

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Jan 18th 2014

I am reminded by the readings today of a conversation I had with a grandfather after the baptism of his infant grandson. “What a beautiful rite is Baptism,” he confessed, and added that all Christians would benefit from being present at baptisms regularly during their lives. In saying this he affirmed for me how full, rich, and filled with wonderful images the baptismal liturgy is.

Today at the end of the first week in Ordinary Time the readings remind us of some very fundamental faith issues: call/response and anointing. In the selection from First Samuel, anointing is forefront and, in Mark’s gospel, Jesus calls Levi to be his disciple and the call initiates an immediate response from the tax collector. These two, call/response and anointing are found prominently in the baptismal ritual.

Becoming one with Christ and with the community professing faith in him is the most fundamental aspect of our life as a Christian person. Baptism provides us the opportunity to respond to God’s call to growth in faith, hope and love.

In the Hebrew Bible priests, prophets and kings were typically anointed with oil. Also in Christian baptism the one receiving the sacrament is anointed with oil. The baptismal anointing provides the opportunity to reflect on the meaning of Christ’s own anointing as a mediator between us and God (priest), as the one who speaks the word of God (prophet) and the one who so very gently rules (serves) in our lives (king).

Thus the invitation, the call of Christ and of God, is given to live out the priestly life by being Christ to those we meet on our path of life; to live a prophetic life by living and speaking the word of God to others; and finally living our kingly lives by following Christ who “ruled” by serving others (not by “lording it over” others).

Clearly these are enormous tasks and the truth is that we do NOT accomplish them by ourselves. Christ, “priest, prophet and king”, is the exemplar and our call like Levi’s in the gospel today: “follow me,” is just the beginning of a life lived with and for others modeled on Jesus’ own life.

So as my grandfather-friend suggests, re-visiting our baptismal promises is such a good and challenging thing for us so that we can attend to God’s love and to trust God’s goodness and the Christ whom we follow as his priestly, prophetic and kingly persons in our world as he did in his. What an honor and joy.

Tom Shanahan, S.J.