

Epiphany 2B (1/18/09 – *Jesus – Epiphanied as He Calls His Disciples*)

In the Name JESUS. [Amen]

In our *Holy Gospel Lesson* for this *Second Sunday after Epiphany*, we find *Jesus – Epiphanied as He Calls His Disciples*. What I mean by that sermon title is this: in the very process of calling these disciples – Philip and Nathanael – to come and follow Him, Jesus of Nazareth is revealed as more than a mere man ... indeed, He is manifested as the divine *Son of God* and *the King of Israel* [JN 1.49] — which is to say that He is made known as the long-promised Christ and Savior.

Actually we have three themes running through our Holy Scripture texts appointed for this day – three related, interwoven themes. The first is obvious – the calling of disciples of the Lord. We heard it first in our *Old Testament Lesson* – the LORD’s call of young Samuel. As the story of Samuel unfolds in the two books named for him, we learn that this call of the Lord would lead to Samuel’s divine vocation as a prophet of God. Indeed, in our short text, we already see those elements. After the third time, Eli the priest realizes that it is the LORD Who is calling to young Samuel. And this dutiful priest – beleaguered on account of his sacrilegious sons – this dutiful priest commands Samuel to say: *Speak, LORD, for Your servant hears* [1SM 3.9]. And as a dutiful servant of the LORD and assistant to the priest, Samuel does just as Eli has commanded. From that moment the Lord begins to utilize Samuel in his life-long vocation as prophet. Samuel will hear and listen to the Word of the Lord ... and he will speak it to the people – that is what a prophet of God does ... he hears God’s Word and then speak God’s Word to God’s people. Eli’s blasphemous sons will die ... and Eli will know the guilt of having not restrained his sons [1SM 3.13–14].

We hear the theme of calling disciples especially in our *Holy Gospel Reading*. *The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee* – that is, the day after John the Baptizer points to Him, saying: *Behold, the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world* [JN 1.29] and two of John’s disciples begin following Jesus (including Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother). And there in Galilee Jesus *found Philip and said to him, “Follow Me.”* Jesus’ call of Philip was direct ... and simple. Philip’s response was immediate. But Philip doesn’t just follow after Jesus, content to receive from the Lord – rather, he also immediately responds in action.

This is the second theme running through our Scripture lessons: that of witnessing. Samuel is called to bear witness to the Lord – even to speak the truth of destruction against the house of Eli. After the *Speak, LORD, for Your servant hears* comes the speaking of what has been heard from the Lord. The same goes for our *Gospel Lesson*. Jesus *found Philip and said to him, “Follow Me.”* [JN 1.43] And what does Philip do? The text says: *Philip found Nathanael and said*

to him, ***“We have found Him of Whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph.”*** [JN 1.45] What Philip hears (and sees), he immediately bears witness to. Such is the posture of faith – it cannot help but speak about what it hears and sees and receives from the Lord. It is only sin in us that stops that witnessing – sin of which we need repent. It was sin in the sons of Eli that caused them to blaspheme the Lord by their terrible public witness – even when they had been appointed priests after their father. How is our witness ... and our witnessing?

And note carefully here, if you will, just how this interchange goes between Philip and Nathanael. In his excitement and enthusiasm of having been found by Christ – we’ll talk about that more in a bit – Philip runs off to tell someone else ... Nathanael. Philip’s witness is simple: ***We have found Him of Whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph.*** Philip is saying: *We have found the Messiah ... the One promised since the fall ... the One Moses wrote about in the first Five Books ... the One the prophets foretold ... the Christ ... the Savior.* No fancy, canned questions with intricate rebuttals for every sort of response. In fact, did you catch how Philip handled Nathanael’s reasoned objection: ***Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*** [JN 1.46a] – by which Nathanael was basically saying: *The entire Old Testament doesn’t even speak about Nazareth. It’s not foretold that the Messiah should come from that little, one-donkey town. In fact, the prophet Micah spoke very clearly that the **One to be ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting** [5.2] should come from **Bethlehem.** So how can you say the Promised One is Jesus of Nazareth?* Philip’s response is not an attempt to reason with Nathanael. He has no intricate, intellectual apologetic. Philip’s witness is clear and simple: ***Come and see!*** [JN 1.46b] A simple invitation to church.

Even our *Epistle Lesson* for today speaks on the theme of witnessing. How so, when it speaks about sexual immorality? Because what we **do** is just as much – often even more – of a witness to what we believe as what we **say**. Speaking is important – but as the old cliché goes: *Actions speak louder than words.* How often do we **undo** with our actions – our daily lives – what we speak ... both here and in the world? How often do we “join ourselves to” sinful words and deeds? And in so doing, we might say we have “sinned doubly” – for not only have we sinned outright, but also those sinful actions done in the sight of unbelievers (or struggling believers) speak contrary to what we ought to be proclaiming ... about Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, the Son of God, the King of Israel. So we must not only repent and confess our sin – but also repent and confess our lack of ... indeed, our poor and **contrary** ... witnessing. ***Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, Whom you have from God? You are not***

your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. [1COR 6.19–20] Glorifying God in our bodies on the one hand means **refraining** from sin in thought, word, and deed – but on the other hand it also means that in our thoughts, words, and deeds we ought to give glory to God through public witness in our daily lives of what we have seen and heard and learned. We help those in need – because Christ has helped us in our greatest need. We comfort the mourning, bind up the hurting, encourage the discouraged, feed the hungry, clothe the poor, and generally bear one another’s burdens – for Christ has born the burden of our sin. And in all these things – and whenever the Lord presents us with opportunity – we point to the One Who is the Source and Goal of all that is holy and righteous and good: the One pointed to by Moses and all the prophets and the whole of Scripture, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God and King of Israel.

All of this brings us to the third theme in our Holy Scriptures for this day – namely, back to the title of the sermon: *Jesus – Epiphanied as He Calls His Disciples*. And here it is that we find the purest Gospel. For notice carefully how it is that Philip becomes Jesus’ disciple. The text says: *and He FOUND Philip and said to him, “Follow Me.”* [JN 1.43] It is **Jesus** Who finds Philip – just as it is Jesus Who has found us ... when we were lost in the darkness and death of our trespasses and sins. And in this, Jesus is *epiphanied* – His nature is revealed. Jesus is the One Who came *to seek and to save the lost* (as we have it in the account of Jesus and Zacchaeus, LK 19). That is, after all, precisely why He *came down from heaven, was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made Man*. God came to find His fallen and lost creation – God came to find us! We don’t search Him out by our own reason or strength or come to Him – rather, here Christ reveals Himself as the One Who comes to us ... the One Who seeks us ... the One Who finds and calls us ... through His Gospel.

And in finding and calling us to follow Him, Jesus also **Himself** empowers us to hear and to follow. It is not so much that “I have decided to follow Jesus” – though it may feel that way – but that **He** has decided to seek **me** and to **work** in me so that I do follow Him. With Christ’s invitation through His Gospel-Word He gives His Holy Spirit – Who works in and through that Gospel-Word to create and sustain faith in us ... God-given faith that desires to follow Christ ... God-given faith that desires to bear witness to Christ Who has called us by the Gospel *out of darkness into His marvelous light* [1PT 2.9]. It is precisely through this Gospel-call that Christ makes of our bodies temples of the Holy Spirit [1COR 6.19] – for it is the Holy Spirit Who continually breaths life and faith into us ... working in us to will and to do according to His good pleasure [PHP 2.13].

In the call of Nathanael – through Philip – Jesus is *epiphanied* as the all-seeing, omniscient God: *Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I*

saw you. [JN 1.48] Jesus knows where we are in life ... what we are contemplating *under the fig tree.* He knows what worries us ... what our needs are ... what are our hopes and longings. And He gladly comes to us ... seeks us ... finds us ... to bring us back to following Him. That is the whole point of our Lord's incarnation – God coming to us where we are ... in the sinful mess that we are in ... to seek us ... to find us ... to save us.

Today we sit in the place of Philip – and **today** Jesus invites us to follow Him ... to leave behind the sins of the flesh ... the sins of our thoughts and words and deeds ... and to follow after Him Who is *the Son of God ... the King of Israel ... the One of Whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote ... until that day we see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.*

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. [Amen]