

Krijtberg, 13 January 2024, 2nd Sunday through the year. 1 Sam. 3:3b-10.19, 1 Cor. 6:13c-15a.17-20, John 1:35-42

Peter van Dael SJ

CALLED

Today's readings are about vocation. The first reading is about young Samuel's vocation. The gospel reading is about the vocation of Jesus' first disciples. Vocation can be defined as an invitation to a particular task or way of life. Following the readings, I want to say three things about vocation.

Vocation through others

First, it is striking that vocation comes from outside and that others have something to do with it. In his sleep, young Samuel heard a voice calling him. He did not know who that voice was from, until old Eli told him it was the voice of God. In the gospel, John points out two of his disciples to Jesus, who is passing by. Then Andrew, one of those disciples, brings his brother Simon to Jesus. It is a kind of chain reaction: John the Baptist-Andrew-Simon. We too are links of a chain: to us faith has been passed on by others, we too pass it on to others. We should not understand this chain clerically, as if only priests and pastors pass on the gospel. It also passes from father and mother to son and daughter. Peter writes in his first letter that all believers should bear witness to Christ and be ready to account for the hope that lives in them (1 Peter 3:15). This is how the 'general priesthood' is exercised. The Second Vatican Council pointed out that all believers exercise their general priesthood by works of active love (*Lumen gentium*). The 'synodal process' initiated by Pope Francis also points to the responsibility of every baptized person; every believer has a right to speak.

Called by your name

Secondly, we notice that names are mentioned in the readings. In the first reading, God called out: Samuel! Samuel! A name is the designation of a particular person in its unrepeatable uniqueness. When God calls you, He calls you by your name. Isaiah has God say: *I have called you by your name, you are mine* (43:1). Jesus, the Good Shepherd, also calls us by our name, as we read in

John's gospel: *he calls his own sheep by name* (10:3). Using one's name also indicates intimacy. A beautiful text expressing this is found in the book of Isaiah: *I have engraved you on the palms of my hands* (49:16). Modernly translated, you could say: I have tattooed your name in the palm of my hand.

At birth, you are given a name. That name is mentioned at your baptism. Hence people speak of baptismal name. You might share this name with one of your parents or ancestors. And usually you share your name with a Biblical person or a particular saint. The name you have been given expresses that you are in a certain tradition. Such a name says that you are not alone, but belong somewhere.

It also happens that someone is given a new name. Such a thing happens at the end of the gospel reading. We heard how Andrew took his brother Simon to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said: *You are Simon ... you will be called Cephas – which is translated Peter*. Simon's new name is an indication of the task to which he was called.

Searching and finding

Thirdly, it must be said that vocation is not just a matter of being passively called, but also involves something of one's own initiative. This is reflected in the words 'seeking' and 'finding' in the Gospel reading. *What are you seeking?* Jesus asked John's two disciples. They went with Jesus and stayed with him all day. When Andrew met his brother Simon, he said to him: *We have found the messiah*. Seeking and finding belong together. Seeking something and longing for something make man human. A philosopher once said: a man is worth what his desires are worth. If you desire or seek nothing, you will get nothing. If you desire, if you seek, you will find. We hear Jesus say the same thing: *Seek and you will find* (Mt.7:7).

We all are seeking and we all hope to find something. But each of us is also called personally, we are called by our names. We are called like Samuel and like the first disciples from the gospel reading. They are early links of a long chain. We too are engaged in that chain. As baptized people, we are called to witness to all around us by word and deed to Jesus who called us.