



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.

March 2017 — Leave Everything Behind

1. *Read*

Matthew 17:1-9

Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, conversing with him. Then Peter said to Jesus in reply, “Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”

While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud cast a shadow over them, then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” When the disciples heard this, they fell prostrate and were very much afraid. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and do not be afraid.” And when the disciples raised their eyes, they saw no one else but Jesus alone.

As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, “Do not tell the vision to anyone until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

(Gospel reading of the Second Sunday of Lent –
Cycle A, March 12, 2017)

2. Meditate

Peter, James and John discovered their vocation long before Jesus was transfigured before them on a mountaintop. Jesus had met them and Peter's brother Andrew on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Peter and Andrew were "casting a net into the sea" (Matthew 4:18), while James and John were "mending their nets" (Matthew 4:21). In other words, they were busy at work when Jesus called them to leave their jobs and their families behind in order to become his disciples. Amazingly enough, they immediately left everything in order to follow Jesus.

After some time together Jesus took Peter, James, and John to a high mountain, where Jesus' appearance changed dramatically. Moses and Elijah joined them for conversation and a heavenly voice proclaimed that Jesus was God's Son. It's not every day that human beings have such experiences, so Peter wanted to make it permanent, suggesting that he build booths for Jesus and his wonderful visitors.

The vision, however, also had a frightening aspect, for the disciples became terrified when they heard God's voice. Experiencing the presence of God can be both wonderful and frightening, delightful and demanding, all at the same time.

Before they knew it, the vision was over. Such experiences are only glimpses of heaven and are not meant to last during our journey here on earth. The disciples were not even allowed to breathe a word of their experience to others as long as Jesus was still among them.

Normally a religious vocation begins in the ordinary circumstances of our lives, with prayer, reflection and the advice and guidance of others – not through extraordinary visions or the visit of angels.

Immediately after the Transfiguration, Jesus, Peter, James, and John headed down the mountain. They rejoined the rest of their group. They did not stay in one place very long.

Disciples are not meant to get too comfortable in one locality. They need to move on to ensure that the Kingdom of God is proclaimed and that all hear the Good News (see Matthew 8:19-20; 10:5-15; 28:19-20; Mark 1:35-39; 13:10; 16:15-20; Luke 10:1-12).

The Church is not meant to be an exclusive club of those who know the truth and have experienced the divine in their lives. The Church is meant to be a gathering of pilgrims who are constantly inviting others to join them on their journey to the Kingdom. Even the monk's vow of stability involves a spiritual journey to expand one's horizons to others. Hospitality is an important virtue not only in the monastery but in every Christian community, since we need to welcome all those who are on their journey to God.

This is confirmed in the first reading of the Second Sunday of Lent (Year A) – Genesis 12:1-4. In this passage God commands Abraham, “Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk and from your father’s house to a land that I will show you” (v. 1). Although Abraham was no longer young (he was already 75 years old), he packed up his belongings and moved with his wife and nephew to a land that was totally unfamiliar.

In fact, the Lord had to “direct” Abraham, since he himself had no idea where to go. The familiar and the past were left behind. In the future Abraham and Sarah would remain immigrants and strangers in the land promised to them by God.

Our ancestors in the faith began a journey that never ends, since that journey continued with Israel and the Church. Israel’s journey in the desert became a symbol of what we are all about. If the Church is expected to remain on the move, to journey toward the Kingdom of God, how much more must its ministers and those consecrated to the service of the Lord!

Interestingly enough, Abraham and Sarah did not leave *everything* behind when they left for an unknown land. They still had one another, their nephew, servants and some possessions. But they remind us that when we follow Jesus, we’re also expected to leave at least *something* behind – family, home, relationships, possessions, culture, language, personal plans – and perhaps even *everything* (Luke 5:11; 9:3; 10:4; 14:33).

Although the transfiguration of Jesus did not initiate the vocation of Peter, James, and John, it certainly strengthened and affirmed their calling. After experiencing this vision, Jesus tells them, “Do not be afraid” (See Matthew 10:26-31; Luke 12:4-7, 32).

Fear has the ability to keep us from growing, from living joyfully, from following through on God’s plans for us. Fear paralyzes us like the sparrow paralyzed by the sight of the snake or the deer on the road that cannot move because of a car’s blazing headlights.

The transfiguration of Jesus was meant to ease the disciples’ fears about the future. Jesus promised that his disciples will face many difficulties, persecutions and failures (Matthew 10:16-25). But he also promised the help of the Holy Spirit when the Church and its ministers have to face such problems (Luke 12:11-12; John 14:16-18, 26).

Despite our fears, we can leave everything behind – even our fears – in order to follow Jesus and to live out faithfully the vocation to which God has called us.



3. Pray

LORD of the Harvest,

BLESS young people with the gift of courage to respond to your call. Open their hearts to great ideals, to great things.

INSPIRE all of your disciples to mutual love and giving – for vocations blossom in the good soil of faithful people.

INSTILL those in religious life, parish ministries, and families with the confidence and grace to invite others to embrace the bold and noble path of a life consecrated to you.

UNITE us to Jesus through prayer and sacrament, so that we may cooperate with you in building your reign of mercy and truth, of justice and peace. Amen.

(Prayer of Pope Francis, adapted by the National Religious Vocation Conference)

4. Contemplate

Remember gratefully some of those occasions when God helped you to face your fears and overcome any difficulties you may have faced in your vocational calling.

5. Act

Give a word of encouragement to someone you know who may be fearful of the future or who is having difficulties discerning a vocation to religious life or public ministry. Promise to pray for him or her.

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