

The Old Testament is full of wonderful stories about the history of God's people and their relationship with him. Especially Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Joshua, Judges, the two books of Samuel and the two books of Kings, which tell the story from the beginning of time to the peak of the kingdom of Israel's power and grandeur. Today's first reading is one of those great stories, the story of Samuel's introduction to the Lord. It's one of my favorites.

When we read these stories we can enter into them by building a mental image of the scene. Doing so can help us remember the story and make its message our own.

Let us imagine the scene. The year is about 1050 BC. It is at the end of the time of Judges and the beginning of the time of Kings. Israel has been in the promised land for about 200 years. The location is Shiloh, 20 miles north of Jerusalem and west of the river Jordan. It is in Shiloh where the Israelites setup the Tent of Meeting, the tabernacle that houses the Ark of the Covenant. It is the place of God's presence among his people which traveled with them throughout most of the Exodus. It will be another 50 or 60 years before it is moved to Jerusalem and another 30 or 40 years until it is replaced by Solomon's Temple.

Samuel, a young boy, had been dedicated to the Lord by his mother because, when she was barren, God had answered her prayer for a male child. Samuel had, from a very young age, been in the service of the Lord under the priest Eli. I imagine that Eli had been teaching Samuel the history of his people and

instructing him in the service of the Lord in this holy place. But at this point Samuel did not yet know the Lord.

Picture it, it is night and Eli, now very old and nearly blind, is fast asleep in his room in the temple. Samuel sleeping near by, hears his name called and, presuming it is Eli calling him, goes to him. You can imagine that Eli is not too happy about being awakened from his sleep in the middle of the night and sends Samuel back to his place. When it happens a second time, I imagine that by this time Eli is really annoyed at having his sleep disturbed a second time. But on the third occasion his priestly wisdom kicks in and he recognizes what is happening, that it is the Lord calling to introduce himself to Samuel. When the Lord calls again we hear young Samuel's all important reply which echos down through the ages to us, "*Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening*".

This is the story of Samuel's introduction to the Lord. The Lord continued to speak to Samuel throughout his life. He grew in knowledge and wisdom. Samuel will become the last great Judge in Israel, he will speak for the Lord to all of Israel as a prophet and he will anoint the first two kings of Israel.

The Gospel today tells the story of another introduction to the Lord. It is the introduction of Andrew, his brother Simon and another disciple to the Jesus. The other disciple is not named but most scholars agree that the other disciple is John, the author of the 4<sup>th</sup> Gospel.

To visualize this story we need to backup just a little. Back

in December, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent we also heard from the Gospel of John, just a few verses before today's reading. There we heard about the testimony of John the Baptist. We learned that he had disciples who were following him and listening to his teaching. So many were following him that it was making the Jewish religious officials nervous. So they sent out priests and Levites to find out who he was and what he was up to.

Now many of his disciples thought that John the Baptist was the Messiah who they were expecting to come to liberate Israel. But he denied that he was and said there was one coming after him who was greater than he and that he was the Lamb of God and would take away the sins of the world, that he was the Son of God.

Now imagine this scene. Two disciples are hanging out with John the Baptist. It's a nice afternoon and Jesus is out for a walk. As he passes by John points to Jesus and he calls him "the Lamb of God". Given what they have learned from John they realize that this is the one of whom John had spoken, the one who was to come after him, the one foretold by the prophets – the Son of God. John the Baptist has just introduced them to the Messiah. The two disciples we learn are Andrew and John. Andrew in his excitement goes and finds his brother Simon and brings him back and introduces him to Jesus. This was their introduction to the Lord, and that afternoon they begin to follow Jesus instead of following John the Baptist.

Next week we will hear from Mark's Gospel, the story of

the calling of the first disciples. Now that story has always bothered me. Jesus is walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee and seeing Andrew and Simon calls to them to follow him. They abandon everything and follow Jesus. What has always bothered me about this is that if you just read the Gospel of Mark, it seems that this is the first time Andrew and Simon encounter Jesus. It seems odd that they would just drop everything and follow a stranger. But in the light of today's Gospel from John we can see clearly that they had already been introduced to Jesus, their Messiah. So it is not at all unusual that they would take the next step in their discipleship, turning away from their previous life and embracing the life as Jesus' future Apostles.

We have just been through the seasons of Advent and Christmas. We have been, like Samuel, Andrew, John and Simon, been introduced, or as it were, re-introduced, to our Lord. In the weeks and months ahead we will be reading from the Gospel of Mark. Although Mark was not an Apostle and he did not know Jesus during his earthly life, he was a disciple of Simon Peter and faithfully recorded Peter's teaching.

Each Sunday in Ordinary time, the Church, as we saw today, presents us with a reading from the Old Testament and the Gospel that are connected in some way. When you read the readings for Sunday Mass it is worth watching for those connections, like the one we looked at today, introductions to the Lord. Never neglect the Old Testament because the Old and New Testaments tell the complete story of our relationship with

God. We have the opportunity like Samuel, Andrew, Simon Peter and John to learn and grow from the Lord's teaching which come to us today through Scripture and our liturgical worship.

When we begin our meditations on the Scriptures may we always start with Samuel's words, "*Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening*". God will speak to us if we will only listen. As we grow in understanding may we embrace discipleship with Jesus. Then may we sincerely proclaim the words of today's Psalm response, "*Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will*".