

**Gospel Verse**  
**January 18, 2009**

John was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he said, "Behold, the Lamb of God." The two disciples heard what he said and followed Jesus.

■ Jn. 1:35-37

One of the most ordinary things is how do we relate to the Lord and the Lord relate to us. How does He work in our every-day life, our ordinary lives? And how are you aware of his presence in our life? And how do we hear Him? Well, let's all hear today. I want to take apart the Scriptures, especially that first reading. Well, really all three of them because they really dove-tail each other. And they give us a pattern, a way of interpreting our lives in relationship to God and; therefore, our lives in relationship to each other.

One of the things that I constantly harp on is - Christianity is not practical. It doesn't work in our everyday life. Then it's not Christianity. No, it's right now. The difficulty is that most of us are like Samuel who is sleeping. We do a lot of sleeping. We do almost everything in our sleep. It's called conventional wisdom. It's the way everything is done. We do it without thinking and do it because everybody else is doing it. We just do it.

So Eli and Samuel are together, and Samuel is asleep. Then he hears something. He hears God call. He hears God say, 'Samuel! Samuel!'. Now Samuel, since he's asleep, doesn't know what the voice of God sounds like. He can't even expect that fact that God would be calling him. And, yet, in divine conversation (If you ever go to a wedding or funeral I perform you will hear this at every one of them)...the divine conversation between God and ourselves...there's a dialogue that begins at the moment of our conception and goes on...that conversation is God who always, always, always calls first. We just respond.

The fact that you are here today and decided to come out and go to mass...you are here today because you are responding to a continual call from God.

So God Calls Samuel... 'Samuel! Samuel!' Well, since he doesn't know, he gets up and runs to Eli and says, 'Eli, you called me.' Eli says, 'No I didn't. Go back to bed'. Now this happens three times. In the scriptures, like in any good story telling, if you want to make an emphasis you tell it over and over again, at least three times. Because by the third time you get the hearer's attention. And we've got to get his attention. To rouse us out of our sleep, sometimes you got to hear it over and over and over again. It's very much that way in spiritual life – at least for positive spirituality like we're hearing today. Negative spirituality – hurts, angers, resentments – are like Velcro. It sticks to you like glue. You can think about it forever. It doesn't go away. Somebody hurts you and you carry that thing for months, a year, forever.

Yet, in positive spirituality – God calling to us and speaking to us – it slips away. So we've got to hear it over and over and over again. It's amazing how much we lose between the pew and the parking lot. Amazing. You're sitting here and you just know how God is really speaking to you. You've just been in communion. You get to the parking lot and you're fighting about how to get out. So we need to hear it over and over. And the third time is a charm. And the third time Eli comes up to Samuel and Samuel finally says, 'Oh, Samuel, wake up boy. I'm not calling you. That's God calling you.'

But in the spiritual life, you never grow because you're never going to figure it out by yourself unless someone shows you the way. Everybody needs a model. Everybody needs a mentor. Everybody needs to be shown how it's done. Why? Because in conventional wisdom, everything is logical. But in spiritual wisdom, nothing is logical. It's always paradoxical. It's always just the opposite of what you think. When Jesus is giving spiritual wisdom and He's saying, 'If you want to find your life you've got to lose your life. If you want to gain life, you have to lose life'. There's just no way we're going to figure that out with left-brain logic. But, if you see it incarnated in someone, living in someone – a model, a mentor, the saints...And what I want to say is a saint is someone who is in communion with God. And we have models and mentors

right here at Mary Queen. The difficulty is if you think you're one, you're not. (laughter) The mentors and models don't know they are mentors and models. But you can see it in them how they respond and react and live. They live in the presence of God. And God is in their presence. You see them. Watch them. Imitate them. Well, that's Eli. Eli is the model and mentor saying, "Look, God's speaking to you. And here's what you should say, "Now that you've got my attention, speak Lord your servant is listening". Or, when we wake up, God always has something to say. The difficulty is waking up. We have to continue hearing the voice of God. It's very much that way in our own lives. We are always given brick walls and mazes and always coming up against something. It is at that point that we are woken up when someone slaps us in the face. When a relationship falls apart or we lose a job or we get a sickness our first response has to be, 'Wow, now that you've got my attention, what are you trying to tell me? Speak Lord your servant is listening'.

God doesn't waste anything. If something is going on in your life, it's going on for a reason. It's not just serendipity. There's a grace there. Our difficulty is that we will respond in that same old sleeping, left-brain way and we can't hear the grace.

So we have to say, like young Samuel, "Lord, your servant is listening". At that point, He speaks. And the scripture tell us that Samuel grew up and the Lord was with him not permitting any words of him not to be without effect.

Now, where does all of this take place? In the temple. Samuel is sleeping in the temple. This I really critical. The reason this is so critical is this is the place where God dwells. This is the place where God speaks. Location, location, location. Somebody asked me once what do I love about Elmhurst. I said, 'Location, location, location'. (laughter) There's no city in Illinois with a better location than what we have right here right now. You can get anywhere from Elmhurst. Anywhere. It's a marvelous location. So the location is really important. And this is the place where the arc of the covenant was. This is where the presence of God was. So because he was at that location, he was at that place, God was able to speak to him. So location is really important. Where God dwells.

Where does God dwell? That's the template. Let's take it one more step. Let's go now to the step of what's going on in the Gospel. Because it's the same pattern. We've got the disciples of John. John is the Eli figure. John the Baptist is the mentor. John is the teacher. John is not the answer. You will know you are finding a real mentor, a real teacher, a truly spiritual person because they will always point beyond themselves. They will not have the answer for you. If somebody comes to me and they want me to fix something in their lives, I have to tell them I can't. I can't make it better. But I can point you to the one who can. I can show you where it can be healed. I can show you where you can enter into the Presence.

So the Presence of God is coming and speaking to John. The divine presence always speaks first. And next Sunday's Gospel is a little different version. It's a synoptic version. We see Jesus is going to come by and He's going to call them right out of their fishing nets. While Jesus is calling by His presence, John sees it and he points behind himself and says to them, "Look, there it is. There's the Lamb of God. You go follow Him. I don't have the answers. But you can follow him.'

So they come up to Jesus...and you can almost see these two little clowns right behind Him and Jesus is walking around and they are probably stepping on His heels. And He turns around and he asks the perfect Jesus question. And it's a question that Jesus asks everybody in this congregation and asks it everyday, 'What do you want? What are you seeking? What do you need? What is the deepest desire of your human heart?' There's nothing wrong with holy desires. What do you want? Of course, these two clowns don't know what to say. So they are hemming and hawing and stepping over their toes saying, 'Um, um, um...Where do you stay?' Location, Location, Location. Jesus says, 'I live in Elmhurst'. (laughter)

Where do you stay? Now, we're not talking about physical location here. He's going to say, 'Come on. I'll show you where I stay.' Where do you dwell? Where does Jesus dwell? Jesus dwells in the temple. No matter where Jesus goes He's dwelling in the temple. Jesus dwells in God. "The Father and I are one. The one who's seen me has seen the Father. We two are one. Do you want to see what God looks like? Look

at me. Why? Because God dwells in me. Where do I stay? I stay in God. I stay in the temple. I am the temple.”

Let's take it one step forward. Who else is the temple? St. Paul tells us today. You don't have to go to a physical temple. You don't even have to be in Elmhurst – You're the temple! You're the temple. God dwells in you. St. Paul tells us that you are the Body of Christ in space and time and you are temples of the Holy Spirit.

You don't have to go somewhere, to some location. Where is God located? In the greatest hiding place on Earth – in your heart. And yet, if we are asleep, we'll never know. And yet if we are asleep, no matter how many times He calls, we'll sleep through life. And many do.

We're told, 'Today you hear His voice, harden not your hearts'. Today He speaks to you. What is your response? Here I am Lord. I come to do your will. Speak Lord, your servant is listening. And if you listen, I promise you He will speak.