

Pondering the Word...

THE ANAWIM WAY

Daily Liturgical Meditations

*Baptism of the Lord to Eighth Week
in Ordinary Time*

*January 9 to March 1, 2022
Cycle C - Year 2*

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What is the Anawim Spirituality?

Our spirituality has three essential characteristics:

Liturgical

The Liturgy is the source of our formation. Daily, we draw inspiration from the readings and prayers of the Liturgy, which we understand to be the ponderings of Mary's heart. For this reason, we honor Mary under the title of Our Lady of the Liturgical Life.

Eucharistic

Jesus in the Eucharist is the center of our spirituality. By faithful participation in Holy Mass and frequent Eucharistic Adoration, we are empowered by the Presence of Jesus to go forth to serve the people of God in all the circumstances of life.

Marian

We entrust ourselves to Mary, the mother and model of every Christian. She continually forms us in her spirit of humility, compassion and reconciling love, transforming us into the likeness of Jesus. She shares with us her spiritual motherhood as we are called to bring forth the life of Jesus in others.

If you would like to explore the Anawim Community further, we invite you to contact us.

***The Baptism of the Lord
and
First Week in Ordinary Time***

***“You are my beloved Son;
with you I am well pleased.”***

Luke 3:22

Theme for the Week

As we celebrate Jesus' Baptism in the Jordan, we give glory to God for the priceless gift of our Baptism. Jesus has entered our lives at Baptism and drawn us into his mission of salvation. Let us treasure this sacramental gift with great joy and dignity as we share life in Christ with others.

IN BAPTISM WE ARE ‘IMMERSED’ IN COMMUNION WITH THE FATHER AND IN THE MISSION OF JESUS

A Spiritual Reflection by Pope Francis

Today, at the conclusion of the Liturgical Season of Christmas, we celebrate the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. The liturgy calls us to more fully get to know Jesus, whose birth we have just celebrated; and for this reason the Gospel (cf. Lk 3:15-16, 21-22) illustrates two important elements: Jesus’ relationship with the people and Jesus’ relationship with the Father.

In the narrative of the Baptism, administered to Jesus by John the Baptist in the waters of the Jordan, we see first and foremost the role of the people. Jesus is in the midst of the people. This is not just background scenery, but is an essential component of the event. Before immersing himself in the water, Jesus *‘immerses’ himself in the crowd*; he joins it, fully taking on the human condition, sharing everything, except sin. In his divine holiness, full of grace and mercy, the Son of God became flesh precisely to take upon himself and take away the sin of the world: taking on our miseries, our human condition. Thus today’s event is also *an epiphany*, because by going to have himself baptized by John, in the midst of the repentant people, Jesus manifests the logic and meaning of his mission.

By joining the people who ask John for the Baptism of conversion, Jesus shares with them the deep desire for inner renewal. And the Holy Spirit, who descends upon him “in bodily form, as a dove” (v. 22), is a sign that with Jesus a new world is being initiated, a ‘new creation’ in which all those who welcome Jesus into their life participate. The words of the Father are also addressed to each of us, that we may be reborn with Christ in Baptism: “Thou art my beloved son; with thee I am well pleased” (v. 22). This Fatherly love, which all of us received on the day of our Baptism, is a flame that was lit in our heart, and needs to be kindled by means of prayer and charity.

The second element emphasized by Luke the Evangelist is that, after his immersion in the people and in the waters of the Jordan, Jesus *‘immerses’ himself in prayer, that is, in communion with the Father*. Baptism is the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry, of his

mission in the world as the envoy of the Father in order to manifest his goodness and his love for mankind. This mission is fulfilled in constant and perfect union with the Father and with the Holy Spirit. The Church's mission too, and that of each of us, in order to be faithful and fruitful, is called to 'graft' ourselves onto that of Jesus. It means regenerating continually in prayer, evangelization and the apostolate, in order to bear a clear Christian witness not according to human designs, but according to the plan and style of God.

Dear brothers and sisters, the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord is a propitious opportunity to renew with gratitude and conviction the promises made at our Baptism, by committing ourselves to live in harmony with it daily. It is also very important, as I have said to you many times, to know the date of our Baptism. I could ask: 'Who among you knows the date of his or her Baptism?' Not everyone, to be sure. If some of you do not know it, when you get home, ask your parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, godparents, family friends.... Ask: 'On what date was I baptized?' And then, do not forget it: let it be a date kept in your heart to be celebrated every year.

May Jesus, who saved us not for our own merits but in order to realize the immense goodness of the Father, make us merciful toward all. May the Virgin Mary, Mother of Mercy, be our guide and our model.

Pope Francis, Angelus Message, January 13, 2019
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January 9, Sunday
The Baptism of the Lord



First Reading: Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7

Thus says the LORD:

Here is my servant whom I uphold,
my chosen one with whom I am pleased,
upon whom I have put my spirit;
he shall bring forth justice to the nations,
not crying out, not shouting,
not making his voice heard in the street.
A bruised reed he shall not break,
and a smoldering wick he shall not quench,
until he establishes justice on the earth;
the coastlands will wait for his teaching.

I, the LORD, have called you for the victory of justice,
I have grasped you by the hand;
I formed you, and set you
as a covenant of the people,
a light for the nations,
to open the eyes of the blind,
to bring out prisoners from confinement,
and from the dungeon, those who live in darkness.

or **Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11**

Comfort, give comfort to my people,
says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her
that her service is at an end,
her guilt is expiated;
indeed, she has received from the hand of the LORD
double for all her sins.

A voice cries out:
In the desert prepare the way of the LORD!
Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God!
Every valley shall be filled in,
every mountain and hill shall be made low;
the rugged land shall be made a plain,
the rough country, a broad valley.

Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together;
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Go up onto a high mountain,
Zion, herald of glad tidings;
cry out at the top of your voice,
Jerusalem, herald of good news!

Fear not to cry out
and say to the cities of Judah:
Here is your God!

Here comes with power
the Lord GOD,
who rules by a strong arm;
here is his reward with him,
his recompense before him.

Like a shepherd he feeds his flock;
in his arms he gathers the lambs,
carrying them in his bosom,
and leading the ewes with care.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 29:1-2, 3-4, 3, 9-10
The Lord will bless his people with peace.

Give to the LORD, you sons of God,
give to the LORD glory and praise,
Give to the LORD the glory due his name;
adore the LORD in holy attire.

R. The Lord will bless his people with peace.

The voice of the LORD is over the waters,
the LORD, over vast waters.

The voice of the LORD is mighty;
the voice of the LORD is majestic.

R. The Lord will bless his people with peace.

The God of glory thunders,
and in his temple all say, "Glory!"
The LORD is enthroned above the flood;
the LORD is enthroned as king forever.

R. The Lord will bless his people with peace.

or *Psalm 104:1b-2, 3-4, 24-25, 27-28, 29-30*

O bless the Lord, my soul.

O LORD, my God, you are great indeed!

You are clothed with majesty and glory,
robed in light as with a cloak.

You have spread out the heavens like a tent-cloth.

R. O bless the Lord, my soul.

You have constructed your palace upon the waters.

You make the clouds your chariot;
you travel on the wings of the wind.

You make the winds your messengers,
and flaming fire your ministers.

R. O bless the Lord, my soul.

How manifold are your works, O LORD!

In wisdom you have wrought them all—
the earth is full of your creatures;

the sea also, great and wide,
in which are schools without number
of living things both small and great.

R. O bless the Lord, my soul.

They look to you to give them food in due time.

When you give it to them, they gather it;
when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.

R. O bless the Lord, my soul.

If you take away their breath, they perish and return to the dust.

When you send forth your spirit, they are created,
and you renew the face of the earth.

R. O bless the Lord, my soul.



Second Reading: Acts 10:34-38

Peter proceeded to speak to those gathered in the house of Cornelius, saying: “In truth, I see that God shows no partiality. Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him. You know the word that he sent to the Israelites as he proclaimed peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all, what has happened all over Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached, how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power. He went about doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.”

or *Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7*

Beloved: The grace of God has appeared, saving all and training us to reject godless ways and worldly desires and to live temperately, justly, and devoutly in this age, as we await the blessed hope, the appearance of the glory of our great God and savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to deliver us from all lawlessness and to cleanse for himself a people as his own, eager to do what is good.

When the kindness and generous love
of God our savior appeared,
not because of any righteous deeds we had done
but because of his mercy,
he saved us through the bath of rebirth
and renewal by the Holy Spirit,
whom he richly poured out on us
through Jesus Christ our savior,
so that we might be justified by his grace
and become heirs in hope of eternal life.

Gospel Acclamation: Cf. Mk 9:7

Alleluia, alleluia. The heavens were opened and the voice of the Father thundered: This is my beloved Son, listen to him. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***

or *see Luke 3:16*

Alleluia, alleluia. John said: One mightier than I is coming; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***



Gospel: Luke 3:15-16, 21-22

The people were filled with expectation, and all were asking in their hearts whether John might be the Christ. John answered them all, saying, “I am baptizing you with water, but one mightier than I is coming. I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

After all the people had been baptized and Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”



Meditation:

Our Gospel today, neatly presented in two paragraphs, describes for us two elements, one human and the other divine. The first sentence sets the scene: “The people were filled with expectation....”

This brief statement conjures up for us a sense of the excitement that is abuzz among the people. The focus of the excitement is John the Baptist. Prior to today's passage, John had been calling the crowds to receive a "baptism of repentance." He also powerfully challenged them to make radical changes in their lives. His striking witness and strong message moved the people to speculate: could John be the promised Messiah? Expectation that the Messiah would come soon had been brewing among the Jews for quite some time; now it is at a boiling point, triggered by the figure of John. The crowds are expecting God to make a powerful and decisive entry into human affairs.

By the end of today's Gospel, we find their expectation directly affirmed by God himself. After Jesus is baptized, the Spirit descends upon him, and the Father speaks out from Heaven: Jesus is his beloved Son who is pleasing to him. The Jews had experienced God's intervention throughout their history. Yet this time, his intervention is not a dramatic event like the parting of the Red Sea or a liberation from foreign rulers. God's intervention is a Person, Jesus Christ, his own beloved Son. Humanity expects, God affirms – but in an altogether surprising way.

Jesus' arrival and his Baptism by John come as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, specifically those of Isaiah, from whom today's liturgy offers two optional readings, which both point prophetically to John the Baptist and Jesus. The selection from Isaiah 40 speaks of "a voice" crying out to "prepare the way of the LORD." St. Luke quotes this very passage a few verses before today's Gospel (cf. Lk 3:3-6). This voice was sent out in the dryness of the desert because God desires to give comfort to his people. It is a voice that, though forceful, speaks tenderly to Jerusalem, focusing on proclamation of good news and on expiation of guilt. John the Baptist's message of repentance surely fulfills this prophetic promise.

The reading from Isaiah 42 prepares the way for us to hear the voice of the Father after Jesus is baptized. Through Isaiah, the Lord says, "Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased." At the Jordan, he reveals that his chosen servant is his own "beloved Son." We learn from the prophet that Jesus' mission is one of gentleness and compassion; he is sent to bring forth the victory of justice to the nations, but he will do so gently.

Aside from the crowd's expectation, another human element that we can find in the first paragraph of today's Gospel is John's *humility*. While the crowd is excited about him and enamored by his teachings, this attention does not distract John from his mission. He recognizes that he is a mere precursor, tasked to prepare God's people to welcome the One to come, "one mightier than I." John knows the lowliness of his place before the One who is coming: "I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals." Such human abasement sets the stage for the fulfillment of God's plan. After John dutifully fulfills his mission, he sees his humble statement fulfilled. The One whose sandals he was not worthy to loosen is revealed, affirmed by the Holy Spirit descending upon him. While John baptized with mere natural water, Jesus "will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire." He will usher in a new creation. John's message of repentance will be perfected in Jesus' message of conversion and salvation. The former is human abasement, the latter, a divine fulfillment.

St. Peter proclaims the good news of the new creation in today's reading from Acts. He says that after the baptism of repentance that John preached, God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, affirming him to be the Messiah. He went about doing good: healing people and setting them free from the oppression of the devil. Repentance opens the way to deep conversion, freedom, and union with God. This two-stage process enables us "to live temperately, justly, and devoutly in this age," as St. Paul says in his Letter to Titus. Because "the grace of God has appeared," we confidently "await the blessed hope, the appearance of the glory of our great God and savior Jesus Christ." Because of him, we can "be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life."

This extraordinary gift is granted to us in Baptism. Built on the new order that Jesus established in his own Baptism, the Sacrament of Baptism inspires us with his Spirit and fills us with his life – marvelously connecting the human and the divine, the natural and the supernatural. The Gospel tells us that Jesus, after he had been baptized, "was praying." While he prays, his communion of love with the Holy Spirit and the Father is suddenly revealed. When we pray, because we have received the grace of Baptism, we too can rely on the Holy Spirit and be sure that the Father looks on us too as his beloved sons and daughters, with whom, in Christ, he is well pleased.

What does my Baptism mean to me? How do I strive to live up to my baptismal promises? How has repentance opened me to deep conversion, freedom, and union with God?

Mary, teach me to always rely on the Holy Spirit as He works in my daily life.

Notes

January 10, Monday, 1st Week in Ordinary Time



First Reading: 1 Samuel 1:1-8

There was a certain man from Ramathaim, Elkanah by name, a Zuphite from the hill country of Ephraim. He was the son of Jeroham, son of Elihu, son of Tohu, son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. He had two wives, one named Hannah, the other Peninnah; Peninnah had children, but Hannah was childless. This man regularly went on pilgrimage from his city to worship the LORD of hosts and to sacrifice to him at Shiloh, where the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were ministering as priests of the LORD. When the day came for Elkanah to offer sacrifice, he used to give a portion each to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters, but a double portion to Hannah because he loved her, though the LORD had made her barren. Her rival, to upset her, turned it into a constant reproach to her that the LORD had left her barren. This went on year after year; each time they made their pilgrimage to the sanctuary of the LORD, Peninnah would approach her, and Hannah would weep and refuse to eat. Her husband Elkanah used to ask her: “Hannah, why do you weep, and why do you refuse to eat? Why do you grieve? Am I not more to you than ten sons?”



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 116:12-13, 14-17, 18-19

To you, Lord, I will offer a sacrifice of praise.

or *Alleluia.*

How shall I make a return to the LORD
for all the good he has done for me?

The cup of salvation I will take up,
and I will call upon the name of the LORD.

R. To you, Lord, I will offer a sacrifice of praise.

or *Alleluia.*

My vows to the LORD I will pay
in the presence of all his people.

Precious in the eyes of the LORD
is the death of his faithful ones.

O LORD, I am your servant;
I am your servant, the son of your handmaid;
you have loosed my bonds.

R. To you, Lord, I will offer a sacrifice of praise.

or *Alleluia.*

My vows to the LORD I will pay
in the presence of all his people,
In the courts of the house of the LORD,
in your midst, O Jerusalem.

**R. To you, Lord, I will offer a sacrifice of praise.
or Alleluia.**

Gospel Acclamation: Mark 1:15

Alleluia, alleluia. The Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel. **Alleluia, alleluia.**



Gospel: Mark 1:14-20

After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the Gospel of God: “This is the time of fulfillment. The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the Gospel.”

As he passed by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting their nets into the sea; they were fishermen. Jesus said to them, “Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Then they left their nets and followed him. He walked along a little farther and saw James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They too were in a boat mending their nets. Then he called them. So they left their father Zebedee in the boat along with the hired men and followed him.



Meditation:

“Against all human expectation God chooses those who were considered powerless and weak to show forth his faithfulness to his promises” (CCC 489). Hannah, the powerless and sorrowful woman featured in today’s first reading, is one of a long line of poor and humble (*anawim*) women who wait with persevering faith for the Lord to act on their behalf.

In time, the Lord will give Hannah the gift of a child, the great prophet Samuel. But in today’s reading, she is in deep anguish. Not only is she childless – a most painful contradiction for any woman longing to have children – but she must also suffer constant ridicule from her rival, her husband’s other wife, who has many children. Peninnah’s taunt, arising from her jealousy that the husband they share favors Hannah over her, is based on a painful truth: “the LORD had made her barren.” It seems that the Lord himself is somehow against poor Hannah! Yet she faithfully returns each year to worship him, though in tears instead of joy.

In the culture of the ancient Near East, infertility was seen as a curse, a cause of deep shame. A woman might prefer death over the shame of living forever childless. This explains the mournful cry of Rachel to her husband Jacob: “Give me children or I shall die!” (Gn 30:1). Hannah’s husband Elkanah is a good man, and wants to console Hannah, but his empathy is embarrassingly shallow. He proposes that he himself is worth more to her than ten sons – as if having a husband somehow erases her public shame. What Elkanah does not realize (for it was not yet clearly understood in those days) is that his family’s problems are rooted in the disorder of polygamy. Both of his wives are miserable, Peninnah because she feels slighted and jealous, and Hannah because she is barren and misunderstood. If Hannah were his only wife, Elkanah could console her by sharing fully in the pain of being childless, and together they would beseech the Lord for a child. But as it is, Elkanah is not childless. In a polygamous family, the husband’s heart is divided, and so is the whole household.

We will see the greatness of Hannah’s faith, and the goodness of the Lord to her, in the days to come. For now, we carry in our hearts the pain of her barrenness. At the same time, we bring before the Lord the many women in our own day who suffer from the hidden and painful wound of infertility. We can also ponder infertility as a sign of our own spiritual condition when we sin. Sin renders us spiritually sterile, for when we cut ourselves off from the Lord, we have no life to celebrate and nothing to give others.

Yesterday we celebrated the gift of Baptism, through which the Lord overcame the sterility of our sin condition and gave us new life. Baptism is a free and unmerited gift, a sign that the Lord loves us more than any husband loves his bride. The Lord wants his Bride the Church to be fruitful for his Kingdom. For this reason, he calls us to abandon our selfish pursuits and to follow him, serving him as “fishers of men.” Thus, although Baptism is a free gift, following the Lord is very costly!

In the Gospel, the call of the Lord breaks into the ordinary routine of some simple, hard-working fishermen, two pairs of brothers. The call is eminently positive: “Come after me!” But to respond with a “yes” to the call of the Lord involves something negative: saying “no” to everything else. For Simon, Andrew, James and John, “yes” to Jesus meant abandoning their nets, their boats, and even their father Zebedee.

Our “yes” to the Lord, if it is a real decision and not mere words, must also cut us off from whatever entangles us or distracts us. We may not have to leave our jobs and families, but our selfish attachments, our controls and our worldly securities will have to be left behind. This is a continuous process of reorientation, as our “yes” unfolds in time. It is a challenging vocation, but also the greatest privilege, an opportunity to share in the great work of extending the Kingdom of God. Only when we abandon the “nets” of the world can we be compelling witnesses who bear fruit by attracting others to the glorious light of the Gospel.

What is my “spiritual barrenness” that severed my relationship with the Lord? Why do I find it difficult to give up my selfish attachments and control that prevent me from following Jesus? How can I abandon the “nets” of the world to be a faithful witness of Christ?

Mary, Queen of Apostles, inflame my heart with the desire to follow Jesus in steadfast faith.

Notes



First Reading: 1 Samuel 1:9-20

Hannah rose after a meal at Shiloh, and presented herself before the LORD; at the time, Eli the priest was sitting on a chair near the doorpost of the LORD's temple. In her bitterness she prayed to the LORD, weeping copiously, and she made a vow, promising: "O LORD of hosts, if you look with pity on the misery of your handmaid, if you remember me and do not forget me, if you give your handmaid a male child, I will give him to the LORD for as long as he lives; neither wine nor liquor shall he drink, and no razor shall ever touch his head." As she remained long at prayer before the LORD, Eli watched her mouth, for Hannah was praying silently; though her lips were moving, her voice could not be heard. Eli, thinking her drunk, said to her, "How long will you make a drunken show of yourself? Sober up from your wine!" "It isn't that, my lord," Hannah answered. "I am an unhappy woman. I have had neither wine nor liquor; I was only pouring out my troubles to the LORD. Do not think your handmaid a ne'er-do-well; my prayer has been prompted by my deep sorrow and misery." Eli said, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him." She replied, "Think kindly of your maidservant," and left. She went to her quarters, ate and drank with her husband, and no longer appeared downcast. Early the next morning they worshiped before the LORD, and then returned to their home in Ramah.

When Elkanah had relations with his wife Hannah, the LORD remembered her. She conceived, and at the end of her term bore a son whom she called Samuel, since she had asked the LORD for him.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 1 Samuel 2:1, 4-5, 6-7, 8abcd
My heart exults in the Lord, my Savior.

"My heart exults in the LORD,
my horn is exalted in my God.
I have swallowed up my enemies;
I rejoice in my victory."

R. My heart exults in the Lord, my Savior.

"The bows of the mighty are broken,
while the tottering gird on strength.
The well-fed hire themselves out for bread,
while the hungry batten on spoil.
The barren wife bears seven sons,
while the mother of many languishes."

R. My heart exults in the Lord, my Savior.

“The LORD puts to death and gives life;
he casts down to the nether world;
he raises up again.

The LORD makes poor and makes rich;
he humbles, he also exalts.”

R. My heart exults in the Lord, my Savior.

“He raises the needy from the dust;
from the dung heap he lifts up the poor,
To seat them with nobles
and make a glorious throne their heritage.”

R. My heart exults in the Lord, my Savior.

Gospel Acclamation: see 1 Thessalonians 2:13

Alleluia, alleluia. Receive the word of God, not as the word of men, but as it truly is, the word of God. **Alleluia, alleluia.**



Gospel: Mark 1:21-28

Jesus came to Capernaum with his followers, and on the sabbath he entered the synagogue and taught. The people were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes. In their synagogue was a man with an unclean spirit; he cried out, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!” Jesus rebuked him and said, “Quiet! Come out of him!” The unclean spirit convulsed him and with a loud cry came out of him. All were amazed and asked one another, “What is this? A new teaching with authority. He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him.” His fame spread everywhere throughout the whole region of Galilee.



Meditation:

We continue to ponder the inner journey of Hannah, the barren woman who became the mother of the great prophet Samuel. In today’s reading, Hannah is presented as a model of humble and persevering prayer. In her grief, she does not give in to discouragement, but rather “remains long at prayer before the LORD.” When the priest Eli misunderstands her behavior and accuses her of being drunk, Hannah reveals to him what she is really doing interiorly: “I was only pouring out my troubles to the LORD.... My prayer has been prompted by my deep sorrow and misery.” According to a more literal translation of the Hebrew text, she was “*pouring out her soul before the LORD.*”

This is *deep prayer*, prayer from the depths of a wounded heart. By revealing her inner poverty, Hannah quickly softens the heart of Eli, who responds by offering his blessing. How much more does such a prayer soften the heart of the Lord! The Lord hears the cry of the poor. How could he refuse the request of Hannah? For her part, she shows that her longing for a child is not merely to satisfy her selfish desires. She makes a solemn vow: if the Lord grants her a son, she will dedicate him to the service of the Lord.

When we are in deep sorrow, we can be tempted not to bother turning to the Lord. We might sit in self-pity, which quickly turns to resentment. At other times, we may try prayer, asking the Lord for relief and mercy. But if he does not respond quickly enough for us, we grow impatient and soon give up, concluding that he is not going to respond. Hannah, a model of the *anawim*, teaches us the value of humility and perseverance. As we continue “long in prayer,” remaining present before the Lord with a listening, receptive heart, we open an interior space which God can enter to provide us with a unique, personal response. The Lord *always* hears our prayers, and if we are receptive like Hannah, he gives us the gift of new life, often in ways that truly surprise us. He does not follow our timetable or our expectations – for his thoughts are far above our thoughts – but he always hears and answers our prayers with great mercy and love. Those who are poor in spirit are certain of this.

Hannah shows us an interior way to deal with sorrow. It is worth noting that she also avoids an exterior path taken by other women in the Old Testament in their desperation to overcome the contradiction of infertility. Sarah and Rachel, for example, offered servant-girls to their husbands as surrogates through whom they might have children (cf. Gn 6:2; 30:3). Hannah relies only on prayer, thus giving a challenging witness of faith to our times, when many people are turning to illicit means of procreation, such as sperm donation and *in vitro* fertilization. Such people often claim that their strong desire for children justifies the measures they take, but Hannah teaches us all that when we are facing human impossibility we must turn to the God of the impossible.

The Gospel shows us another dimension of the power of prayer. Not only does prayer open us to receive grace and new life from the Lord, it also defends us from the influence of the evil one. Jesus manifests his authority and power by casting an unclean spirit out of a

possessed man. This convinces the people that they are witnessing something entirely new, “a new teaching with authority.” Jesus’ mission *is* new; he has come to free us all from bondage to Satan and to restore us to innocence. This new freedom from sin and Satan is one of the great effects of *Baptism*, as we recalled on Sunday.

Jesus in the Gospel does not compromise with the unclean spirit or have a conversation with him. Rather he rebukes him sharply, then tells him to be quiet and get out. Relying on the Lord’s authority and power at work in us, we can do the same – not with arrogance, but with humble admission of our weakness and sin. Then the Lord can free us from evil and restore us to our baptismal state of grace. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is an especially wonderful means by which he does exactly this.

We may believe in the power of prayer, but too often we do not come before the Lord in our need, fully trusting that he will hear and answer us. We need to immerse ourselves in the presence of God in prayer so that we will have the faith to rely on him in our struggles and temptations throughout the day. Let us follow the example of Hannah today, and depend totally on God to bring us new life in him, and to give us victory over the power of evil.

How has the example of Hannah’s faith and perseverance in prayer touched me? When things don’t go my way, how do I react? Why do I hesitate to rely completely on Jesus in my struggles and temptations?

Mary, help me to depend totally on God and his will.

Notes



First Reading: 1 Samuel 3:1-10, 19-20

During the time young Samuel was minister to the LORD under Eli, a revelation of the LORD was uncommon and vision infrequent. One day Eli was asleep in his usual place. His eyes had lately grown so weak that he could not see. The lamp of God was not yet extinguished, and Samuel was sleeping in the temple of the LORD where the ark of God was. The LORD called to Samuel, who answered, “Here I am.”

Samuel ran to Eli and said, “Here I am. You called me.” “I did not call you,” Eli said. “Go back to sleep.” So he went back to sleep. Again the LORD called Samuel, who rose and went to Eli. “Here I am,” he said. “You called me.” But Eli answered, “I did not call you, my son. Go back to sleep.” At that time Samuel was not familiar with the LORD, because the LORD had not revealed anything to him as yet. The LORD called Samuel again, for the third time. Getting up and going to Eli, he said, “Here I am. You called me.” Then Eli understood that the LORD was calling the youth. So Eli said to Samuel, “Go to sleep, and if you are called, reply, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.’” When Samuel went to sleep in his place, the LORD came and revealed his presence, calling out as before, “Samuel, Samuel!” Samuel answered, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”

Samuel grew up, and the LORD was with him, not permitting any word of his to be without effect. Thus all Israel from Dan to Beersheba came to know that Samuel was an accredited prophet of the LORD.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 40:2 and 5, 7-8a, 8b-9, 10

Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will.

I have waited, waited for the LORD,
and he stooped toward me and heard my cry.
Blessed the man who makes the LORD his trust;
who turns not to idolatry
or to those who stray after falsehood.

R. Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will.

Sacrifice or oblation you wished not,
but ears open to obedience you gave me.
Burnt offerings or sin-offerings you sought not;
then said I, “Behold I come.”

R. Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will.

“In the written scroll it is prescribed for me.
To do your will, O my God, is my delight,
and your law is within my heart!”

R. Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will.

I announced your justice in the vast assembly;

I did not restrain my lips, as you, O LORD, know.

R. Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will.

Gospel Acclamation: John 10:27

Alleluia, alleluia. My sheep hear my voice, says the Lord. I know them, and they follow me. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***



Gospel: Mark 1:29-39

On leaving the synagogue Jesus entered the house of Simon and Andrew with James and John. Simon’s mother-in-law lay sick with a fever. They immediately told him about her. He approached, grasped her hand, and helped her up. Then the fever left her and she waited on them.

When it was evening, after sunset, they brought to him all who were ill or possessed by demons. The whole town was gathered at the door. He cured many who were sick with various diseases, and he drove out many demons, not permitting them to speak because they knew him.

Rising very early before dawn, he left and went off to a deserted place, where he prayed. Simon and those who were with him pursued him and on finding him said, “Everyone is looking for you.” He told them, “Let us go on to the nearby villages that I may preach there also. For this purpose have I come.” So he went into their synagogues, preaching and driving out demons throughout the whole of Galilee.



Meditation:

In this week following the Feast of the Lord’s Baptism, we can reflect on the daily readings as instructions on how best to live out the new life we have received in the Sacrament of Baptism. Today’s instruction focuses on the essential art of prayer and listening to the word of God. To be a faithful follower of the Lord, we must have a *listening heart*.

The child Samuel is a beautiful and simple model. By the time of today’s reading, Samuel is already living at the shrine of the Lord in Shiloh, where his holy mother Hannah brought him, in fulfillment of the

vow she made before he was conceived. We reflect on how Samuel learned at an early age how to recognize the voice of the Lord and listen to his word. What a valuable lesson! No one is too young or too old to learn how to listen interiorly to the voice of God.

At first, Samuel cannot distinguish between the divine voice of the Lord and the human voice of Eli. He repeatedly thinks Eli is calling him, for “he was not familiar with the LORD.” This is the first lesson: to know that there is a great difference between one voice and another. When we are dull of spirit and out of practice in listening, we can easily mistake someone else’s voice, or even our own voice, for the voice of the Lord. When we pray with an attentive heart, we learn to discern what voices we are hearing and how we are to respond.

The lesson about which voice to listen to comes up frequently in the Bible. One example is Pontius Pilate, who finds himself confronted with the responsibility to make a decision about Jesus. He asks Jesus questions, but hides behind a veil of indecision. Finally Jesus gives a very clear word on which Pilate can act: “For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” But Pilate will not listen to the Lord’s voice. He deflects it with another question, “What is truth?” (Jn 18:37-38). Pilate does not have a listening heart.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus himself gives us an example of listening in prayer. After a full day of intense activity, the Lord goes off to a deserted place where he can pray. His disciples eventually find him and tell him that many people are looking for him, expecting him to continue his ministry of healing and exorcizing. But Jesus does not simply follow the voices of those who place expectations on him. He listens to the voice of the Father. He is committed to doing the will of the Father. He lives by the motto, “Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will.” At this moment, quite contrary to the expectations of everyone, no doubt surprising them all, the Father sends Jesus to others, to those who do not yet know him, to spread the good news of salvation to them.

The simple example of Samuel and the profound example of Jesus both teach us of our need to listen closely to the voice of the Father, to discern his will for us. Without a daily experience of deep prayer, we tend to conclude that what others need, or what we want, is the will of God! Our seeing, hearing, and understanding need to be purified so that

our ways and thoughts will become more and more like the Lord's ways and thoughts. Like Simon and the disciples in today's Gospel, we must learn that if we are going to find the Lord, we must keep seeking him, not where we would like him to be, but where he wills to be.

The advice that Eli gave to young Samuel is also a precious instruction to us. Today we are being taught to say to the Lord: "*Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.*" Listening is the fundamental prayer attitude. Let us listen to God's voice, with readiness to act upon his word.

What situations in my life prevent me from hearing the voice of God? As a faithful follower of the Lord, how am I spiritually forming a listening heart? At times, when I hear the voice of the Lord, why do I not heed it?

Mary, help me to form a listening heart like yours.

Notes

January 13, Thursday, 1st Week in Ordinary Time
Saint Hilary, Bishop and Doctor of the Church



First Reading: 1 Samuel 4:1-11

The Philistines gathered for an attack on Israel. Israel went out to engage them in battle and camped at Ebenezer, while the Philistines camped at Aphek. The Philistines then drew up in battle formation against Israel. After a fierce struggle Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who slew about four thousand men on the battlefield. When the troops retired to the camp, the elders of Israel said, “Why has the LORD permitted us to be defeated today by the Philistines? Let us fetch the ark of the LORD from Shiloh that it may go into battle among us and save us from the grasp of our enemies.”

So the people sent to Shiloh and brought from there the ark of the LORD of hosts, who is enthroned upon the cherubim. The two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were with the ark of God. When the ark of the LORD arrived in the camp, all Israel shouted so loudly that the earth resounded. The Philistines, hearing the noise of shouting, asked, “What can this loud shouting in the camp of the Hebrews mean?” On learning that the ark of the LORD had come into the camp, the Philistines were frightened. They said, “Gods have come to their camp.” They said also, “Woe to us! This has never happened before. Woe to us! Who can deliver us from the power of these mighty gods? These are the gods that struck the Egyptians with various plagues and with pestilence. Take courage and be manly, Philistines; otherwise you will become slaves to the Hebrews, as they were your slaves. So fight manfully!” The Philistines fought and Israel was defeated; every man fled to his own tent. It was a disastrous defeat, in which Israel lost thirty thousand foot soldiers. The ark of God was captured, and Eli’s two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were among the dead.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 44:10-11, 14-15, 24-25
Redeem us, Lord, because of your mercy.

Yet now you have cast us off and put us in disgrace,
and you go not forth with our armies.
You have let us be driven back by our foes;
those who hated us plundered us at will.

R. Redeem us, Lord, because of your mercy.

You made us the reproach of our neighbors,
the mockery and the scorn of those around us.
You made us a byword among the nations,
a laughingstock among the peoples.

R. Redeem us, Lord, because of your mercy.

Why do you hide your face,
forgetting our woe and our oppression?
For our souls are bowed down to the dust,
our bodies are pressed to the earth.

R. Redeem us, Lord, because of your mercy.

Gospel Acclamation: see Matthew 4:23

Alleluia, alleluia. Jesus preached the Gospel of the Kingdom and cured every disease among the people. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***



Gospel: Mark 1:40-45

A leper came to him and kneeling down begged him and said, "If you wish, you can make me clean." Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand, touched the leper, and said to him, "I do will it. Be made clean." The leprosy left him immediately, and he was made clean. Then, warning him sternly, he dismissed him at once. Then he said to him, "See that you tell no one anything, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses prescribed; that will be proof for them." The man went away and began to publicize the whole matter. He spread the report abroad so that it was impossible for Jesus to enter a town openly. He remained outside in deserted places, and people kept coming to him from everywhere.



Meditation:

Today's Gospel begins with, "a leper came to him." In those days, lepers were strictly forbidden to approach anyone. To preserve the health and ritual purity of the community, they were required to keep a safe distance from everyone. Such "social distancing" has become all too familiar to us in the era of COVID-19. The Jews were required to follow the prescriptions in the Book of Leviticus: "The one who bears the sore of leprosy shall keep his garments rent and his head bare, and shall muffle his beard; he shall cry out, 'Unclean, unclean!' As long as the sore is on him he shall declare himself unclean, since he is in fact unclean. He shall dwell apart, making his abode outside the camp" (Lev 13:45-46). So the poor man who approaches Jesus is violating the letter of the law. But Jesus is moved with pity for the man and reaches out to touch him, curing him instantly.

This healing miracle is a sign of the power of God at work in the ministry of Jesus. It is also a sign of God's tender mercy for each of his children. Jesus' being moved with pity and touching the leper is a

revelation that God is moved with eternal pity for all of us and desires to touch us and heal us. There is a connection between this miracle and the even greater miracle of Baptism. When we were baptized, the Lord was moved with pity for us. He stretched out his hand and touched us, and we were instantly healed of our sin condition. During the baptismal ceremony, there are several times when the child is touched; these are sacramental signs of being touched by Jesus.

Now that we have been touched by Jesus, how are we to live? How are we to relate to the Lord? We can see in the first reading an example of how we should *not* relate to the Lord. The Israelites experience a defeat in battle at the hands of the pagan Philistines. Although they question why God has allowed this to happen, they do not really look deeply for an answer. Instead, they try to manipulate God into taking their side by bringing the Ark of the Covenant into the battle with them. Of course, God will not allow himself to be subjected to their presumption. For their own sake, they need to be humbled, so God allows them to suffer a disastrous defeat.

The defeat of the Israelites can be likened to the struggles and defeats we sometimes experience after Baptism. At times, God simply does not do what we expect him to, and we are left wondering why it happened. Why are we sometimes defeated? The answer lies in the mystery of God's plan for our good, and our cooperation – or lack of cooperation – with his plan. God always has a greater victory in mind for us. Sometimes a defeat comes because the only way we will grow is if we experience the disastrous results of saying “no” to God. We do not always understand what God is doing in situations of contradiction, but it is important, especially in those moments, to renew our “yes” to him. We should never let an apparent defeat of our plans become a defeat of our faith. Saying “yes” to God is always the right response.

The Bible presents Hophni and Phinehas, the two priest-sons of Eli, as arrogant and scandalous scoundrels. They may have the Ark of the Lord in their hands, but they do not have the Lord in their hearts. Along with the other Israelites, they put their trust in the Ark, not in the Lord. Their death in the battle serves as warning to us: we are not to use external signs of loyalty to God as a substitute for true faithfulness to him. Obedience from the heart is more important than external or legalistic observances.

If we have been touched and healed by God, in Baptism and in so many other ways, it is not so that we can then go off to pursue our own will and our own advantage. That path can only lead to disastrous defeat for us. When we remain faithful, humble and obedient, then there is no

limit to the grace and mercy the Lord can bestow on us. Let us allow no space for self-will and presumptuous pride. Rather, let us humbly cry out, “Redeem us, Lord, because of your mercy!”

*How have I experienced the touch and healing power of God?
What is the “leprosy” in me that I desire to ask the Lord to heal? Why do I question the mystery of God’s plan for my life?*

Mary, guide me along the path of life allowing no space for my self-will and presumptuous pride.

St. Hilary, pray for us.

Hilary was born into a wealthy family around 310 in Poitiers, France. He received a solid education which is apparent in his writings. He did not grow up in a Christian environment, but his quest for truth led him to study the Bible, and he literally read himself into the faith. He, his wife and his daughter were baptized in 345. So greatly was he respected by the people of Poitiers that they unanimously elected him bishop in 353. As bishop, he opposed the emperor’s attempt to run Church matters, and for this he was exiled. While in exile he wrote many works explaining and defending the faith, among which is his famous treatise, *De Trinitate* (On the Doctrine of the Trinity). He was also a staunch opponent of the Arian heresy and became known as the “Hammer of the Arians.” Hilary died in 367.

Notes

January 14, Friday, 1st Week in Ordinary Time



First Reading: 1 Samuel 8:4-7, 10-22a

All the elders of Israel came in a body to Samuel at Ramah and said to him, “Now that you are old, and your sons do not follow your example, appoint a king over us, as other nations have, to judge us.”

Samuel was displeased when they asked for a king to judge them. He prayed to the LORD, however, who said in answer: “Grant the people’s every request. It is not you they reject, they are rejecting me as their king.”

Samuel delivered the message of the LORD in full to those who were asking him for a king. He told them: “The rights of the king who will rule you will be as follows: He will take your sons and assign them to his chariots and horses, and they will run before his chariot. He will also appoint from among them his commanders of groups of a thousand and of a hundred soldiers. He will set them to do his plowing and his harvesting, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. He will use your daughters as ointment makers, as cooks, and as bakers. He will take the best of your fields, vineyards, and olive groves, and give them to his officials. He will tithe your crops and your vineyards, and give the revenue to his eunuchs and his slaves. He will take your male and female servants, as well as your best oxen and your asses, and use them to do his work. He will tithe your flocks and you yourselves will become his slaves. When this takes place, you will complain against the king whom you have chosen, but on that day the LORD will not answer you.”

The people, however, refused to listen to Samuel’s warning and said, “Not so! There must be a king over us. We too must be like other nations, with a king to rule us and to lead us in warfare and fight our battles.” When Samuel had listened to all the people had to say, he repeated it to the LORD, who then said to him, “Grant their request and appoint a king to rule them.”



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 89:16-17, 18-19

For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.

Blessed the people who know the joyful shout;

in the light of your countenance, O LORD, they walk.

At your name they rejoice all the day,

and through your justice they are exalted.

R. For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.

For you are the splendor of their strength,
and by your favor our horn is exalted.
For to the LORD belongs our shield,
and to the Holy One of Israel, our King.

R. For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.

Gospel Acclamation: Luke 7:16

Alleluia, alleluia. A great prophet has arisen in our midst and God has visited his people. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***



Gospel: Mark 2:1-12

When Jesus returned to Capernaum after some days, it became known that he was at home. Many gathered together so that there was no longer room for them, not even around the door, and he preached the word to them. They came bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. Unable to get near Jesus because of the crowd, they opened up the roof above him. After they had broken through, they let down the mat on which the paralytic was lying. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to him, “Child, your sins are forgiven.” Now some of the scribes were sitting there asking themselves, “Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming. Who but God alone can forgive sins?” Jesus immediately knew in his mind what they were thinking to themselves, so he said, “Why are you thinking such things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, pick up your mat and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins on earth” –he said to the paralytic, “I say to you, rise, pick up your mat, and go home.” He rose, picked up his mat at once, and went away in the sight of everyone. They were all astounded and glorified God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this.”



Meditation:

This week the liturgy has reminded us of the wonder of the extraordinary Sacrament of Baptism. In Baptism we were freed from sin and consecrated to God. We were made his own adopted children and brought into his Kingdom. We were given a share in Jesus’ mission as priest, prophet, and king. The *Catechism* describes our participation in Christ’s kingly office as a “gift of royal freedom,” by which we overcome the reign of sin in our lives. “That man is rightly called a *king* who makes his own body an obedient subject and, by

governing himself with suitable rigor, refuses to let his passions breed rebellion in his soul, for he exercises a kind of royal power over himself. And because he knows how to rule his own person as king, so too does he sit as its judge. He will not let himself be imprisoned by sin, or thrown headlong into wickedness” (St. Ambrose, quoted in CCC 908).

Precisely because we have been set free, however, it is possible for us to use our freedom to serve other “gods,” to choose other “kings.” Then we fall from being *kings* to being *slaves*. In today’s first reading the Israelites are clamoring to have Samuel appoint a king for them. They are not willing to trust that God will lead them; they want to have a king like the nations around them. God grants their request – even though what they are asking is a direct rejection of his authority over them – because he respects their freedom to choose. God respects human freedom. With the greatest love, he calls us to himself, but we must choose to respond to his call.

Whenever we make a choice against God, it is also a choice against ourselves. Samuel points this out to the people. He explains that they will end up in a condition of virtual slavery to the king they are so eager to have. But the people are obstinate and will not listen, so the Lord tells Samuel to grant their request. He will not violate their freedom, even if they choose their own slavery. We learn from this story that choosing against God makes us slaves, because the natural consequence of sin is slavery to sin.

This condition of slavery to sin is symbolized in the Gospel by the paralysis of an afflicted man. It is an accurate symbol because sin causes spiritual paralysis; it can even kill us spiritually, as in the case of mortal sin. The man in the Gospel is physically paralyzed, so helpless that it takes four men to bring him to Jesus. When Jesus sees him, he first heals his spiritual illness: he forgives his sins. Then, in order to show clearly to the murmuring onlookers that he has authority to forgive sins, he heals the man physically as well. In this way Jesus reveals his divine compassion for all who suffer, and shows that his primary mission is to free us from sin. He has come to restore us to the dignity of the children of God, children of the King.

A significant key to the absolution and miraculous healing of the paralytic is the faith of his four friends. They had enough faith in Jesus to make the effort to bring the man up onto the roof, open up a hole, and

lower him down. We do not know who these men are. What we do know is that, “when Jesus saw their faith,” he healed the paralyzed man.

We can see in this our own responsibility to bring others to Jesus, not physically but spiritually. Love should move us to carry them in prayer and set them before the Lord’s feet. If we look past the surface and see the spiritual condition of many people, we realize that they are very much like this paralyzed man, paralyzed by fear, lack of forgiveness, insecurity, addictions, paralyzed by the seemingly hopeless divisions in their family relationships. So many people do not know how to come to Jesus to ask for healing. They are unable for a variety of reasons to come to him on their own. Who is going to carry them to the feet of Jesus? Who is going to open a hole in the heavens for the grace of God to come down upon the paralyzed world? Let us follow the example of the four friends who carried the paralyzed man, and bring our world, our neighbors, our families – and even our enemies – before Jesus for his merciful forgiveness and healing.

Why do I go out of the way to help someone even when it is difficult? How does my faith manifest itself in the service of others? How do I experience God’s visitation to me?

Mary, as I have experienced Jesus’ mercy and forgiveness, enable me to do the same to others.

Notes

January 15, Saturday, 1st Week in Ordinary Time
Saint Arnold Janssen, Priest (Philippines)



First Reading: 1 Samuel 9:1-4, 17-19; 10:1

There was a stalwart man from Benjamin named Kish, who was the son of Abiel, son of Zeror, son of Becorath, son of Aphiah, a Benjaminite. He had a son named Saul, who was a handsome young man. There was no other child of Israel more handsome than Saul; he stood head and shoulders above the people.

Now the asses of Saul's father, Kish, had wandered off. Kish said to his son Saul, "Take one of the servants with you and go out and hunt for the asses." Accordingly they went through the hill country of Ephraim, and through the land of Shalishah. Not finding them there, they continued through the land of Shaalim without success. They also went through the land of Benjamin, but they failed to find the animals.

When Samuel caught sight of Saul, the LORD assured him, "This is the man of whom I told you; he is to govern my people."

Saul met Samuel in the gateway and said, "Please tell me where the seer lives." Samuel answered Saul: "I am the seer. Go up ahead of me to the high place and eat with me today. In the morning, before dismissing you, I will tell you whatever you wish."

Then, from a flask he had with him, Samuel poured oil on Saul's head; he also kissed him, saying: "The LORD anoints you commander over his heritage. You are to govern the LORD's people Israel, and to save them from the grasp of their enemies round about.

"This will be the sign for you that the LORD has anointed you commander over his heritage."



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 21:2-3, 4-5, 6-7

Lord, in your strength the king is glad.

O LORD, in your strength the king is glad;
in your victory how greatly he rejoices!
You have granted him his heart's desire;
you refused not the wish of his lips.

R. Lord, in your strength the king is glad.

For you welcomed him with goodly blessings,
you placed on his head a crown of pure gold.

He asked life of you: you gave him
length of days forever and ever.

R. Lord, in your strength the king is glad.

Great is his glory in your victory;
majesty and splendor you conferred upon him.
For you made him a blessing forever;
you gladdened him with the joy of your face.

R. Lord, in your strength the king is glad.

Gospel Acclamation: Luke 4:18

Alleluia, alleluia. The Lord sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor and to proclaim liberty to captives. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***



Gospel: Mark 2:13-17

Jesus went out along the sea. All the crowd came to him and he taught them. As he passed by, he saw Levi, son of Alphaeus, sitting at the customs post. Jesus said to him, “Follow me.” And he got up and followed Jesus. While he was at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners sat with Jesus and his disciples; for there were many who followed him. Some scribes who were Pharisees saw that Jesus was eating with sinners and tax collectors and said to his disciples, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?” Jesus heard this and said to them, “Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do. I did not come to call the righteous but sinners.”



Meditation:

This past week can be viewed as an ongoing meditation on mercy, for all week we have been reflecting on the new life we received, by the sheer mercy of God, in Baptism. God’s mercy has been revealed in a series of miracles and healings performed by Jesus: a possessed man in Capernaum, the mother-in-law of Simon, a humble leper, and yesterday, a paralyzed man. In Baptism, we too have been freed from sin, touched by Jesus, healed in the depths of our soul.

Today’s readings bring out another dimension of Baptism: it is also a vocation to follow and serve the Lord. Jesus’ surprising call to Levi, “Follow me,” includes both an expectation that the tax collector will leave sin behind and an invitation to join in the great new work of evangelization. Levi’s mission begins immediately, as he invites many other “tax collectors and sinners” to meet the Lord at the dinner in his house. We learn that those who are convinced of their spiritual health – in this case some scribes who are Pharisees – are very difficult to evangelize. People who acknowledge their need, however, “the sick,” those infected by sin, can benefit greatly from the help offered by the “physician,” Jesus Christ.

The calling of Levi, the tax collector – more popularly known as Matthew – has made a deep impression on the spiritual journey of Pope Francis. He has written about the calling of Matthew as an example of how God’s mercy can overcome our sin and make us disciples. “Passing by the tax collector’s booth, Jesus looked intently at Matthew. It was a look full of mercy that forgave the sins of that man, a sinner and a tax collector, whom Jesus chose – against the hesitation of the disciples – to become one of the Twelve. Saint Bede the Venerable, commenting on this Gospel passage, wrote that Jesus looked upon Matthew with merciful love and chose him: *miserando atque eligendo*. This expression impressed me so much that I chose it for my episcopal motto” (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 8).

In today’s first reading, Saul, like Levi, is called to leave his old way of life behind and begin a new life in the service of God. When Samuel meets him, Saul is searching for his father’s lost asses. These animals are well-known for their independence and stubbornness, and can well be taken as a symbol of the people of Israel who are rejecting the authority of God and stubbornly demanding a king. Saul knows nothing about this yet. He is focused only on his own small daily problems and concerns. Samuel reveals to him that God has called him to something much greater. He is to become king, “to govern the LORD’s people Israel, and to save them from the grasp of their enemies round about.” Samuel anoints Saul for this sacred mission.

Just as he did with Levi and with Saul, the Lord has called each one of us. He has healed us and freed us from our sin. He has anointed us and called us to follow him as his disciples. This gift – clearly revealed in the marvelous Sacrament of Baptism – was not given to us because we were healthy and righteous. No, the Lord “looked on us with merciful love and chose us” while we were still sick, still sinners. He is still looking on us with mercy. He wants not only to heal us, but also to use us for the salvation of the many others who are in such great need of a Savior.

We have no right to look down with disdain on the “proud asses” in the world, for without the mercy of God we would be worse off than they. To pursue our mission, we must leave behind our judgments, our selfish pursuits and our stubborn independence and open ourselves to a life of service to others. Such service is not a burden, but a privilege, to be borne with great gratitude. Each of us can say, in the words of the Gospel Acclamation, “The Lord sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor and to proclaim liberty to captives.”

When have I experienced Jesus' look of mercy? How has God's grace freed me from my selfish pursuits and independence? Why is it so difficult to leave my old ways of living to follow Jesus?

Mary, may I say daily, "The Lord sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor and to proclaim liberty to captives."

St. Arnold Janssen, pray for us.

Arnold Janssen was born in Germany in 1837 and raised by parents who instilled in him a deep devotion to religion. After his ordination in 1861, Arnold became aware of the spiritual needs of people beyond the limits of his own diocese and because of this he decided to dedicate his life to awakening in the German people their missionary responsibility. In 1871, because of the anti-Catholic laws of Bismack, many priests and religious were expelled from Germany or imprisoned. Despite the negative reactions of many, Arnold declared, "The Lord challenges our faith to do something new, precisely when so many things are collapsing in the Church." In 1875, he founded the Society of the Divine Word (SVD) and his dream to make Jesus known to every person in every nation began to be fulfilled when he sent his first two missionaries to China in 1889. In 1875, Arnold founded the Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters to assist his Society in their missionary efforts and in 1896 he founded a contemplative branch, the Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit of Perpetual Adoration (the Pink Sisters), to pray for priests and the success of evangelization and missionary efforts. After a life filled with a constant search for God's will, a great confidence in divine providence, and hard work, Arnold died in 1909. He was beatified by St. Paul VI in 1975 and canonized by St. John Paul II in 2003 with one of his first missionaries to China, St. Joseph Freinademetz.

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