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Reflection

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Today's readings are rich in meaning and pull together themes that we have celebrated over the Christmas season. They can be summarized in three words: call, listening and mission.

Samuel, the son of Hannah, of whom we heard about just before Christmas, is awakened during sleep by a still, small voice calling him to what - he does not know. Eli, the wise elder, eventually helps him to understand that this might be a call from God.

The Gospel reflects the mission of Jesus to the poor, the sick and the oppressed as well as the call of the disciples to follow Jesus. The disciples are a bumbling crowd of fishermen and laborers who have much to learn about the mission of Jesus and their call to further God's Reign in our world.

Today's readings take their richness from within the context of earlier readings of the Christmas season. I cannot think about Samuel without reflecting on his mother Hannah, who in her old age, gave birth to a son who became a prophet and judge. Hannah pre-figured Elizabeth and Mary, both of whom listened to God and surrendered to the call of the Spirit as they heard it. Both the prayer of Hannah and Mary's Magnificat prophesize Jesus' mission and God's dream of justice, love and peace in our world.

The Baptism of Jesus, which we celebrated last Sunday, initiated Jesus into his Mission. As Jesus emerges from the waters of the river, the Spirit descends upon him and God speaks, "This is my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased". This is an affirmation of Jesus as the one to reveal God's dream for all of creation.

The Feast of the Epiphany has the effect of broadening the Mission of God's salvific action beyond the Jewish community to all the peoples of the earth community. The psalm response of that feast says it well and is a favorite of mine, "All the nations on earth will adore you, Lord."

With all this as context for today's readings, we have an enhanced understanding of the call of Samuel and his response, "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening. Samuel went on to lead the people of Israel as prophet and judge. Later verses in

this section of I Samuel read, “Samuel grew up and the Lord was with him, not permitting any word of his to be without effect.” (1 Samuel 3:19)

The Gospel of Mark, from which we read today, focuses on Jesus as he begins his public ministry. John is in prison and Jesus has gone to Galilee with his disciples to proclaim the Gospel. Jesus proclaims, in an earlier passage, “This is the time of fulfillment. The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the good news.” (Mk 1:14-15) Jesus calls Simon and Andrew, James and John to leave their nets behind and follow him. He assumes the role of teacher to his disciples who are learning what it means for Jesus to be about the Father’s work. Besides curing Simon’s mother-in-law, Jesus cures all who are brought to him who are ill or possessed of demons. Exhausted by his ministry, he takes a break to pray and listen to God’s desires for him and all of God’s creation. Jesus then moves on with his disciples proclaiming the Gospel to the whole of Galilee and freeing those needing liberation from illness and sin.

The responsorial psalm, sums up the experiences of these whom we meet in these post-Christmas readings.

“I have waited, waited for the Lord
He stooped toward me and heard my cry...

Sacrifice and oblation you wished not,
But ears open to obedience you gave me...

In the scroll it is written for me,
To do your will, O God is my delight;
Your law is within my heart.” Ps 40
Here I am, Lord, I come to do your will.

The readings pose a challenge for all of us:

How are my listening skills? Where are we hearing God’s call this day? How are we living the Mission and furthering the Reign of God today?

God’s Spirit, God’s energy, is within and around us. We are called to live the Spirit, a spirit of peace, love and justice. Our effort may seem small, but God can “run with it.” Listen up! God is calling each of us at every moment to live the Gospel.