

HOMILY SUNDAY 12 - C
Birth of John the Baptist
(Isaiah 49:1-6; Psalm 139; Acts 13:22-26; Luke 1:57-66; 80)

Have you answered the call of God in your life?

Be a disciple: Take up your cross and follow Jesus

In the first reading today, Isaiah is called for a mission, a vocation. His mission is to renew, recall, restore Israel and reveal to her the salvation of God.

In the second reading, both Paul and John the Baptism are examples of men called, chosen to do the same, only now they point to Jesus as the salvation of God. They both had a special vocation and fulfilled their vocation, their call from God.

In the Gospel, we hear about the unusual circumstances surrounding the birth of John the Baptist: an old couple beyond child-bearing years; the barrenness of Elizabeth; the naming of John and recovery of speech by Zechariah; awe throughout the hill country of Judah; and John growing strong in the Spirit.

These readings leave us with two questions: who is this Jesus clearly announced by John and so fervently proclaimed by Paul? And what is he calling you and me to do, to be?

How would you introduce Jesus to an alien? Who is he for you? Knowing about him through study and courses is not the same as experiencing him in our lives. That personal experience of Jesus is what transformed both John the Baptist and Paul into disciples.

As I ponder this mystery in my own life, I realize that I have come to my own my understanding of who Jesus is for me. I have learned to praise Jesus in prayer every morning from out of my experience and understanding of him. I will share that with you as I pray it each day:

Lord Jesus Christ, totally receptive to the Father's love,
humble, obedient pure and faithful in response to that love;
Son of God, Son of Man, Son of David, Savior, Redeemer,
Word made flesh, sinless one, free from addiction,
The Way, the Truth, the Life, the Resurrection,
Suffering servant, Crucified Messiah, Sacrificial victim,
Risen Lord, victorious king, friend of sinners. Amen.

Following this Jesus is another whole dimension. To be a disciple, is to become a carbon copy of Jesus. It is to take on his way of thinking, of acting, even of feeling. The bracelet worn by some people with the letters *WWJD* on it is actually a great idea, a reminder that as a disciple of Jesus we are called to follow him, to do what he would do.

The thing that Jesus did above all else was do the Father's will even though that took him to the

cross. Jesus did three things with the cross: he accepted it; he carried it, and he shared it. It was through the cross that he revealed for us the depths of God's love for us, and through the cross that he broke the power of death and rose to new life.

As disciples, we must also take up our cross, carry it and share it, as Jesus did. The cross for us will be an inconvenience; an unpleasant truth; something we don't like. It might be caring for a sick family member; putting up with an unpleasant employer; having a wayward child.

The cross might also be a call, a call from God to a different way of life. Within the Catholic Church we speak of four different calls, or vocations: Holy Orders, Religious life, Marriage and the single life.

Ever one of us has a call – God is calling us to one of these vocations. God is calling us as he called John the Baptist. God is calling us to be either a priest, a religious brother or sister, married, or serve him as a single person, perhaps even as a consecrated single person. Like Isaiah, we were called before we were born. Like Isaiah, we were named in our mother's womb. Like Isaiah, we are called to bring others back to God, to raise up the tribes of God's people, to restore the survivors of Israel. Like Isaiah, God wants to make us a light to the nations, that God's salvation might reach the ends of the earth.

What an exalted calling is ours. It is our task to be attentive to the Spirit of the Lord moving within us, to discern what God might be saying to us, what God might be calling us to. Would that we would respond as did Isaiah and St. Paul.

Many people ask themselves what they can do with their lives, what they can get out of life. God asks us to turn that question around. The key question is rather, "What does God want me to do with my life?" It is a bit like John F. Kennedy when he was campaigning for the presidency of the United States. I still remember his clarion call: "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask rather what you can do for your country."

The seeds of my own vocation go back a long way. As a family we drove eight miles every Sunday on gravel roads to attend church in Delmas. I remember the peace that we all felt in the car as we returned from mass. That I believe was already an experience of God calling. Then at home we would kneel around the kitchen table to recite the rosary during the months of May and October. I remember the peace in the house after the rosary. That too was God calling.

Later on there were those people who said to told me they thought I would make a good priest. Now the call from God was getting louder. And when the Oblates tried to sign me up after grade twelve, the call was blatant. However, being a shy farm kid and wanting to experience the world, I said "no" to that call and went to university instead. And there, Fr. Mallon, a French teacher, came out of class one day and asked me point blank, "Lavoie, did you ever think of being a priest?" And now I knew that God was still after me, and later that year, after a stint with the International singing group Up With people (where I realized I needed a life time commitment to feel fulfilled) I entered the Oblate Novitiate in Arnprior, Ontario, and the rest is history.

Saying "yes" to the call from God to priesthood, religious life, and now the episcopacy, has been

anything but boring. It has been a most interesting, meaningful and rewarding life. I can only say to the young people of today, "Dare to be different, dare to be like St. Paul or John the Baptist – listen to what God is asking of you in your life, and dare to say yes to whatever that call is asking of you. There will be the source of your peace and joy."

The Eucharist that we celebrate now makes present, through remembering, faith and prayer, the powerful love of Jesus on the cross.

May it empower us all to take up our cross as disciples and follow Jesus along the path that he has chosen for us. May God bless us all.