, ROCK.

Those who have found Jesus, instinctively call others, especially those they love.

It will be sometime before the Lord will come to them on the Galilee shoreline and call them into his service. But the preparation, gradual and intense, has begun.

The Lord has many ways of calling – from the urgent prophecy in the sanctuary to the revelation of dream. From the gradual growing in knowledge of the Presence to the witness of family and friends. From the simple invitation to the house of Jesus to the radical call to leave the day job and become part of the Apostolic Mission.

God speaks..... The Question is, Do we listen?

Shema Israel.....