

Feb. 9 & 10, 2019  
5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time

All Saints Parish, Syracuse  
Fr. Fred Daley

### We Are All Called

There was a true story in America Magazine a while ago about a throughway toll plaza just outside a large American city. Each morning there would be a very short line of commuters at five of the six tollbooths but a very long line at the toll booth number six.

On a busy morning, with bumper-to-bumper traffic, why would anyone drive up to a long line, when there were five much shorter lines available?

The reason: The toll-taker at booth number six!

Without fail, this toll-taker had a friendly personal greeting for everyone who passed through the booth: "How are you doing today?" "How's the family?" and even surprising inquiries like: "What happened to your glasses?" The commuter said that not even his family had noticed that he had lost his glasses...; the toll-taker not only noticed – but expressed his concern!

The article stated:

*Such was the power of this one toll-taker, that harassed drivers would line-up – adding five or ten minutes to their commute – simply to be refreshed by this man's friendly works of authentic kindness, bringing springs of new life into a world that routine stress had rendered so toxic.*

In her autobiography The Long Loneliness, Dorothy Day – one of the most revered figures in the history of the American Catholic Church for her commitment to the poor and for co-founding the Catholic worker movement – wrote that in her journey of conversion from atheist to Catholic, the first impulse towards Catholicism was Mrs. Barrett, a neighbor and mother of her friend Kathryn.

One Saturday morning young Dorothy burst into the Barnett apartment looking for her friend Kathryn, and found Mrs. Barrett, down on her knees, saying her prayers.

Without dismay or embarrassment Mrs. Barrett turned to tell little Dorothy that Kathryn and the other children had all gone to the store, and then went on with her praying.

That single moment had a profound impact on the young Dorothy:

*I felt a burst of love toward Mrs. Barrett that I have never forgotten, a feeling of gratitude and happiness that warmed my heart. Mrs. Barrett, in her sordid little tenement flat, finished her breakfast dishes and got down on her knees and prayed to God! She had God and there was beauty and joy in her life!*

Dorothy Day's baptism would come decades later: Mrs. Barnett probably never knew the impression her simple prayer life had on Dorothy.

Brothers and sisters, what might our toll-booth-taker and Dorothy Day's neighbor, Mrs. Barnett, have to do with this weekend's readings from Scripture?

Our three Scripture readings today are often pointed out as "call narratives" or "vocation narratives," and it's impossible to over emphasize their importance. They are at the heart of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. The last two weeks we've been reflecting that to be a disciple is not only to worship Jesus, but *to imitate* Jesus. The toll-booth-taker and Mrs. Barrett – whether they knew it or not – *were imitating Jesus* by how they were living their lives.

In our readings today we hear the call of Isaiah to a specific ministry: to be a prophet. The call of Peter and his fishing buddies, to be Disciples of Jesus, and the call of Paul to be a missionary. The original Scripture readers would use these stories of Isaiah, Peter and Paul to help them understand their own personal calls from God, and we are invited to do the same... a good question to reflect on in light of our readings today as well as on the toll-booth taker and Mrs. Barrett.

Are we gathered here this morning, aware that each of us individually is called by God in a particular way to use the gift *of who we are* – the gift *our personality* – that *we have been given*, to help the world become a bit more the world God intended?

Are we aware at all that God is *using us...*; that each of us is another Christ and together are the Body of Christ?

And, as the toll-taker and Mrs. Barrett remind us, we're called to bloom where we are planted – right here, right now – in our relationships, families, neighborhood, parish, workplace... in our world.

Our Scripture readings point out that one of the obstacles that can get in the way of recognizing God's call is that we can't imagine that we are worthy enough to be called by God...:

Isaiah cries out: "*Woe is me! I am doomed because I am a person of unclean lips...*"

Paul confesses that he's the least of the apostles because he *persecuted the church...*

Peter falls on his knees and tells Jesus to get away from him, because "*I'm a sinful person.*"

The truth is, we're all human...; we're all sinners...; we all make mistakes...; we're not perfect... We are precious works of art – in process. AND, God uses us in the midst of it all as God's vessels to bring about the reign of God! Progress not perfection! As the late spiritual writer Henry Nouwen was fond of saying: we're "*wounded healers.*" God uses our woundedness to heal others. An addict can find no one better for help, than another addict in recovery. God's grace is enough for us.

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For us as Catholics sometimes it's extra hard to recognize that God is calling us in our lives, because for centuries "call" / "vocation" was presented in a very limited way: only bishops, priests and religious were "called" – the rest of us were to "pray, pay and obey"!

The truth is *we're all called* – whether we're in the world of business, education, health care, public service... retired... caring for our family... – *to imitate* Jesus... to be Jesus!

Finally, another element that is common in our three Scripture Readings is that when we become aware that we are called by God – we change! Isaiah's, Paul's and Peter's calls radically change their lives and that's the same for us. Our value system changes, we have a completely different sense of what's really important in life... where we spend our time, money and talents. We make a 180° turn and little-by-little, we become the people God intends us to be... and: the "call" to be a Disciple is not a one-time invitation, but *continuous* throughout our lives.

The spiritual challenge is to be awake and recognize how Jesus is calling us, right here and right now, – in the midst of life... there is no retirement or leave of absence from the call to discipleship!

Some of you may recall on New Year's Day at our liturgical gathering, that in the Assembly we welcomed a guest, Sister Rose, who was on a visit to her Community and family from her Ministry. In sharing her story with us, Sister explained that while, at the age of 79, living comfortable here in up-state with her Community, she was strongly nudged / called to go to the Texas border and work with our undocumented brothers and sisters! In her discernment she wondered if she was crazy to respond to such a call at her age! Sister Rose is now 82 and thriving in her ministry at the Border!

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Several weeks ago in my Homily, I used one of my favorite prayers and people have been asking that we provide copies of it, so we do have it on the insert in the bulletin this weekend, and I think it once again well summarizes the core of our reflections today:

It is the statement by Fr. Pedro Arrupe, SJ former General Superior of the Society of Jesus:

*Nothing is more practical than finding God,  
that is, then falling in love  
in a quite absolute final way.  
What you are in love with,  
what seizes your imagination,  
will affect everything:  
it will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning,  
what you will do with your evenings,  
how you spend your weekends,  
what you read,  
who you know,  
what breaks your heart,  
and what amazes you with joy and gratitude.  
fall in love,  
stay in love,  
and it will decide everything.*

Amen!