

HOMILY 2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time
January 16/17, 2021

Fr. Joe and I started seminary about the same time. Fr. Joe was very outgoing; he was always in the center of what was going on. He was a lot of fun to be around. Everybody liked him. When I found out that he was an accountant before he entered the seminary, I was really surprised. He did not have the personality I would expect of an accountant. I asked him if he liked being an accountant and he said: “Not really.” I asked him why he became an accountant and he told me: “Well, my father was an accountant and did very well. I have 6 brothers and sisters and he was able to provide very well for us. And I wanted to please my father. He was also a man of great faith. He used his accounting abilities to serve the Church. He played a major role in building several buildings at his parish, including the church building; he was on their Finance Council and really received a lot of fulfillment from serving the Church.” I wonder if parents realize the tremendous influence they can have on their children.

The readings today are about our callings. God has a plan for each one of us, and we all need to discern what God is calling us to do. First, a word about discernment. When we have to make a choice between two things, one is right and the other is wrong, God wants us to make the right choice. This is not discernment because it is clear what God is calling us to do. The Church helps us to define the right thing to do. We do not always do the right thing, but we frequently know what the right thing to do is. If we need to decide between two things, both are right and good, that is when we need to discern what God is calling us to do. We need to do this through prayer, allowing God to direct our actions. Most people do not hear voices, but if you sit with the decision in prayer you can get an intuition from God to discern what he is calling you to do.

What do we learn from the readings about discernment? In the first reading we encounter Samuel, who was a young boy and was living at the temple with Eli, who was an old priest. Samuel was sleeping where the ark of the covenant was when he thought he heard Eli calling him. It was actually God calling him, but he was unable to discern that and he kept going to Eli asking him what he wanted. He needed a little help discerning God's voice, and Eli helped him. Sometimes we need the help of other people when we are discerning. But notice Eli did not tell Samuel what to do. He told him to listen to God: "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." Someone else cannot discern for you. You must discern for yourself, but others can help you. That is part of what faith sharing is about. We also learn that God is persistent. If we do not get it right away, God does not give up on us. He is persistent. In the Gospel reading, Jesus calls three of his disciples. The first question that he asks them is "What are you looking for?" I do not think they knew what they were looking for because they did not answer him, they just asked where he was staying. "What are you looking for?" is a very important question. Our culture tells us that we should be looking for wealth, power, control, fame, a life with no pain, and we are influenced by this. Is that what you really want? The Holy Spirit gave us particular gifts and talents and he wants us to use them to help others. That self knowledge is part of discernment as well, how to use your gifts and talents to help others. If Fr. Joe would have asked himself that question, he probably would not have identified accounting as what he was looking for because in my opinion, that was not using his gifts and talents.

Since the Gospel reading today is about calling the first apostles, I want to say a few words about vocations to the priesthood. Today we have about 250 active priests in the AOD and in 10 years we will have about 150. If we want to continue to receive ministry from priests, we need to do something to encourage vocations to the priesthood. The priesthood is a great life. I have never

earned less money in my life, and I have never been more joyful and fulfilled. I wonder how many parents have suggested the priesthood to their sons. Studies show that parents have an incredible amount of influence over their children, particularly in the area of faith. Fr. Joe picked accounting because he admired his father and wanted to please him. I hear a lot of parents say that they just want their children to be happy. In studies of job satisfaction, clergy is consistently at the top of job satisfaction. And does anyone here have more job security than I have? We do not make a lot of money, but we have everything we need. Some parents have told me that they want their sons to get married and have children. Well, is that about you or is that about your son. I will never have children, but I have about 6,000 people who call me father. People have asked me what the typical priest type is. I have to say that there isn't one. I was in seminary with a physician, a number of attorneys, engineers, accountants, musicians, tool and die makers, truck drivers and believe it or not a standup comic. Whatever your gifts and talents are, you can use them in the priesthood. You do have to want to bring people to the Lord through the sacramental life of the Church. Men typically go to seminary in their late 20's or 30's. One problem with our lack of vocations is that our young single men in their late 20's and 30's are not coming to Mass. We need to get our young adults back to Church, particularly our single men if we want priests. What is God's plan for your life? So, what are you looking for? It is up to you to discern this.