

## MEETING THE LORD THROUGH OTHERS: 2<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY B

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The time is the 11<sup>th</sup> century before Christ. The place is the shrine in the small town of Shiloh in ancient Israel. It houses the ark of God containing the Ten Commandments. The high priest is Eli, now very old and almost totally blind. A little boy called Samuel is asleep in the shrine. His mother has waited and prayed so long for his arrival that in gratitude she has given him to the service of the shrine. The child helps with the religious services and looks after Eli, his patron and protector.

Three times in one night the boy hears a voice calling his name: '*Samuel, Samuel.*' Three times he thinks that it's the old priest calling out to him. Each time the high priest tells him that he did not call him, and sends him back to bed. But on the third occasion Eli instructs the child: '*if someone calls [you] say, "Speak Lord, your servant is listening".*' This is exactly what Samuel says the fourth time God calls his name.

What faith-filled words they are! In one short sentence they recognise God as the Lord and Master of Samuel's life, that God is calling him to be something and do something, and that the right response is to both hear and heed God's call. So, in a word, it's about vocation, a call to do something special for God, or what Mother Teresa of Calcutta has called '*something beautiful for God*'.

Eli's place in the scheme of things is to introduce others to the Lord and to their new vocation and role. Samuel will grow up to be the last of the great judges in Israel and the first of the king-makers.

In today's gospel we see John the Baptist introducing two of his own disciples to Jesus. In doing this he introduces them to their new future. That future is staying with Jesus and following him. So John the Baptist has pointed away from himself to Jesus whom he calls '*the lamb of God*'. So in today's gospel the Baptist is running the first introduction agency for those on the lookout for the messiah.

One of the two disciples is Andrew. He leaves his leader, John, to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, his new leader. But to make this new start he needs the Baptist to point him in the right direction. And what the Baptist does for Andrew, Andrew in turn does for his brother, Simon. He shares his experience with Simon, convinces him that he has just met the Messiah, and introduces Simon to Jesus.

When we reflect on the beginnings of our own faith in Christ and of our own particular personal relationship with him, we remember the people who introduced us to Jesus. Most of us can think of a particular person, our mother or father e.g. who enabled us to begin our

journey of faith. None of us goes on our own to Our Lord. Access to him is always through other people. As a group of Christians we all come to him by way of generations of Christians who have shared their experiences of Jesus. In their turn they were introduced to him by others. As a popular song puts it: *'We are standing on the shoulders of the ones who came before us. They are saints and they are humans, they are angels, they are friends.'* The story of Christianity, in fact, is a story of a great chain of witnesses linked through the apostles from the beginning to Jesus himself.

Of course we have to play our part in introducing others to Jesus. We don't have to be great missionaries in overseas countries to do this. If we believe that Jesus is worth knowing, we will bring others into his loving presence by our quiet witness. In that way the Christian faith will keep growing and never die out. Because somewhere, someone like the apostle Andrew will be bringing another person to meet Jesus of Nazareth, the Saviour of the World.

What an appealing and heart-warming responsibility and opportunity!

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