

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson
14th January 2024 - 2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings (Year B): 1st: 1 Samuel 3:3-10,19. 2nd: 1 Corinthians 6:13-15,17-20. **Gospel:** John 1:35-42.

As we move on into green, ordinary, growing time, the story of Samuel is a beautiful tale of awakening and the whole process of growing up. Samuel, the hero of our 1st Reading is a nothing.

The time is the 11th century BC and the place is the shrine in the small town of Shiloh, in the hill country, where the Ark of God was kept then. After the wilderness experience, the Ark was the Tabernacle that moved with the people, now it has come to rest at Shiloh. This is well before the Temple in Jerusalem.

The background to this is Samuel's mother Hannah, who was barren and continually taunted by others because of this. She goes into the Sanctuary of God, and there she pours out her heart to the Lord. Eli, the high priest keeping watch at the Shrine, thinks she is drunk, as she mouthed her words, but silently, whereas it was normal to speak prayers out loud.

The little child was longed for by Hannah, and when indeed her prayers were answered she has her son. Given that yearning, it is almost inconceivable to us that Hannah then presented that same son, in early childhood to the care of Eli at the Shrine. She had promised this to Eli before he was born.

Hannah's song of joy as she presents him to the Lord is a mirror of Mary's Magnificat. The child helps Eli, who is now old, and has useless, unworthy sons. It was the time between the Judges and moving to the settled kingdom, which Samuel when he grew up would become the first in the line of great prophets and anointed Saul and David as kings.

It was also a time of great unrest when there was a life-and-death struggle between Israel and the Philistines, when loyalty to God was paramount. Part of Philistine territory was the Gaza strip.

We meet the young boy asleep in the sanctuary but does not yet know the Lord or recognise God's voice, hence his clumsy childish efforts to be helpful by waking up the old priest Eli, until the Elder realises what is going on, and teaches Samuel to say: Speak Lord, your servant is listening.

Hannah's task in all this reflects both Elizabeth and Mary.

Eli's place is to introduce others to the Lord and to find their new vocation. Samuel grows up to be the last of the great judges and the first of the king makers.

Ten centuries' later the link is made with two other men, John the Baptist and Andrew. In the gospel we meet John the Baptist introducing two of his own disciples to Jesus; and in doing so introduces them to their new future.

The disciples go with Jesus and stay with him. John points away from himself to the Christ. As we know that is his role.

Andrew needed John Baptist to point him in the right direction, as Eli did for Samuel. And what John did for Andrew, Andrew did for his brother Simon Peter.

In the other three gospels Andrew is known simply as the brother of Peter. But in St John's gospel Andrew has a special function of introducing people to Jesus.

Before the feeding of the 5000 Andrew discovers the small boy with the five loaves and two fish, and he introduces the little lad to Jesus. Later in the gospel some Greeks speak to Philip and express their desire to meet Jesus. Philip tells Andrew and together they introduce the delegation to Jesus.

Use today to reflect on our own introduction to Jesus, recalling the people who introduced us, our mums, dads, grandparents, friends, teachers, priests, sisters, catechists, whoever.

None of us goes alone to Jesus: access to Jesus is always mediated through people. We all come to Jesus by way of generations of Christians who shared their experience of Jesus. We have to play our part in all that.

We are told that when Samuel grew up to be a great prophet ‘the Lord let no word of his fall to the ground.’

Like Mary, we ponder the Word of God, read to us Sunday by Sunday, day by day, and our own reading of the scriptures.

It is a lifetime engagement. Each day we are invited to say to the Lord “where do you live” and each day the Lord will reply ‘Come and see.’

We never exhaust what the Lord and our journey through life have to teach us; there is always something to learn and find out about Jesus and our faith. He is the one who St John says ‘Tabernacled among us’; hence our tabernacles. Here I am Lord, I come to do your will; Speak Lord, your servant is listening.

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