

God's choice can surprise us!

Each Lent puts before us the Rite of Election, the initiation of the process which brings catechumens into the Catholic community. After the Rite of Election, they are no longer catechumens; they become “the elect.” The Old Testament reading for the Fourth Sunday of Lent [A] presents a similar incident: David is “divinely elected” when God chooses him succeed Saul as Israel’s king. Scriptures are full of stories of how God calls men and women to share in tasks of divine significance. God’s choice of David did not merely put in place a king for the people; it established the family line from which the Messiah was to come. Divine election presents a transformative moment of challenge for the person called by God.

In the story of David’s election, several developments stand out. First, it becomes clear that human preference does not always reflect divine preference. The prophet Samuel assumed that Jesse’s oldest son of was the most likely choice, given his lofty stature and preeminence in the family. God reminds Samuel that divine standards differ from human estimation. God looks at the heart: for readiness to serve, for an ear open to God’s bidding, for obedience. In this case, God has chosen the youngest and least likely of Jesse’s sons; David’s heart was pleasing to God.

Second, the passage tells us that “from that day on, the spirit of the Lord rushed upon David.” God blesses those chosen for special service, enabling them to carry out their God-given mission. Left to our own abilities, we often feel our simple human inadequacy. This was also true of the people we encounter in the Scriptures. They demur when God calls them to participate in the unfolding plan of salvation. When God tells Moses to go to pharaoh on behalf of the oppressed Hebrew slaves, Moses responds, “O Lord, I have never be eloquent [...] but am slow of speech and slow of tongue” (Exod 4:10). God promises to be with Moses and to provide the words he is to speak. This reminds us of an important aspect of God’s call: it is God’s mission, not ours. God will provide what we need, if we simply do our best.

It is not a mere cliché to say, “We have all been called by God.” By our Christian baptism, we have indeed been called by God and given a share in the mission of Jesus Christ to bring the gospel to life by our deeds and words. Our calling may not be as dramatic as Biblical vocation

narratives, but our calling is just as real. Most importantly, God's call comes to us out of love for who we are: sons and daughters of God. What parent doesn't want the best for a beloved child? We believe that God wants this for us, and calls us to share in a mission of divine significance. Even if we touch only one other person with the power of the gospel, it can be a transforming experience for both us and them. And most of us touch the lives of many others, whether we know it or not.

This Sunday's gospel tells of Jesus' cure of a blind man, a man for whom darkness is changed into light. Through the healing power of Jesus, the blind man comes to belief and understanding. Hearing our call, responding to it, and living in the dignity of our Christian vocation is to abide in the light of God's truth. Through our living of the gospel, we bring the light of Christ to one another. Each of us has been chosen by God for this divine work.

- Abbot Gregory J. Polan, O.S.B.

Conventual Chaplain *ad honorem*