

## FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK



2nd SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME - January 15, 2006 B

### TRUE & FALSE CALLS

Unfortunately, I do not know the name of the author of the following reflection on today's readings.

*In his memoirs about the Civil War, General Grant said that his best assistant generals were those who waited for him to call them to important commissions. The worst were those who, by political manipulation, arranged their call to high rank. With the latter, General Grant had a great deal of trial and woe, not to mention grief and tragedy.*

*The same might be true in our lives here on earth with respect to God's designs and His many calls to us His people. When we wait for God to call us to the important endeavors of life, rather than substitute our own self-contrived calls, our lives here on earth turn out much for the better. Not simply for ourselves, but also for people around us.*

*"Waiting" in this context does not refer simply to clock and calendar. It means being open to the grace of God at all times, with a willingness to fulfill our present duties to God and man, and with a constant pondering on how we might offer our time and talents to the glory of God and the betterment of mankind. WAITING is a state of soul, a calm alertness for what God might have in mind, especially when we dwell on the mysteries of Christ Jesus as they draw us to the Father.*

*Too often we miss the calls of God. Like this fellow, Samuel, in the First Reading today. He was not a bad man, but there was a flaw in his WAITING: he was confining himself to a human channel. Back and forth he went to his friend, Eli. Finally, on his friend's advice, Samuel turned to prayer and made it part of his WAITING. "Speak, (Lord)," he prayed, "your servant is listening." And from that moment on, Samuel became a great prophet on behalf of God, helping form God's chosen people. He heard God's call because his WAITING became rooted in prayer. He was willing to turn to his God and say, "Speak I will listen."*

*A danger to all this, of course, is contriving our own calls. Some Civil War generals "arranged" their own calls to high military positions, said General Grant. And their incompetence led to tragic consequences on the battle field.*

*In our own day, a man and woman call themselves to live together, but not to marriage. And their lives become too clumsy for pagans to explain and too*

*puzzling for parents to understand, not to mention too scandalous for children to emulate.*

*The drug pusher calls himself to poison the lives of youngsters. And parents grieve and children are lost.*

*A corporate executive calls himself to graft and fraud. And a once fine business goes bankrupt and a thousand people lose their jobs.*

*An adulterer calls himself to a noon hour affair every week. And two marriages disintegrate.*

*An unconverted alcoholic calls himself to proclaim he can drink, when everyone else knows he can't. And the world around him lives in misery.*

*Contrived calls, all. And no one is even whispering, "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening."*

*Fortunately, our Gospel today restores our spirit of hope in God's various calls to enter His designs. Portraying a scene of a discovery ready to happen, the evangelist John records two of our predecessors seeking out Jesus. "What are you looking for?" He asked them.*

*They responded that they were looking for Him, and wanted to visit Him. That's another way of saying, "Speak, Lord, we want to listen." Very gracious was His reply: "Come and see." Yes, come and see what God has in mind. Look at the designs on His drawing board. Of course, to do this requires time with Him our Lord and Savior.*

*At this point some people might say this scene pertains to the call of the fisherman to become apostles, and really doesn't touch ordinary folks. Not so fast. Time out.*

*These men were looking for the Messiah, not the ordaining prelate. He was calling them to be His followers, to embrace the faith He would plant in their souls, and to open up to what He would call them to be, and to do, in the days to come. They were seeking Him, and He was calling them. It was, plain and simple, Conversion 101. True, there is the implication of leadership for the man, Simon, as Jesus changed his name to the Rock. Nevertheless, conversion was the moment here. And it is the same for us now. For you and me.*

*And as we hear God's call—to marriage, to be a foreman, to be a good dad or mom, to be a teacher, to be a priest, or to be just a good person—we want to be sure He hears us, praying, "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening!" And help me, Lord, to do it right.*

## TWO REFLECTIONS ON PRAYER

This first reflection on prayer is by Ronald Rolheiser, an Oblate priest, theologian and award winning author. My hope is that you will not only read the article but make time to sit with it in a reflective and prayerful way. Fr. Ron writes:

*One of the classic definitions of prayer tells us that prayer is raising mind and heart to God. In essence, that says it all. The problem is that often we raise our minds but not our hearts. Our prayer tends to be intellectual but not affective, and we tend to think of prayer more as a way of gaining insight than as a way of being touched in the heart. But prayer is ultimately about love—not insight. It is meant to establish friendship. Friendship, as we know, is not as much a question of having insight into each other’s lives as it is of mutually touching each other in affection and understanding. Friendship, as John of the Cross puts it, is a question of attaining “boldness with each other.” When we have touched each other’s lives deeply, we can be “bold” with each other. We can then ask each other for help, ask for each other’s presence without needing an excuse, share a feeling, share an insight, or even just share a joke. Good friendship inspires “boldness.”*

*The object of prayer is precisely to try to attain this kind of “boldness” with God, to try to reach a point where we are comfortable enough with God to ask for help, to share a feeling, to share an insight, or even to share a joke, just as we would with a trusted friend. But to reach this kind of trust we must first let God touch us in the heart, and not just in insight. This means that prayer is not so much a question of having beautiful thoughts about God as it is of feeling God’s affection for us. Sadly, that is precisely what we generally miss in prayer—the experience of God’s affection.*

*What is common in prayer is the tendency to talk to ourselves rather than to God. For example, when we are at prayer and we begin to have various feelings and insights, the almost automatic reaction is to begin to speak to ourselves about what’s happening in us, saying things like: “This is wonderful!” “This scares me!” “I shouldn’t be feeling this way!” “I can’t wait to write this down!” When this happens we end up speaking to ourselves rather than to God.*

*This point was clarified for me recently on a retreat given by Bob Michel of St. Paul University, Ottawa, a highly respected mentor in the art of prayer. He suggests that perhaps the number one problem in prayer, among those who seriously try to sustain private prayer, is precisely the tendency to constantly talk to ourselves rather than to God.*

*Quoting Leon Bloy, who once said, “There are persons who adore themselves before the Blessed Sacrament,” he suggests that too often in prayer we say things to ourselves that we should be saying to God. In prayer, he says, we should never say things like this to ourselves: “This is wonderful!” “This scares me!” We need to say them to God. The key to prayer, in his view, is to turn from ourselves to God.*

*And the pivotal part of that turning is that we must ask God to touch us affectively and not just intellectually. When we go to pray what we most need to ask for is to hear God’s voice within us saying: “I love you!” Nothing would heal us more and nothing would make us more “bold” before life’s mystery and goodness than hearing those words from God. Our very capacity to love depends upon it.*

*Thomas Merton, commenting upon our struggle to love and forgive each other, once said: “The beginning of the fight against hatred is not the commandment to love, but what must necessarily come before in order to make the commandment bearable and comprehensible. It is the prior commandment to believe. “The root of Christian love is not the will to love, but the faith that one is loved ... until this discovery is made, until this liberation has been brought about by the divine mercy, men and women are imprisoned in hate.”*

*The Gospels agree. The first words out of Jesus’ mouth in John’s Gospel are a question, the most timeless of all questions: “What do you want?” (also translated as “What are you searching for?”). Jesus asks the question at the beginning of the Gospel, but doesn’t fully answer it until the end.*

*His answer? The word he speaks to Mary Magdala early on the morning of the resurrection. She has been searching for him, is bewildered, and now when she finds him doesn’t recognize him. He repeats for her the question he began the Gospels with” “What are you searching for?” and then supplies the answer himself. With deep affection, one-to-one, he pronounces her name: “Mary.”*

*In the end, that’s what we are all searching for and most need. We need to hear God, affectionately, one-to-one, pronounce our names. Nothing would heal us more of our deep restlessness and bitterness than to hear God call us by name and say: “I love you!”*

### Reflection Questions

- What spoke to you most in the above article?
- To what extent do you think your prayer is intellectual, a “head thing” versus conversation flowing from your heart?
- Nearly all of us believe in our head God loves us. To what extent do we believe it in the core of our

belief? A good one-liner prayer is: “Lord, help me to experience in the core of my being your infinite love for me.”

- How would you answer the question: “What are you searching for?”

### A Second Reflection

The following article is by Fr. Donal Neary, a Jesuit priest. He writes:

*You pray when you're in trouble. I certainly do. I think we all do. Exams, illness, the dark confusion of life. And that's good. It's good to turn to God in bad times. Jesus never turned anyone away because they were in trouble. And you get a bit of peace, or there is an answer.*

*There are two types of asking—one is to ask for help and be patient and the other is where you say things like “I'll do this God, if you do that”. “I'll never smoke drunk again if the school lets me back in.” It's a sort of transaction—a business type of prayer.*

*I prayed the first way for years—I had a stutter in school and I prayed I would get rid of it. Prayed I could speak again, properly. Prayed I wouldn't be laughed at when I couldn't answer a question. I believed I'd be cured.*

*They call this type of prayer transformational. It lets you be changed. When I prayed about the stutter, I learned patience and I learned trust. I realized that I was worthwhile as a person not as a speaker. I didn't have to be on the successful roller coaster to make good friends. Somehow I trusted God would cure me at some stage. And if he didn't... well, I don't know what would have happened, but the contact was real. It was real presence—me to God and God to me as both of us really are.*

*The first is more what I think real prayer is. When you come to God as you are and trust even a bit, you get changed, transformed, for the better.*

*They call the second form of prayer “transactional”. It's bargaining with God. Not that this is an entirely bad thing. It can be very healthy to offer something up along with a prayer. The problem is if we see it too much as a business deal and don't come closer to God through the experience. We can feel justified in keeping this distance because after all “It's a fair swap, isn't it?” God has far more to give than just what we think we want.*

*Pray for what you need...with all your heart. But don't stop praying when the exam is over or the doctor gives you the all clear or the school lets you back and things go well. Then start thanking. Even before you get something, thank God.*

*Thanks is the door to prayer. Thank God for good things while you're praying. Just be thankful and you are praying. Light a candle at night and spend a few minutes being grateful That's prayer. Thanks makes you realize who you are—a child of God, humble to receive a lot from others, part of the whole world of love that God creates. To pray is to be grateful, and if you pray, you know you're loved. Someone said once that ‘Prayer is relaxing into the mystery of being loved by God.’*

*Prayer is easy enough really, once you begin. You'll realize that prayer is more than talk, it's listening. And this can change you too. For the better.*

### Reflection Questions

- What spoke to you most in this second article?
- Do you ever bargain with God? If so, how do you feel about it?

### Prayer Before Exams

Spirit of wisdom and knowledge,  
Bring serenity to my mind and heart  
While I take my exams.  
Give me quiet confidence in my  
Gifts and talents.  
Remind me of my dignity and preciousness  
In a world where I compete in exams,  
For jobs, for a place in life.  
Anoint my memory with the power of recall.  
Keep me calm on the day of my exams.  
May the results be for the enrichment  
Of my life, and the education of my heart.  
This I ask in Jesus' Name  
Amen

Have a blessed week,

