

Have you ever been alone in a strange place or in a crowd of people and heard your name called out? You look around to find that voice and just cannot make the connection? I have answered to many different names, Dennis, dad, grandpa, and deacon, sometimes just hearing hey you caught my attention. However, to be called by God is quite the experience.

Our readings today point us in two directions, one being about God calling us, and the other about what should happen if we are looking for God and we find Him or he finds us.

We read so many times of God calling people and they seem so dramatic. Take for example the burning bush he used to get Moses attention or having Abraham take his son to the mountain top to be sacrificed, or how about Paul being blinded and knocked off his horse. I guess some people need that kind of actions to get them to notice God is calling.

Even today, many are called by God to do something in their lives for Him. Sometimes drastic ways are needed again to get our attention. Take for instance the lost of a job, a serious illness, an unexpected pregnancy, or the added burden of caring for someone who no longer can care for themselves. Maybe these are God's ways of saying, "Can you hear me now???"

Then there are times that like Samuel he just calls our name. He gives that little tug at our heart and we just do not understand what is going on. It should give us some comfort in this Sunday's first reading to realize that even when God speaks directly to Samuel, he still needs the help of his mentor, Eli, to understand that it is God speaking to him and how he should respond. God's call and plan are always

experienced and discerned in community. Even when that call is directed to an individual - such as in religious life - it must be tested through a formation process to make sure it is genuine. We all need a hand to fit into God's plan.

The temptation is always before us to go it alone in discerning God's will for our lives without the benefit of the insight and wisdom of others. Or else, we fail to challenge others to consider what God may be calling them to by extending an invitation to follow Jesus as John the Baptist did to his disciples and as Andrew did to his brother Simon Peter in this Sunday's gospel

On occasion, that calling can be simply someone giving a compliment on your singing, or the way you read when you are lecturing. It could be that song on the radio that comes at the time you need it most or the reading in the bible that you happen to turn to when you were feeling troubled.

These stories make it clear that God's call to us comes through intermediaries. Even when God speaks to us directly, as in the case of Samuel, we require the help of others, like Eli, to discern it. Moreover, often God's call comes through the witness of others, as was the case for Jesus' first disciples. They followed Jesus because of the witness of John the Baptist and later of Andrew. We must be prepared to hear God's call to us through the people we meet. We must also be prepared to be the vehicles of God's call to others.

What about when we are looking for God. There was a story about a young mother who was so involved in the worship service that she did not notice anything else. Suddenly, though, the mother realized that her five-year-old was no long sitting with her. A bit panicked, she quickly looked around and she saw her child crawling

under the pew. Embarrassed, she quietly demanded, "What are you doing under there?" and with that innocent face that only a child can have looking up at her the child said "I'm looking for God."

Two weekends ago I participated in what is known as TEC Teens Encounter Christ, a three day experience that has cause me to see a change in my life, as well as a change in a few others who were there with me. I say participate because that is what many people told me to do. I was to participate not anticipate what was going to happen next. I was not to try to figure out what was coming next but to be in the moment, the here and now. They take away your watch and your cell phone and for the rest of the weekend you are on God's time.

I guess you could say I spent the weekend looking for God. I did participate in many of the activities reluctantly at first but soon found myself being pulled into the experience. I even joined in some activities that certain parts of my body still remind me that I did. I cannot really say that I found God in so much as He found me.

Throughout that weekend, He showed me the future of the Catholic Church and let me tell you that future is looking bright. That weekend not only got me energized but humbled me at times to drop to my knees. My emotions ran the gamut from the lowest low to the highest high I have ever felt. There are no words in the human language to describe them; it is something that you need to experience for yourself.

I thought I was pretty steadfast and devout in my faith. But the reverence and respect that some of the youth showed during the liturgy of the Eucharist made me realize, I have much to learn when I am in the presence of my God, during this liturgy or when receiving His sacred body and precious blood during communion. Not only

was it humbling but also heartwarming to see so many of our youth, the future of our church, being so in tune with our God and allowing Him to work through them to continue Jesus' work here on earth.

To hear God's call you have to listen. Whenever we are faced with important decisions, it can be tempting to shake our fists at the heavens and shout: "Just tell me what you want!" How many times I found myself doing just that. Discerning God's will is not always easy. When all our options are good - but especially when none seems good - it takes some time to sort out just what the right course of action may be.

For over twenty years, God called to me and I felt the pull at my heart but I did not listen. Then one day while attending one of the school weekday mass' I heard the children sing "What do you want of me Lord? Where do you want me to serve you? Where can I sing your praises?" All of these questions from the "Servant Song" were running through my head. It was through these children that Jesus helped me to understand His will for me in my life.

To this very day, God is putting so many thoughts in my mind so fast, maybe to make up for lost time, that at times I have to say Whoa Lord! Slow down so I can understand what you want from me, or what you want me to say to your people that will bring them closer to you.

Today God has put a new song into my heart, and my hope for you is that some day you will be able to sing it also as God unfolds his plans for you.

(Sung) Here I am, Lord, Is it I, Lord? I have heard you calling in the night. I will go, Lord, if you lead me, I will hold your people in my heart.