

“Speak, for your servant is listening.” This is the response of the young man Samuel in the First Reading after the Lord was mysteriously and persistently calling Him. Can you imagine how frustrating it must’ve been for Samuel to hear someone repeatedly calling your name but not know who it is, what exactly is going on, and how you should respond? Thankfully, with the help of the Temple priest Eli, Samuel is able to eventually respond with attentiveness to the Lord and a readiness to serve Him.

The Lord was calling young Samuel to be His prophet to the Chosen people of Israel and to help inaugurate the divinely established monarchy in Israel. This account of God’s call to the prophet Samuel demonstrates that God is *persistent* in calling human beings to do His will. God *persists* in calling us *because* He *persists* in loving us! God’s call to the young prophet Samuel was *personal*—“Samuel! Samuel!”—likewise, God persistently calls every one of us *by name*.

Brothers and sisters, the Lord is persistently calling each one of us *by name right now in this moment in history!* If we’re angry or discouraged about the dysfunctional, toxic, immoral, and polarized state

of our culture, our politics, or our country, then we need to listen up—because the Lord is persistently calling each of us *by name* in the same way that He persistently called Samuel. The Lord is calling us personally to *become saints* and to help change things for the better!

As disciples of Christ, *all of us* are called to help build a civic culture based on objective truth and the equal and intrinsic dignity of *every* human person. As disciples of Jesus, we're called to help build a civic culture defined by peace and *mutual* respect and love, and that includes love *for our enemies* and those we strongly disagree with. I think the Holy Spirit wants to remind all of us right now that we can strongly and passionately disagree with someone on a particular issue without hating them as human beings. This is currently one of the biggest problems in our highly polarized and toxic political culture and it's frankly destroying the fabric of our country, which was founded on the dignity of the human person and tolerance.

I truly believe that, as a country, we will not flourish or succeed *unless* we love objective truth and human life. We certainly won't live up to our founding ideals unless we love objective truth and human life

again. Unless we as a nation learn to love objective truth and human life, then we will continue down this self-destructive path of hatred and political violence, which can only lead to tyranny. The Lord is persistently calling each of us *by name, regardless of our political beliefs*, to be peacemakers! Our Lord Jesus says, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matthew 5:7).

The Lord is persistently calling us *by name* to be courageous champions of truth, goodness, and beauty—to be courageous champions of human life and dignity! The Lord is calling each of us *by name* to be courageous champions of rational dialogue and debate, where opposing ideas can be passionately debated so that the truth may win out! A constitutional republic such as ours cannot survive unless it is based on the preservation of objective truth and respect for the intrinsic dignity of *every* human life, from conception until natural death, from Republicans to Democrats, from conservatives to progressives.

“What are you looking for?” This is the question from today’s Gospel posed by our Lord Jesus to the two disciples of St. John the Baptist: Andrew and John. The profound irony in this question is that

the *Answer is asking the question*. There's no doubt in my mind that our Lord and Savior asks each of us this very question in a very personal and direct way. Jesus is undoubtedly the ultimate Answer to the deepest and most persistent questions of the human heart, which longs for truth and authentic and lasting peace, justice, freedom, and happiness.

With everything that's happened in our beloved country recently and over the last year with all of the anger, hatred, and violence in our nation—there's no doubt in my mind that our country needs to rediscover our Lord Jesus Christ. Brothers and sisters, Christ is the ultimate Cure for all of our nation's spiritual ills and for all of the evil that plagues our country. He is the cure for each and every one of us Who conquers our sins and destroys our death.

The declaration of St. John the Baptist in today's Gospel should stir within us a burning desire for Christ as the divine Cure for all of our spiritual ills: "Behold the Lamb of God." Sound familiar? It should, because the priest says these beautiful words at every mass right before the distribution of Holy Communion, as he lifts the Body and Blood of the Christ into the air. In fact, these are some of my favorite words to

say in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass: “Behold the Lamb of God.

Behold Him Who *takes away the sins of the world*. Blessed are those *called* to the supper of the Lamb.” In other words, when the priest says this, we’re basically telling you the people, “This is the spiritual Cure for us and our world and for all of the evil that plagues us! This is it, right here! Behold the Lamb of God!”

Brothers and sisters, as Catholics and disciples of Christ, we’re being called *personally* by the Lord to make Him present in our nation today through *our very lives*, through our words *and* actions. Such a divine initiative of evangelization and renewal for our nation *begins* in *our hearts with our own lives*: am *I* allowing Christ to dwell in *my* heart and transform *my* life? We can’t help to sanctify our nation until we *first* allow the Lord to sanctify *us as individuals*. And *then* we must make Christ the center and foundation of our families, which are building blocks of society! The family is the domestic church where the Gospel should reign in terms of truth, goodness, mercy, and justice!

Brothers and sisters, our nation cannot change for the good until *we all* change for the good! St. Augustine of Hippo said it best when he

said, “Bad times! Troublesome times! This [is what people] are saying. Let our lives be good; *and the times are good. We* make our times; such as *we* are, such are the times.”

If we want Christ to transform our nation, then our fellow citizens need to encounter Christ in each of us! We are called to unite ourselves to Christ so much so that we can confidently say with St. Paul: “I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live, *no longer I, but Christ lives in me*” (Galatians 2:20). So if the people around us meet Christ *in* us, then hopefully by the grace of God, *they* will be led into a personal relationship with Christ *in and through* His Church. This is the goal of evangelization—this is the essence of the Gospel. This is how the Lord wants to sanctify and transform our culture: one person at a time.

As we prepare to worship and receive our Lord Jesus Christ in the Most Holy Eucharist, let’s open our minds and hearts to His persistent, personal call to each of us, and like the prophet Samuel and the psalmist, let’s respond wholeheartedly, “Here am I Lord. Speak, for your servant is listening. I come to do Your will.”