

## 2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time - January 19, 2020

### Homily Deacon Jim Olsheski

Last week, with the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, we concluded the Christmas liturgical season AND our diocesan Holy Year of Renewal. We now begin Ordinary Time. The word "Ordinary" as used here is not meant to suggest that this liturgical period is plain or unremarkable, but simply to indicate that these weeks are counted, from the 1<sup>st</sup> week of Ordinary Time to the 34<sup>th</sup> week. In short, Ordinary Time is that time of the liturgical year that is NOT Lent or Easter, Advent or Christmas. However, there is nothing "ordinary" about Ordinary Time as we see in today's readings.

A major theme of the readings is "**being called**," which the dictionary defines as "a strong urge toward a particular way of life or career; a vocation."

The first reading from Isaiah is taken from the second of the four Servant Songs, which, taken together, depict the figure of one **called by God** for a vocation to Israel and all the nations. Although faithful, he suffers opposition but, in the end, the Servant triumphs. Since the early Church, this Servant has traditionally been interpreted to be Christ, who **God calls** to lead the nations.

Last week, we heard the first Servant Song in which **God called** the Servant to bring justice to the nations. In today's reading, **God calls** the Servant to bring God's salvation, not only to Israel, but to ALL the nations of the world, all the while relying on God for his strength. In the second reading St. Paul declares that he was "**called** to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God;" while in the Gospel, John the Baptist completes his **calling** by pointing toward Jesus with the words, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world."

In last Sunday's Gospel, we heard of Jesus' baptism at which time Jesus was **called** by God the Father when the voice from heaven declared, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." Just as St. Paul reminded the Corinthians that they were **called** to be holy, we are also **called**, through our baptism, to be holy. But what does it mean to be holy? Holiness means to live a life of spiritual purity or, as Jesus tells us, "[to] be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Mt 5:48)

In times past, a common misperception was that only priests, and religious brothers and sisters were called to holiness. However, the Second Vatican Council re-emphasized that every one of us is called to holiness: "The universal call to holiness."

But how do we become holy? We, most definitely, cannot do that on our own; we must rely upon and cooperate with the Holy Spirit, who works in us when we are open, when we present ourselves, to him. Our prayer needs to be that of today's responsorial psalm: "Here I am Lord, I come to do your will."

No two of us are called to holiness in precisely the same way. There is no "cookie cutter" approach; our Lord individually customizes holiness. Individually, we are each "called by name" because of our distinctive personal, lived experience. We uniquely become one in the Lord in our holiness.

One example is Dolores Hart, a Hollywood leading lady of late 1950s – early 1960s who starred in films with Robert Wagner and Elvis Presley, among others. She gave it all up in 1963 at the height of her acting career to become a Benedictine nun.

A significant influence on her answering her call came when she was filming the movie, *Francis of Assisi*, in which she portrayed St. Clare. She met with Pope John XXIII and told him "I am Dolores Hart, the actress playing Clare." The future saint told her, "No; tu sei Chiara," -- "No; you **are** Clare!" Dolores Hart is now known as Mother Delores Hart at the Abbey of Regina Laudis (Queen of Praise) in Bethlehem, Connecticut. The title of an HBO documentary film on her life summarizes her calling: *God Is Bigger Than Elvis!*

But not everyone of us experiences such a radical transformation as a result of answering our call. For as Martin Luther King, Jr., whose national holiday we celebrate this Monday, said:

"If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as a Michaelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, 'Here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.'"

Whether our lives be extraordinary or ordinary, regardless of our calling, we will answer our call to holiness if we follow the words of Mother Teresa and "Do ordinary things with extraordinary love."