

2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time/ 31st Sunday after Pentecost

John 1: 35-42 and Luke 18: 35- 43

I heard a story once about a young man by the name of Jim who was about 19 years old at the time. His uncle in Toronto invited him for a day out on one of his hobbies- pigeon shooting, i.e, clay pigeon shooting. The young man had never seen the sport before, let alone never having done it. Little disks of clay are propelled from a machine. The shooter, using a shotgun, stands in various positions and tries to hit the disks as they fly past at different angles and trajectories. Never having engaged the sport before, the lad wasn't very good at the game, but found it rather fun.

The last clay pigeon, however, was the real challenge. Once it was propelled, it suddenly angled and came directly at Jim. He panicked, but pulled the trigger instinctively, and all he could remember after that was the clay shattering all around him.

Jim's uncle came running over to him, "Good thing you got that one", he said, "or it would have got you". Up to that moment, Jim had not thought of pigeon shooting as a *two-way affair*.

It's that realization, I think, which is also at the heart of all spiritual life, of our relationship to God, and of the Church- it's always a two-way affair, a two-way street, and as much as we may, in our various ways, be looking for God, God is also looking for us. And so there is always a *question* that God in some way, at some time in life,

throws at us. I don't think this is obvious to us, because we often think that we're the ones who should be asking the questions that God is the one somehow responsible for giving the answers and then telling us what to think or how to act or what to do.

But what if the really important task in life is not just doing what we're told to do or thinking what we're told to think? What if the really big human job is first of how hearing the *question in life being addressed to us*?

The gospel readings today for both the Roman and Byzantine liturgies center precisely on a question that Jesus asks someone. In the reading from the Gospel of John (Roman), there are two disciples of John the Baptist, Andrew and another unnamed disciple – which probably means it was John, the writer of the gospel. They heard John the Baptist describe Jesus, who has just walked past, as “God's Lamb”. Whatever that term meant, it suggested something about Jesus that made him potentially interesting to these two disciples. They are so intrigued by what their teacher had just said about Jesus, that they were interested enough to want to find out more, and so they follow Jesus.

And here is where the switch takes place. Rather than simply catching up to Jesus and bombarding him with questions, which is the way things often happen in religious discussions, Jesus, the teacher, turns around and says to *them*: “What are *you* looking for?” or “What do *you* want?”, literally, “What are you *seeking*?” They then give a most peculiar response- “Eh. . . where are you staying?” I think these two disciples were so

taken back by Jesus' question that they didn't even try to give a thoughtful or a deeply considered answer. They simply fall back on a conventional opening line- "Well, here are you living while you're in these parts?"

And again, Jesus doesn't give them an answer. Rather, he invites them to walk with him and to see for themselves. The first question- "What are you seeking?" leads to the next step- if you really are seeking something, then come, walk with your life alongside of me and you'll see." There is something really important going on in this dialogue, but I'll come back to this in minute.

The reading from the Gospel of Luke in the Byzantine liturgy today also has Jesus posing a question to someone- a question that touches on what is most valuable to that person. As Jesus comes to Jericho, there is a blind beggar sitting along the dusty road waiting for travelers to pass by so that he might ask them for something. He hears the commotion caused by Jesus' approach and asks what's happening- he can't see. Someone tells him that "Jesus the Nazarene" is coming. It would seem that Jesus' reputation has gone before him because the beggar is ready to identify Jesus as the "Son of David", a popular term for the Messiah, and so he yells out and keeps yelling out, despite some people trying to make him shut up, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Jesus stops and has the man brought to him. And when the blind man is standing in front of him, Jesus asks the million-dollar question, "What do you want me to do?"

“What do you want from me?” Now, the beggar might have scaled down his request and asked what he was used to asking for from passers-by- “Please give me some food.” “Please give me some money.” “Please give me some new clothes or a new stick.” But he doesn’t ask for any of these things. He goes for the chance of a lifetime. . . maybe out of sheer chutzpah or maybe because, even though he can’t actually see Jesus, he has a sense that he is in the presence of someone who can somehow change his life. He asks for his sight. He asks to be able to see the world around him. He asks to be fully human again. He asks for what is most crucial and most fundamental to his life. The other things that he could have asked for pale in significance when compared to this.

These two gospel accounts are, it seems to me, brilliant stories that can draw us the listeners into a space, into a place, where we don’t just hear a story being told about somebody else, but we hear a story that *invites us to become part of it*. The questions that Jesus asks in these stories and the invitation that he extends are absolutely crucial to *our own* lives:

What are you seeking?

What do you want from me?

What is *most* vital to your life?

Come, walk with me, and you’ll see.

And isn’t this what sacred scripture is intended to do- not just give us information or data or interesting ideas or doctrines about things, not just to tell us what to do or how to

think. When we hear the texts *as the Word of God*, they pull us into another space, they make *us* part of the on-going story of God's relationship to this planet and to the human family. And unless we see and feel and understand that *our own* lives are indeed *part of that story* to which sacred scripture bears witness, then being a Christian would mean being reduced to membership in a club that happens to espouse certain ideas and has rules for how it does stuff. Being on the Jesus' trail is far, far more interesting than that.

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What do you want from me?

What is *most* vital to your life?

Come, walk with me, and you'll see.

This is something which is at the heart of what's going on at every Eucharistic assembly, and it's something we are really trying hard to make our RCIA candidates and catechumens understand- that becoming a Catholic Christian is not just about getting the "right answers" and doing the "right things". It is first and foremost about embracing a path of discipleship. It's about being ready not just to have our questions somehow answered for us by someone. It's about allowing Jesus to ask *his question of our* lives. It's about being willing to respond to the invitation to come along with Jesus, to see where he is staying. . .

. . .and then, as happened to those two disciples in John's gospel who followed after Jesus, it's about us being ready to stay with him awhile, to be with Him as he still meets us in sacred scripture, in prayer, in the fellowship of the Christian community, and then

when the time is right, in Baptism and in the Breaking of the Bread. If we will allow ourselves to become part of “The Story”, then, lo and behold, rather than just talking about the “new evangelization”, as we often do, we actually might become part of it. We actually might find ourselves willing and able, like the disciple Andrew in John’s gospel to be able to go out and to say to others, “You know what, believe it or not, we have found the Messiah!”