

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time - B

Being called to the priesthood has its pluses and minuses. I'm often asked about the celibacy issue, for example which, I must admit, becomes less of an issue as I get older. I guess I'm getting settled in my ways.

I also get asked often about having to be available 24/7 which, I admit, can be a burden at times.

Another line of questioning is a lot more fun to respond to. When people ask me what I like most about being a priest, it's easy to come up with an answer. I like being invited into people's lives and being made a part of them. That's such a privilege!

In more personal terms there's a great sense of being in the right spot that really cannot be underestimated. I know a lot of people struggle with the question of what they should devote their lives to. They struggle with discerning what God is calling them to and may wonder their whole lives whether they've heard him right.

I have to admit, that's not a problem for me. True, God had to take extraordinary measures to get me to listen to the call, but once he got my attention, I knew it was coming from him.

Even though my response still needs a lot of work, there's a deep sense of calm that comes with knowing that the right path is still lying in front of you.

Perhaps that's how the apostles felt when Jesus

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gave them authority over unclean spirits and sent them out in pairs with detailed instructions about how they are to conduct themselves.

We can envy them a little that everything is laid out so clearly—until we start to imagine their journeys in more detail.

Picture two apostles entering a town, tired and hungry, with no means to purchase food or lodging. They are totally dependent on the hospitality of the people they meet, who they know may not welcome them.

Since the authority they had been given was new to them—unprecedented really—they could very well have had questions about when to do the casting out of the unclean spirits, how exactly to cure the sick, etc.

At what point do they shake the dust off their feet? So many unanswered questions!

The prophet Amos is in a similar situation. He knows he's been called to speak prophetically to the kingdom of Israel. He doesn't know what to do when his message is rejected, and he's told to take his message elsewhere. All he can do is to come clean. "Hey, this wasn't my idea! Take it up with the God of Israel, if you dare. For me, I'm just going to follow his lead."

When we read biblical stories like these, we realize how terrifying it could be not to have any excuse to

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“mishear” our call. By definition, a call does not come from us, and so we have to accommodate ourselves to it.

That’s the challenging part. Chances are good, even excellent, that part of the call will entail leaving something behind and that safety and success are not guaranteed.

Maybe it’s not the lack of clear instructions that stops us from following God’s call, but the suspicion of what God might call us to do. It’s easier for us to convince ourselves that we’re supposed to take the more comfortable and secure path.

The letter to the Ephesians reminds us that God’s will for us is a mystery as well as a blessing. It may frighten us, but even still be the source of our hope.

God wants something better for us than we could ever plan for ourselves.

When called, the apostles did as instructed. And it worked. Jesus did not leave them in a lurch, not even when it came to what seemed impossible.

We can have confidence that, even if we wonder about all that God is calling us to, there are aspects of the call that we already know and already can act on. The prophet Amos knew that he could not let injustice win the day. God gave him a voice and called on him to use it.

There are moments for us, too, when it is crystal

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clear what God is calling us to do in that particular moment. Even if we are afraid, we might still know the call with utter clarity. It is an act of faith to respond with a yes rather than a no. But faith is the way forward. Fear is not.

We can do this! We can choose to follow God's call where it leads because we have been given the gift of faith and handed a tradition which tells us that ultimately God's plan can only be for the good.

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1. Pluses and minuses of the call to priesthood:

a. celibacy question often asked. Becomes less of an issue as I get older. Guess I've settled into the lifestyle

b. being available 24/7 more of a challenge, especially for an introvert like me.

c. Another line of questioning: "what do you like most?" I like being invited into people's lives—such a privilege!

d. In more personal terms—there's no underestimating the value of knowing you are on the right path.

A lot struggle with that, I know. Discernment does not come easy, if at all.

Not a problem for me. True, God took extra measures to get my attention, but no doubt where the message was coming from or what it was about.

Generates a deep sense of calm, knowing the right path is still lying right in front of me.

2. The apostles' sense, too? Clearly commissioned with detailed instructions. No room to wonder what he meant.

Could lead to envy on our part—until we imagine the journeys in more detail.

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3. Picture it: two apostles arrive in town tired and hungry; no means to purchase food or lodging.

Total dependency on the hospitality of strangers. They may not receive a welcome.

And then—authority over unclean spirits? How's that work exactly? At what point do we shake the dust? So many unanswered questions!

4. The prophet Amos—a similar situation. Knows he's been called; doesn't know what to do when the message is rejected and is sent packing.

He simply comes clean: "This was not my idea. Take it up with the God of Israel."

5. These stories can lead us to realize how terrifying it can be not to have any excuse to "mishear" our call. We have to accommodate ourselves to something that comes from beyond us.

The challenging part. Chances are good we will be called beyond our preferences, to leave something behind, to recognize that safety and success are not guaranteed.

6. Maybe it's not the lack of clear direction that stops us, but the suspicion of what God might be getting us into.

Could fall prey to the temptation to convince ourselves that the more comfortable and secure path is just fine.

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7. Ephesian: God's will is a mystery and a blessing—both at once.

It can frighten us, but even so be the source of our hope. God wants something better for us than we could ever plan for ourselves.

The apostles did as instructed—and it worked. Jesus did not leave them in a lurch, not even when it came to what seemed impossible.

8. We can have confidence that, even if we wonder about all that God is calling us to,

there are aspects of the call that we already know and already can act on.

The prophet Amos knew that he could not let injustice win the day. God gave him a voice and called on him to use it.

There are moments for us, too, when it is crystal clear what God is calling us to do in that moment.

Even if we are afraid, we might still know the call with utter clarity. It is an act of faith to respond with a yes rather than a no. But faith is the way forward. Fear is not.

9. We can do this! We can choose to follow God's call where it leads because we have been given the gift of faith and handed a tradition which tells us that ultimately God's plan can only be for the good.