



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.

December 2017 – Humble Service

1. *Read*

John 1:6-8, 19-28

A man named John was sent from God. He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to testify to the light.

And this is the testimony of John. When the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests and Levites [to him] to ask him, “Who are you?” he admitted and did not deny it, but admitted, “I am not the Christ.” So they asked him, “What are you then? Are you Elijah?” And he said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” He answered, “No.” So they said to him, “Who are you, so we can give an answer to those who sent us? What do you have to say for yourself?” He said:

*“I am the voice of one crying out in the desert,
make straight the way of the Lord,”*

as Isaiah the prophet said.” Some Pharisees were also sent. They asked him, “Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ or Elijah or the Prophet?” John answered them, “I baptize with water; but there is one among you whom you do not recognize, the one who is coming after me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie.” This happened in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

(Gospel of the Third Sunday of Advent,
Year B, December 17, 2017)

2. Meditate

It takes time to discern one's vocation. Jesus' 40 days in the desert were probably not only a time of temptation but also a time of discernment, of discovering the demands and the limits of his own vocation.

John the Baptist also spent a good amount of time in the wilderness where he learned that he was called to be “the voice of one crying out in the desert” (John 1:23). The Baptist discerned that there were limits to his vocation. He was not the Messiah, not Elijah, and not *the* prophet (John 1:20-21).

His task was limited to crying out, baptizing and witnessing to Jesus. As limited as this vocation might seem to be, it was still a response to God’s call. In fact, John’s vocation was a fulfillment of Sacred Scripture (Isaiah 40:3). Thus it was a legitimate vocation, even if some priests and Levites from Jerusalem questioned and even challenged that legitimacy (John 1:19).

The Gospel of John describes John the Baptist’s vocation as “testimony,” for this precursor of the Messiah was to “testify to the light” (John 1:7, 8). Testimony and testifying are legal actions that take place in a court of law. The Fourth Gospel frequently uses such legal expressions to point out the legitimacy of John’s and Jesus’ ministries.

In the New American Bible translation, the English word “testimony” appears nine times in the Gospel of John: John 1:7, 19; 3:11, 32, 33; 5:31, 32, 34, 36). Various forms of the verb “testify” occur 31 times (1:7, 8, 15, 32, 34; 2:25; 3:11, 26, 28, 32; 4:39, 44; 5:31, 32, 33, 36, 37, 39; 7:7; 8:13, 14, 18; 10:25; 12:17; 13:21; 15:26, 27; 18:23, 37; 19:25; 21:24). Nine times this testimony is that of John the Baptist (1:7, 8, 15, 19, 32, 34; 3:26; 5:32, 33).

John’s vocation was to testify to the light, that is, to Jesus. His task was to help others discover that Jesus was the Messiah. Isn’t that the focus of every Christian vocation?

The Baptist’s vocation of testifying to Jesus is further spelled out in the first chapter of the Gospel of John: “This was he of whom I said, ‘The one who is coming after me ranks ahead of me because he existed before me’” (John 1:15). John confesses that Jesus outranks him, that Jesus even existed before him (a hint at Jesus’ pre-existence as the divine *logos*, the Divine Word).

John further testifies: “I saw the Spirit come down like a dove from the sky and remain upon him. I did not know him, but the one who sent

me to baptize with water told me, ‘On whomever you see the Spirit come down and remain, he is the one who will baptize with the holy Spirit.’ Now I have seen and testified that he is the Son of God” (John 1:32-34). The reference is to Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan River.

God had revealed to John that the one who received the Spirit was not only the Messiah but the Son of God. John’s testimony is significant, for it leads others to follow Jesus and recognize him as the Messiah and Son of God (John 1:41, 49).

In the Fourth Gospel, John the Baptist was the first person to identify Jesus as Messiah and Son of God. After the Resurrection, Thomas also recognizes Jesus: “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28).

John begins a process that is the aim of the entire Gospel of God: “These are recorded so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God...” (John 20:31).

John recognized that he played “second fiddle” to Jesus, for he himself was not the light (John 1:8) and was unworthy to loosen Jesus’ sandal strap (John 1:27). He confessed that “he (Jesus) must increase, I must decrease” (John 3:30), for John was not the bridegroom but only the bridegroom’s friend (John 3:29). This prophet had the humility to recognize that he was not the center of attention and that his vocation was to direct the attention of others to Jesus, who was the light, the Son of God, and the Lamb of God (John 1:9, 29, 34, 36).

John the Baptist is thus a good example for us, since he models Christian discipleship, which is always directed toward Jesus. St. Paul reminds us that humility should be characteristic of our Christian vocation: “Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests...” (Philippians 2:3-4).

Paul points out that Jesus himself also serves as our model of humility: “Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:7-8; see Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45).

Those who follow Jesus, especially those called to ordained ministry and consecrated life, cannot claim to be superior to others. Like Jesus, their mission is to serve, not to be served (Matthew 20:26-27; Mark 10:43-44; John 13:14).



3. Pray

Prayer for Consecrated Life

O God, throughout the ages you have called women and men to pursue lives of perfect charity through the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

We give you thanks for these courageous witnesses of faith and models of inspiration.

Their pursuit of holy lives teaches us to make a more perfect offering of ourselves to you. Continue to enrich your Church by calling forth sons and daughters who, having found the pearl of great price, treasure the Kingdom of Heaven above all things.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

4. Contemplate

Spend some time contemplating the image of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples, reminding yourself that you too are called to serve and not to be served.

5. Act

Find an opportunity to let someone else go ahead of you or be served before you today (e.g., at a meal, at a bus stop, in a store or a bank).

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