

1st Sunday in Advent

Be Ready for the Call

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It used to be thought that only priests and nuns had vocations. Young men and women would pray and weigh over whether or not they had a vocation. But after Vatican II the Church has emphasized the idea that everyone has a vocation—for after all vocation comes from the Latin *vocare*, to call. A vocation is a calling, and today the church emphasizes that everyone has a calling, a calling from God.

What is the meaning of my life? What is its purpose? I work with students who are trying to discern their calling. And one of the things I emphasize with them is that the meaning and direction of their lives is not simply a matter of their own choice. It's not simply a matter of doing whatever they want with their lives, but a matter of learning what they most want. The meaning of life is not a choice so much as it is a calling. Our choice lies first in whether or not we take the time to quiet down, reflect over our relationships and the course of our lives and listen to how God is speaking to us. And secondly our choice lies in how we respond to what we are hearing in the depths of our souls.

To hear our call we must listen for it. Zen Buddhism teaches that enlightenment is not something that one attains by one's own efforts. One can meditate day and night for years, and suddenly finally attain enlightenment while washing the dishes or taking out the garbage. So too in the Christian tradition God's grace is ultimately a gift, not a reward to be earned. A Buddhist disciple once asked his master then, if we do not attain enlightenment through long years of meditation, why do we devote ourselves to meditation at all? The master responded: that we might be awake and alert, that we might recognize enlightenment when it comes. As Paul says in today's second reading: now is the hour to wake from your sleep. Now is always the hour. You cannot be too awake.

Jesus warns us today that when the Son of Man comes two men will be out in the field, one will be taken and one will be left behind. Two women will be grinding at the mill. One will be taken, one will be left behind. When God calls what determines who responds and who stays behind? The one who leaves is the one who is alert and waiting for the word, ready to leave everything and follow. How could Peter and Andrew, James and John immediately drop what they were doing, quit their day jobs and follow Jesus when he called them? They must have already been waiting for it. Already wondering whether there was not more to life than what they were living. They heard the call because

they were listening for it. While the rich young man, whom Jesus also called to sell all that he had and follow him, why did he stay behind? He too was looking for more, but when his call came, he wasn't ready to pull the trigger. He did not want it enough. He'd rather long for more than commit to becoming more.

Evangelical fundamentalists have a word to describe what happens in today's Gospel—they call it the rapture. And those who don't hear the call? They are the troubled and the confused "left behind" to endure the tribulations of the end times. But we don't have to wait for the end of the world for the Son of Man to enter into our lives. God is always knocking on our door. Its just that most of the time we have the TV on too loud to hear it. Or we may think we hear something, but we are too absorbed checking Facebook or Instagram, Twitter or Snapchat to check it out. Or we are worried it's those pesky Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses again. Or we dismiss it as just our imagination. Or we just roll over and fall back asleep. There are a million reasons why we don't answer the door.

There is only one reason to answer that knocking. Only one reason to respond to God's call—to become whom we were made to be all along, to become our true selves, and in so doing, to be taken up with our Lord and be saved.

Now God does not just call individuals, he also calls communities. Today is our 17th anniversary as a parish, and around the 50th year for Our Lady of the Lake as a worshiping community of Catholics out here in Tum Tum and Suncrest. How is God calling Our Lady of the Lake? Can we hear the knock on our door? And will we answer or will we be left behind?