

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B)

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Due to the spread of the new coronavirus, there will be no public Mass in our diocese until February 7. Fortunately, we can access online Masses, even the Pope's Masses, and receive spiritual Communion through the Internet and other methods. However, I suggest an easier way for many of you: get a copy of the Sunday Liturgy leaflet (the English equivalent of the Japanese *Seisho to Tenrei*) and listen to the Word of God at your own home in union with God and the Church.

Placement in the Liturgical Calendar Year

According to the liturgical calendar, the Sunday of the Baptism of the Lord marks the end of Christmas Season and the beginning of Ordinary Time. Ordinary Time is interrupted by Ash Wednesday (February 17 this year), and Lent begins. Then we enter Holy Week (starting on March 28 this year), and have Holy Triduum. Then there are six Sundays of Easter, followed by the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord and ending with Pentecost Sunday (May 23 this year). Then we return on the 11th Sunday in Ordinary Time (June 13 this year).

As you all know, the liturgical calendar has a three-year cycle for the readings at the Sunday Mass (Year A, Year B, and Year C), and this year falls on Year B, and the Gospel is mainly read from Mark's. Partly because Mark's is short, the Gospel of John is read today on the Second Sunday (John 1:35-42). The Church has made provision for those of us who, in our weakness and our busy lives, find it difficult to make time to read the Bible, so that by attending Sunday Mass on a regular basis, we will hear and read the important pages of the Bible on a three-year cycle. Even if you don't know exactly which chapter or verse of which Gospel, those of you who have been attending Mass since you were children must have heard many Scripture verses a number of times. The episode of Samuel's call in the First Reading and the call of Jesus' first disciples in the Gospel of John that we hear today are in our memories and have become part of your cultural identity as Christians.

This is the way the liturgy gives us a chance to refresh our memory. Therefore, I believe that reopening our hearts to God's mercy according to the guidance of the liturgical calendar is a

wonderful opportunity to receive strength to move forward in midst of the pandemic.

First Reading: Samuel, a boy dedicated to God by his mother (1 Samuel 3:3-10, 19)

The Book of Samuel introduces us to the boyhood of Samuel. He was dedicated to God in the temple according to his mother's promise. As the boy Samuel is asleep, a voice calls to him. Thinking it is the voice of his teacher, Eli, he honestly gets up and answers the call three times. Samuel does not yet know God. But he knows to be obedient. He also knows to answer the call, even though at first it seems to have happened in vain. For the third time Eli realizes that it is God who is calling the boy. So he teaches Samuel how to listen by replying, "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening." (1 Samuel 3:10)

Let's meditate on this scene. The scene personally reminds me of some moments in my life, especially those of experiencing an encounter with God. For example, a time of meaningful change in my life, a time of new awareness. Or it reminds me of the time I made the decision to leave my home and come to Japan and of the struggles and hopes I had there. Samuel is calling us to listen to God's voice today here where we are.

Second Reading: Our body is the temple of God (1 Corinthians 6:13-20)

Paul reminds us in his First Letter to the Corinthians that our bodies are temples. And we are called to be united to Christ. So we must always determine what brings us closer to God and the gospel of Jesus, and what keeps us away from them. We must remember that my relationship with God has to do with all aspects of our lives. We must not forget that God is with us at all times: in prayer and spiritual life, at work, in relationships, in politics, for physical maintenance, etc. Even though we often feel that God is silent, He will not abandon us, especially in times of suffering and darkness.

Gospel: Searching and Encountering Jesus at about 4 p.m. (John 1:35-42)

In today's Gospel, John tells us about Jesus' encounter with the first disciples. John points out that this encounter took place at four o'clock in the afternoon. As we meditate on the first reading, let us think about our "four o'clock in the afternoon," a time when we felt the presence of God in a special way, perhaps a time of his presence that made a difference in my life. According to the Gospel of John, the first disciples of Jesus had belonged to the first group of John the Baptist. John himself sees nothing wrong with the disciples leaving him and following Jesus. Jesus is not John's rival. It was not a question of Jesus or John: "He must increase; I must decrease." (John 3:30)

When they began to follow Jesus, they wanted to know where he lived. When they saw it, they stayed with Jesus and were convinced that he was the Messiah. The place where you live shows what kind of life you are living.

In this episode, the disciples confess that Jesus is the Messiah, Savior, and Redeemer from the very beginning of their life together. And from the very beginning, Jesus changed the name of Simon, the son of John and Andrew's brother. He is now called Cephas or "Rock." When John wrote this Gospel, the figure of Peter was already recognized by the first Christians as a stone, a rock.

What the followers of Jesus were interested in was not so much what Jesus would say but how he lived. It was the way Jesus lived and his plan for people's lives (the Kingdom of God) that drew them in, impressed them, and attracted other disciples.

It is impossible to follow Jesus and walk with him without the experience of meeting him. What was told, including theological theories, is not useful in itself. Our hearts are only stirred by the way people live.

Let us end with a prayer

Thank you, Lord, for giving me life and for always being with me throughout all the times and difficulties I have faced. In the darkest times, especially when I was filled with suffering, you gave me faith, which helped me to overcome those difficulties. May my gratitude reach all the people you have put in my life. Thank you, Lord.

We ask you for special blessings on the youth. May they discover their mission in this world with zeal and determination and live with courage and integrity. And when they feel called to greater service, may they be true servants of the Kingdom with generosity and humility.

Let us pray.

O God, you are always there in history, showing us the signs of the times, calling to us specially deep in our hearts. Send us the Spirit to listen carefully to your call. May we always seek and find the way that you are showing us to build a new society with the gospel of Jesus the King.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Note: All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New American Bible, Revised Edition (NABRE).