

REFLECTIONS

Year 2 - Ordinary Time
First Readings

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Introduction

As an outcome of the "Synod on the Word of God," held in Rome in 2008, a number of propositions were presented. Here, as an introduction to Volume II of "Reflections," I want to mention a few that have motivated me to publish the "scribbles" I have written each day for almost twenty years:

- (a) "That a church renewed by a listening to the Word of God can undertake a new missionary season, announcing the Word of God to all people."
- (b) Disciples are invited to frequently invoke the Holy Spirit, so that the Spirit may lead to an ever deeper awareness of the Word of God and the witness of our faith.
- (c) "The Church must be that community which, reconciled by that Word which is Jesus Christ, offers a space of reconciliation, mercy and forgiveness to all."
- (d) We hope that a new season of love for the Sacred Scripture will emerge, so that a relationship with the person of Jesus will emerge from their prayerful and faithful reading.
- (e) Celebration of the Word is one of the privileged places for encounter with Christ. In this proclamation Christ is made present and continues to speak to his people.
- (f) In the midst of today's noise and busyness, which make effective listening difficult, we are encouraged to cultivate a disposition of interior silence and a way of hearing the Word of God that transforms life.
- (g) The Synod recommends the formation of small ecclesial communities where the Word of God is heard, studied and prayed over.
- (h) Receiving the Word of God generates a new way of seeing things and promotes an authentic ecology. It is the basis for dialogue with non-Christian religions and other Christian traditions.
- (i) The Word of God helps us to recognise the signs of God in all human efforts to render the world more just and habitable.

In the spirit of these and other Synod propositions, I offer these reflections.

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The Book of Samuel is presented in two parts and was written late in the 7th century BC. The title alludes to the lead figure in the first book. Samuel, was responsible for the enthronement of David, whose history is the subject of the second book. The Book is not meant to be a complete and continuous history, nor a systematic account of the period. It is rather a series of episodes centred on the persons of Samuel, Saul and David.

***Monday of the First Week of Ordinary Time
Samuel 1:1-8 - Love Unconditionally***

I see this reading as a tender love story. It involves a man called Elkanah and his wife, Hannah. He did, in fact, have two wives, which was not an uncommon custom. Every year they travelled to Shiloh on pilgrimage and made offerings and sacrifices. Part of the latter was given to the wives and children. But Hannah, who was barren, got a double portion. Elkanah loved her for herself, rather than for what she *could do* for him.

Is there any other kind of genuine love? We can love those who fill our lives with good things - who give us what we need or want. But surely the real test comes when the person we love can't make our lives fuller or richer. What happens when a child goes astray, a friend betrays, a parent disappoints, or a spouse develops Alzheimer's? Love that withers and dies when these things happen is not real. I and all of us know people who love unconditionally. That's the kind of love God has for me and you - the kind of love God asks us to demonstrate.

***Tuesday of the First Week of Ordinary Time
1 Samuel 1:9-20 - Welcome Whatever***

If I was ever invited to a special function hosted by, for example, a President or Prime Minister, I would be at my very best. I would acquaint myself with protocol and so forth and present myself accordingly. Likewise, there are religions that require rituals or purifications before one approaches the deity. For the best reception, one must come with reverence, humility and gifts in hand.

Biblical religion asks that we approach God with deep reverence. But the truth is that God would welcome us on any terms! This is the acceptance we see in Hannah's story. For many years, she had prayed to have a child, but she remained barren. Then came the year when, at Shiloh, she vented her unhappiness, disappointment and even her bitterness and anger. Such was the outpourings of her emotion that the High Priest thought she was drunk! But on hearing her story, he didn't shame her; rather, he affirmed her.

God hears an angry prayer as well as loving praise.

***Wednesday of the First Week of Ordinary Time 1 Samuel
3:1-10, 19-20 - Speech of the Prophet***

With Samuel, we enter into the age of the prophets. These people, chosen by God to speak on God's behalf, carried a power of speech and urgency higher than their own intelligence or experience. Earlier leaders often derived their power through physical means - the rod of Moses, the army of Joshua, the strength of Samson. But with the coming of Samuel, God invested power in the speech of the prophets.

That power is not a relic of ancient days. It is with us today and often not expressed in specifically religious language. So anyone who exposes corruption in high places speaks prophetically, as does the one who presses the claims of justice, truth and decency. Prophetic speech appeals to a higher order than social custom and civil law, and calling on that higher order is what gives prophetic speech its authority and power. It cuts through deceit and conceit and challenges the human heart to do its duty.