

## 210117 The 2nd Sunday after the Epiphany: Morning Prayer

### **The Lord be with you.**

God the Father, by whose glory Christ was raised from the dead,  
raise you up to walk with him in the newness of his risen life.

### **Let us confess our sins to God our Father.**

Heavenly Father, we have sinned against you and against our neighbour  
in thought and word and deed, through negligence, through weakness,  
through our own deliberate fault;

by what we have done and by what we have failed to do.

We are truly sorry and repent of all our sins.

For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ who died for us,

forgive us all that is past;

and grant that we may serve you in newness of life  
to the glory of your name. Amen

**Absolution** Almighty God, who forgives all who truly repent,  
have mercy on you, pardon and deliver you from all your sins,  
confirm and strengthen you in all goodness,  
and keep you in eternal life;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

### **1Samuel 3:1-10** [Samuel's Calling and Prophetic Activity]

Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. The word of the LORD was rare in those days;  
visions were not widespread.

At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his  
room; the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the  
ark of God was. Then the LORD called, 'Samuel! Samuel!' and he said, 'Here I am!' and ran to Eli, and said, 'Here  
I am, for you called me.' But he said, 'I did not call; lie down again.' So he went and lay down. The LORD called  
again, 'Samuel!' Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' But he said, 'I did not  
call, my son; lie down again.' Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet  
been revealed to him. The LORD called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, 'Here  
I am, for you called me.' Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, 'Go,  
lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening."' So Samuel went and lay  
down in his place. Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, 'Samuel! Samuel!' And Samuel said,  
'Speak, for your servant is listening.'

This is the word of the Lord;

**Thanks be to God.**

**Psalm 96** ... "Declare his glory among the nations and his wonders among all peoples."

### **John 1:43-51** [Jesus Calls Philip and Nathanael]

Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, 'Follow me.' Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the  
city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found him about whom Moses in  
the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.' Nathanael said to him, 'Can anything  
good come out of Nazareth?' Philip said to him, 'Come and see.' When Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards  
him, he said of him, 'Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!' Nathanael asked him, 'Where did  
you come to know me?' Jesus answered, 'I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.' Nathanael  
replied, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!' Jesus answered, 'Do you believe because I  
told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.' And he said to him, 'Very  
truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of  
Man.'

This is the Gospel of the Lord

**Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ**

## Sermon

“Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening”. Today for me is one to reflect on our core belief in God: in the very existence of God. How often have any of us experienced the feeling that God might - just now - be - somehow - present? For us? Today’s OT reading can be read as a sweet story of Samuel as a little boy slowly becoming convinced, in the Temple at night, that God is not only present, but is actually speaking to this small person. But it might also slightly un-nerve us: a hidden personage in the pitch-darkness of the Temple is demanding his attention! If that were to happen to me, I would hope for - I would need - the reassuring presence of an old sage like Eli.

When God tries to get through to us, sometimes we are not ready, deaf in some way. This experience is reassuringly mirrored in this story in which the young Samuel needs help to recognise that it is God who is calling him.

By the time of Jesus’ ministry in Galilee, Samuel’s call was part of the lexicon of the Jewish people, of how God calls human beings. So today’s gospel reading is really an overlay of that basic teaching. The difference is that the Son of God is now right there, in Galilee. So here we have a slightly unsettling vignette of the power, the nearness, of Jesus, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.”

This little inter-action reminds me that, just occasionally, the divine - God - breaks through from heaven and reassures us that he is still “there”. This Son of God tells Nathanael “Truly I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man”. If you had been there in that discussion with Jesus, would you have been so “blown away” existentially that you would have responded, “You are the Son of God! You are the king of Israel!”

Would you have been so thrown by this tantalising glimpse: as it were a physical scent of God’s glory that you might have felt that you must drop everything and hang on every word and action of this Jesus; that nothing else was of any consequence for the rest of your life?

We’re being exposed to Vocation... to the calling.

This “call” thing has perplexed and challenged me for a long time. Mark, in his stories of the calling of Jesus to his Apostles uses a word which strikes me very forcibly - “immediately”.

They immediately .... followed him. Immediacy in my case meant 30 years! I can remember that the weekly readings I heard in church started resonating with me, challenging me. Could I take them seriously without resorting to either a simplistic Sunday-school faith; or an ultimately destructive rationalistic scepticism? That was certainly not an “immediate” process! Then, I had to buy into the Creeds. And I must confess that I poorly understood the Nicene Creed until I was in training for ministry.

Then, a tenuous, strengthening quiet realization that I had enough of a relationship with God to be sure and certain that he is alive and present today.

That I could pray to him and that he heard me. Pretty basic. The stuff of normal, if fervent, Christianity. I am, after all, just a normal Dublin Anglican.

So why did I cross the line into vocation? But that’s the wrong question.

The right one is - why was I pulled - helped - across the line? Remember Samuel!

Why? Because over a long period (ten years in my case) I travelled along a road full of life options, where all the alternative side roads faded away until only one was left - the main road, forcing me to the inevitable conclusion that I should talk this through with Pat, my wife, and then talk hesitantly to my rector, before I lost my reason.

People ask me how I knew. I just did - I knew that I had to further explore belief. That I had - no - other - option. The previous Archbishop of Canterbury, in his dense but voluptuous use of the English language, has put it this way:

“Vocation is a dreadful falling into the hands of God. God has decided; I may struggle or revolt, but here is this clear will, to be done whatever the cost. All I am asked for is compliance.”

What arrogance to presume that the great God should want to touch me on the shoulder and crook his finger at me! But I see no other way of explaining it. Jeremiah put the presence of God rather well when he said: “There is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and cannot”.

And what did it mean for me? - I was still working full-time in a tech company. It took about two years, culminating at a Selection Conference - thorough, heavy and encouraging. Once through, the Archbishop sponsored me for three years’ training in the Theological College, amongst colleagues from all over Ireland. One third were women. One third were from the Republic. All of us came with different churchman-ships. But

all of them had gone through a similar, extended period of testing. And I have to admit that they were all what we must call “mature”.

Ordination as a deacon happened on a hot day - 18<sup>th</sup> June 2006, in Christ Church Cathedral Dublin. Priesting came a year later. Which enabled me to celebrate the Sacrament of the Holy Communion. To baptise, to marry and to conduct a funeral.

I finally transferred to full-time ministry in, I think, 2012. And in November 2013 I was asked to come here! So, for me, following Jesus was not with the immediacy of the Gospels.

Vocation is a calling from God. I have no idea why he called me. I do not need, or presume to know, why. My vocation was tested by the Church – by the organization, the Church of Ireland. Vocation is from God, but Ordination is by and for the Church. Be sure to note that difference. My call to ordination is to serve in the Church; to create community among believers. Let me repeat that: to create community among believers. Ministry is about allowing God to use you in the community – to be God’s servant.

Building and leading a community - “where two or three are gathered together in thy name”. Serving that community, wherever it is – in church or not. Encouraging the kingdom of God on earth. Proclaiming the Word – the Gospel message. Being an evangelist. And presiding at the sacraments.

I’ll finish with Mark’s Gospel. You know, of course, that Jesus came from that dreadful place, Nazareth. Nothing good ever came out of Nazareth, we’re told. Would you follow him just like that? Immediately? In my case, “immediately” meant “finally” - after much procrastination.

But God hooked this fish in the end! Think of me, pray for me.

For most of the past fourteen years, it’s the most exciting thing I have ever done!

### **The Apostles’ Creed**

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord.

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. **Amen.**

### **The Collect of the second Sunday after the Epiphany**

Almighty God,  
in Christ you make all things new:  
Transform the poverty of our nature  
by the riches of your grace,  
and in the renewal of our lives  
make known your heavenly glory;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

### **Prayers of intercession**

As the first disciples came to faith in Christ, so may the Church be faithful in following him. May she be made worthy to know and to reveal the mystery of salvation.

*Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.*

Where there is hostility between nations and races, where a name can arouse suspicion, bring the peace of Christ. Teach all people to trust one another and find friendship in seeking the good of all. *hear our prayer*

Help us to guide in the right way those who are near to us We pray for peace in our communities here in Ringsend, Irishtown, Sandymount and Donnybrook; for peace in our relationships, blessed by the presence of the Lord. *hear our prayer*

Have mercy on all who are sad, or lonely, or injured, or in hospital at this time; those who are sick and suffering with COVID-19. We remember before you all whose lives are falling apart, all who are entering into the darkness of uncertainty, that each in their weakness may know your strength. We pray that you will support those who are caring for them, and we ask that you cherish the quiet ministry of hospital chaplains such as Hilda Plant in St. Vincent's Hospital. *hear our prayer*

We give thanks for the departed to whom heaven has been opened and the divine vision granted. May our faith in this world bring us to follow Christ until we come to eternal life. *hear our prayer*

### **The Lord's Prayer**

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;  
thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,  
for ever and ever, **Amen.**

### **Dismissal**

Almighty God,  
by your command time runs its course;  
forgive our impatience,  
perfect our faith,  
and, while we wait for the fulfilment of your promises,  
grant us to have a good hope because of your Word;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
And the blessing ...

Live streamed from St. Matthew's Church, Irishtown.

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