

Homily for the 2nd Sunday of Ordinary Time

January 13-14, 2018

Readings: 1 Samuel 3:3B-10,19; 1 Corinthians 6: 13C-15A, 17-20; John 1: 35-42

Preacher: Marlene Bessette

As I prayed over today's gospel, what kept surfacing for me is the power of a question. In my experience, a question is a very useful tool—in business, education, therapy...really in any kind of relationship. Good questions can spur innovation, learning, insight, and lead to personal and interpersonal growth.

I recently read that the inspiration for the instant Polaroid camera (Boy, I'm showing my age using a Polaroid as an example!) came about when the inventor's daughter, impatient to see a photo her father just took, asked, "Why do we have to wait for the picture?" Instead of just answering with an explanation of the chemical process to develop film negatives into photographs, the inventor allowed himself to be drawn into the question with an attitude of exploration and wonder—eventually resulting in a new technology. What this example demonstrates, as does our gospel, is that although the question is important, what happens next is what really matters.

The first words Jesus speaks in today's reading, indeed, the very first words he speaks in the Gospel of John, are, "What are you looking for?" How many of us have spent a lifetime asking and answering this question? I know that I have asked myself this question and acted on my answers many times over the course of my life, whether it was in getting an education, deciding where to live, pursuing a career or even getting married and starting a family—I first had to figure out "what I was looking for."

But how do we answer when it is Jesus asking us that question? In our gospel today, it was this question that started Jesus' ministry, his following. Speaking for myself, when I contemplate Jesus asking me, "What are you looking for?" the simple and at the same time complicated answer is "Myself!"

I am looking for the person that God created me to be and only by engaging in dialogue, in prayer, with Jesus, do I have some hope of getting an answer. I have been fortunate in that I was invited to engage in the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius a dozen years ago. The practice of evolving an intimate relationship with Jesus through regular prayer eventually gave me the courage to quit my corporate life and join Catholic Charities, it has given me the direction and

courage to speak to others of the joy one finds in working “for-purpose” rather than for-profit. Sometimes I would just like to stop and pat myself on the back for all I have done, but Jesus will not let me do that for long. What I have come to realize is that I am not yet done answering the question Jesus asks: “What are you looking for?”

Each one of us must answer that question for ourselves through the prayer practice that best connects your mind and spirit to our Lord. It might be the Mass and Eucharist, a retreat, spiritual direction, or bible study. It is safe to assume however, that after much honest soul-searching, the answer will never be selfish or self-serving. It must always reflect the love and forgiveness that Jesus brought into the world for each and every person on this planet. And in all likelihood, the true answer will stretch you beyond your comfort zone, beyond what you could ever imagine.

Will Jesus ever stop asking this question of us, regardless of how faithfully we believe we are leading our lives? In my prayer, I see us all walking after Jesus, faithfully following...and He stops, turns around, and asks yet again, “What are you looking for?” It’s almost like He’s saying: “Why are you just standing there? Can’t you see we have so much more to do? We still have the hungry and homeless, we still have the oppressed, the addicted, the refugee, the abused children, the frail elderly...we still have poverty even though the total wealth in our world could easily eradicate it...we still have suffering and war and racism and hatred. What are you looking for—it’s all around you!”

With a challenge like that, we may be tempted to stop because of the hopelessness of it all. But Jesus knows we don’t have the answers ourselves. That’s why He will always invite us, as he did Andrew and the first followers, to “Come, and you will see.”