



Bible Reflection on Vocations

2017 is the PANAM Zone Year for Divine Word Vocations. Each month throughout this year, the biblical reflection will focus on a passage related to vocation awareness, discernment and promotion. In each reflection, the Bible Committee will make use of the five steps of *lectio divina*: read, meditate, pray, contemplate and act.

February 2017 — No One Can Serve Two Masters

1. *Read*

Matthew 6:24-34

No one can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat [or drink], or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds in the sky; they do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are not you more important than they? Can any of you by worrying add a single moment to your life-span? Why are you anxious about clothes? Learn from the way the wild flowers grow. They do not work or spin. But I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was clothed like one of them. If God so clothes the grass of the field, which grows today and is thrown into the oven tomorrow, will he not much more provide for you, O you of little faith? So do not worry and say, ‘What are we to eat?’ or ‘What are we to drink?’ or ‘What are we to wear?’ All these things the pagans seek. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom [of God] and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides. Do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself. Sufficient for a day is its own evil.”

(Gospel reading of the Eighth Sunday of the Year – Cycle A, February 26, 2017)

2. Meditate

Choices are part of life. Although we sometimes talk about fate, destiny and luck, much of what happens to us in life is a consequence of our choices. That's not true of a slave – and the text of this Gospel presumes that slavery exists. Slaves have no choice regarding their masters. They are usually bought or sold, inherited or rented out, without their opinion being asked.

Many masters are quite demanding, requiring instant obedience and service. That's true whether the “master” is a human being, an addiction, or an important goal in one's life such as success, influence, power, financial independence, a better job, a good home or an important position in society.

Having more than one master adds difficulty to a slave's life, since in a conflict the slave has no idea which master to obey. Jesus reminds us that if we have two masters, we “will either hate one and love the other or be devoted to one and despise the other” (Matt 6:24). Love and hatred as used here are not necessarily emotions since in the Bible these opposites can simply indicate that we have choices to make.

According to Jesus, these choices are much more important than deciding which brand of cereal we want to buy or which pair of shoes we want to wear. The most important choices have to do with our relationship with God, who wants our undivided service and devotion, not simply an occasional nod in the direction of the Divine.

We know from the Bible that God loves us and constantly has us in mind: “Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you” (Isa 49:15; see Isa 43:1-4; Jer 1:5; Zeph 3:17).

We can be confident that we are part of the divine plan, that we are being called to serve our Divine Master. Nevertheless, our relationship with God is a consequence not only of God's grace and call, but also of our own openness and our willingness to respond to God.

The Bible frequently reminds us that our relationship with God depends on our own choices. This is especially true in the Book of Deuteronomy, one of whose favorite themes is election or choice. In Deuteronomy, God chooses people and places for special purposes. The book also reminds Israel of its own election: “For you are a people sacred to the Lord, your God; he has chosen you from all the nations on the face of the earth to be a people peculiarly his own” (Deut 7:6; see also 10:15; 14:2). In Deuteronomy choice is preeminently – but not exclusively – a divine activity.

We don't know the reasons why God makes certain choices, but it would be a mistake to assume that any person or group is *worthy* or *deserving* of the divine choice. The Bible seems to indicate that, generally speaking, God chooses the unworthy, the lowly, the poor and the weak (cf. Exod 3:11-12; Judg 6:15; 1 Sam 2:3-10; 1 Sam 16:7; Isa 6:5-8; Jer 1:6-8; Luke 1:48, 52).

In Deuteronomy it isn't just God who chooses. We are invited – no, commanded – to respond and freely to make our own choice when we are called to serve God (see Deut 30:19). Since we have the obligation to choose, we can either accept or reject God's offer of love. We can embrace God or refuse to acknowledge God as our master. For us as Christians this happens whenever we choose something or someone else besides God, including God's persistent rival for the affection of human hearts: *mammon*, which means "property," "wealth" or "money."

Human life is not self-sufficient, so we constantly look for something outside ourselves to "serve" and to give us meaning. All too often that something ends up being whatever it takes to make us comfortable and powerful. (The avoidance of mammon is certainly the basis of the vow of poverty.)

The foundation of our lives must be a sound one ... and that foundation can only be God. If God is our master, then it is essential that we love God with all our heart, soul and strength (Deut 6:5; Matt 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27). Service of God requires wholehearted devotion. As Jesus puts it, "No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:60).

Paul reminds us that we are "servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 Cor 4:1). For some Christians, that may entail making a commitment to the consecrated life or to public service as lay ministers, deacons, priests or bishops. God's ministers need to be both worthy of trust (1 Cor 4:2) and able to trust (Matt 6:25-34).

A relationship with God requires trust on both sides: we trust that God calls us, loves us and support us; God trusts that we will be faithful to our calling and willing to allow God to be our master.

We can trust that God provides for our needs (Ps 103:11, 17-18; 146:7), and so we do not need to be anxious about what we are to eat or drink or wear. We also do not need to be anxious if our ministry is not successful. As St. Theresa of Calcutta was known to say, "God calls us not to be successful, but to be faithful."

A vocation is being the person God wants us to be, not what the world (*mammon*) wants us to be.

3. *Pray*

Prayer for Families and Vocations

God our Father, in baptism you called me by name,
and made me a member of your people, the Church.
I praise you for your goodness,
I thank you for your gifts.

Father, bless your Church with love.
Raise up in our communities good and holy families,
loving husbands and wives,
devoted parents and children.
Raise up from our families and friends,
dedicated and generous leaders,
who will serve as Sisters and Brothers,
priests and deacons,
missionaries and lay ministers.

Send your Spirit to guide and strengthen me,
that I may serve your people,
following the example of your Son, Jesus,
in whose name I offer this prayer. Amen.

(Jamaica 1981)

4. *Contemplate*

Spend some time quietly thanking God for choosing you to fulfill some small but important part of God's plan.

5. *Act*

- Pray for an increase in religious vocations.
- Pray for someone you know who is struggling to discern his or her religious vocation.
- Prepare a homily on making choices.

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