

FIRST READING: 1 Samuel 1:9-20

A reading from the first Book of Samuel:

Hannah rose after a meal at Shiloh, and presented herself before the LORD; at the time, Eli the priest was sitting on a chair near the doorpost of the LORD's temple. In her bitterness she prayed to the LORD, weeping copiously, and she made a vow, promising: "O LORD of hosts, if you look with pity on the misery of your handmaid, if you remember me and do not forget me, if you give your handmaid a male child, I will give him to the LORD for as long as he lives; neither wine nor liquor shall he drink, and no razor shall ever touch his head." As she remained long at prayer before the LORD, Eli watched her mouth, for Hannah was praying silently; though her lips were moving, her voice could not be heard. Eli, thinking her drunk, said to her, "How long will you make a drunken show of yourself? Sober up from your wine!" "It isn't that, my lord," Hannah answered. "I am an unhappy woman. I have had neither wine nor liquor; I was only pouring out my troubles to the LORD. Do not think your handmaid a ne'er-do-well; my prayer has been prompted by my deep sorrow and misery." Eli said, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him." She replied, "Think kindly of your maidservant," and left. She went to her quarters, ate and drank with her husband, and no longer appeared downcast. Early the next morning they worshiped before the LORD, and then returned to their home in Ramah. When Elkanah had relations with his wife Hannah, the LORD remembered her. She conceived, and at the end of her term bore a son whom she called Samuel, since she had asked the LORD for him.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: 1 Samuel 2:1, 4-5, 6-7, 8abcd

***My heart exults in the Lord, my Savior.***

"My heart exults in the LORD, my horn is exalted in my God. I have swallowed up my enemies; I rejoice in my victory."

***My heart exults in the Lord, my Savior.***

"The bows of the mighty are broken, while the tottering gird on strength. The well-fed hire themselves out for bread, while the hungry batten on spoil. The barren wife bears seven sons, while the mother of many languishes."

***My heart exults in the Lord, my Savior.***

"The LORD puts to death and gives life; he casts down to the nether world; he raises up again. The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he humbles, he also exalts."

***My heart exults in the Lord, my Savior.***

"He raises the needy from the dust; from the dung heap he lifts up the poor, To seat them with nobles and make a glorious throne their heritage."

***My heart exults in the Lord, my Savior.***

Gospel: Mark 1:21-28

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark:

Jesus came to Capernaum with his followers, and on the sabbath he entered the synagogue and taught. The people were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having

authority and not as the scribes. In their synagogue was a man with an unclean spirit; he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!" Jesus rebuked him and said, "Quiet! Come out of him!" The unclean spirit convulsed him and with a loud cry came out of him. All were amazed and asked one another, "What is this? A new teaching with authority. He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him." His fame spread everywhere throughout the whole region of Galilee.

The Gospel of the Lord.

### **Reflection for the 1<sup>st</sup> Tuesday of the Year II**

Many of the great biblical heroes, prophets and kings have, like contemporary super heroes, an unusual origin story. Since they are unique and special individuals who are chosen by God, their specialness can be seen in the uniqueness of the circumstances of their birth. The only reason we have their origin story, in the first place, is that they were important characters whose lives affected the people for whom the scriptures were written. If their lives had no impact on God's people, we would not have their origin story. This is not always a concept that is first and foremost in our minds as we read the bible. Their stories are all written in retrospect; perhaps many years after the individuals had died and only from the perspective of faith; the faith of the author and readers.

Having said this, the story of Hanna and Elkanah always reminds me of an anecdote of the person who prays each day to win the lottery and never did. One day, in frustration after years of steadfast prayer, the person gave an ultimatum to God. God responded, "To win, one must first buy a ticket!" The way to have a baby is revealed at the end of the story. To conceive a child requires sexual relations not just prayer.

Rarely have I, as a priest, ever intervened in the prayers people pray. There have been a few instances when the things for which people have prayed contradict the goodness of God. In one parish, many years ago, one woman prayed, each day, in the Prayer of the Faithful for sinners, especially those of Russia. I attempted to point out that, in scripture, when Paul prayed for sinners, he always included the line, of whom I am foremost. I also added that I pray that way too. She replied that this didn't apply to her since she never sinned. I quoted from the first letter of John that when we say that we have never sinned, we make Jesus a liar. Soon after this, since she continued her prayer, I stopped inviting people's prayers during the Prayer of the Faithful. Once in a great while, people would offer prayers that God would curse their nasty and noisy neighbors. We pray for our enemies not against them. God loves our worst enemies and those we can't stand; God's love is infinite, eternal and unconditional. We can rely on God's love for others when ours falls short.

This story shows the humanity and deepest yearnings of Hannah. She turned to God for a baby. It also shows the limitations and humanity of the high priest Eli. Just because of his position and authority did not mean he was better than everyone. He showed that he was plagued, as I am, with pettiness, judgment and a lack of compassion. It took Hanna's reproach and true intentions for him to show any compassion for her. His closing blessing to her was hard won by her correction of him. This is a lesson for all of us who judge others. We, like Eli, will always get egg on our faces when we do so. As a sinner, I am foremost too.

Within subsequent weeks, the story of Samuel will continue to unfold. He has two full books in the bible that tell his story.

I remember, back in Advent of 1978, the parish where I was assigned as a deacon, had a scripture scholar come in to give an Advent series of talks. At the moment I can't recall his name, he suffered a series of strokes before his death. He spoke of an opportunity he had to discuss the scriptures along with a group of Jewish bible scholars. He had expected an orderly, systematic discussion that, as a Catholic theologian, was common in his experience. Instead, the Jewish theologians told stories that seemed to have nothing to do with the texts they were studying. Yet the stories proved relevant and poignant in the discussion. They always asked questions and never gave answers. Instead of approaching bible study line by line and word for word they related the scriptures to life and lived experience. Each time I read in this passage from Mark that Jesus taught with authority and not as the scribes, I remember that story the Advent speaker told. How much has this gospel influenced the way I approach scripture. My task as a preacher is to relate the text to living life too.

What we read in this passage is that Jesus had authority. Whose was it? The people in the story are surprised and ask, "What is this?" From our perspective we know and believe that Jesus is God. They, on the other hand, did not. There was a downside to this passage that was to shape Jesus' approach to his mission and ministry. Jesus mission was to die on the cross and rise from the dead. His mission was to preach the good news of salvation and to serve God's people. He didn't seek fame as a wonder worker. From this point on, Jesus, in the gospel of Mark, would actively try to hide his authority and power as the Messiah. Commanding unclean spirits was a side line for Jesus. He was born to suffer and die on the cross. The greatest sign of Jesus divinity did not come from his miracles; it came from his resurrection from the dead.

This is the perspective that we share as we read this passage. We already believe in Jesus and his mission to save us. We know that Jesus is God's son and our redeemer. We know that he's the Messiah who will return at the end of the age to establish the Kingdom of God. The people who witnessed these events in the synagogue in Capernaum did not. Jesus' life, mission and ministry were just beginning to unfold. Jesus sought people's faith in him not his personal fame.

As the story of Samuel begins to unfold and as the gospel of Mark begins we will witness the wonder and awe that God intends us to know from them. How these stories unfold lets us know the mystery of God, not just as we read it from the pages of the bible but in the lives we live and discern God's movement within and among us.

May we know God's presence as we live our daily lives

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