

Bonne fête de la St Jean!

In the first verses of Luke's gospel, not recounted here, we learn that Zechariah, John's father had been visited by the archangel Gabriel who announced the lovely news that he and Elizabeth would soon be parents of a son, to whom the name John should be given. Doubting the archangel, Zechariah was rendered mute, unable to speak. Elizabeth, too, had been visited by the Holy Spirit in the course of her unexpected pregnancy and told that this much longed-for son was a gift from God and that he should be named John.

When the baby was born, it was a natural expectation of all who were gathered that the son would be named Zechariah, taking after the father. But we know that Elizabeth and Zechariah had been advised otherwise. Elizabeth spoke simply, "No. He will be called John". Zechariah, perhaps having learned the consequences of disbelieving an archangel, confirmed the choice by writing the name "John" on a tablet. His tongue was instantly freed and this miraculous turn of events signaled to all that this newborn John was specially called by God.

We are reminded in this passage that our children are gifts to us from God. Their call and their mission is from God. With great beauty, the readings and psalm today echo this message. He was John, not Zechariah. He was John, called into being and knitted together by God in his mother's womb. As he grew, nurtured in the love and care of his parents, he would have been able to offer praise, thanking God that he was wonderfully made, fashioned in the depths of the earth, as the psalmist sings. As a man he was able to state with authority, both who he was, and who he was not, "Who do you suppose that I am?", he asked his followers. "I am not He", referring to Jesus, and then going on to live his humble yet crucial mission: to announce and prepare people for the coming of Jesus, to point people towards Jesus and finally, to give way, completing his mission as Jesus began his.

God has a call for each of us and it is important for us to be able to state with the same authority as John- both who we are and who we are not. The story is told of rabbi named Zusya, who lay on his deathbed surrounded by his faithful students. As death approached he grew more agitated rather than less, as might be expected for a man who had lived such a learned life, full of good deeds. "Rabbi, surely you are approaching your reward in heaven, go gently with God" said the students. "No, my friends", he replied, "I can see clearly now- God will not ask me why I was not Moses, why I was not David. God will ask me why I was not Zusya- and I have few words to say in reply".

God asks us to be who we are, confident in the knowledge that we are wonderfully and uniquely made, sharp-edged swords, called to live a mission of service to one another and ultimately to God. Last week we heard Jesus' parable of the mustard seed and how this tiny seed, has within it, all it needs to live its mission- to become the largest of plants, where all can

dwell in its shade. We need to understand, however, that what the mustard seed cannot do, despite all of its God-given potential, is to grow into a cob of corn, or a tomato. We have within us all we need to grow, but only into the person we are called to be.

Finding our mission takes time, often God's time. As we are reminded in the first reading, sometimes we may feel that we toil in vain, uselessly spending our strength. As the saying goes "what a long time it can take to become the person I have always been".(1) Listening to God's quiet voice is important, for we know that we have been called by God from birth. The author and theologian Frederick Buechner suggests simply this: your call from God is the intersection point where your deepest gladness meets the world's deepest needs.(2)

Thinking of the world's deepest needs, we witness the plight of migrants and refugees, scorned, turned away, or housed in a former Wal-Mart, children separated from their parents. Whose passion is stirred by this injustice? Whose deepest gladness arises in the mission to speak truth to power, defending and promoting the right of each child of God to live their call, in decent conditions, together with their family?

At times, perhaps when our spirit is at a low ebb, it is enough and necessary, to ask only this: what is God's call for me today? Between sunrise and sun-down, how can I honour God and my call? At other times, in our expected hours of suffering and vulnerability, we hope to be ministered by others who are honouring their call to support, care and tend to us. So, on this, the Lord's day, and on this feast of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist, let us come to the Eucharist confident in the knowledge that we are wonderfully made, called together to build the reign of God!

(1) Parker Palmer, "Now I Become Myself", Yes! Magazine

(2) Frederick Buechner, "Wishful Thinking, A Seekers ABC"