

PRO-LIFE
HOMILY NOTES
Second Sunday in Ordinary Time
17-18 January 2009

First Reading: 1 Sm 3:3b-10, 19

Responsorial Psalm: Ps 40:2, 4, 7-8, 8-9, 10

Second Reading: 1 Cor 6:13c-15a, 17-20

Gospel: Jn 1:35-42

Andrew follows Jesus. After less than a day with Jesus, Andrew is convinced he has found the Messiah. Andrew finds his own voice and proclaims to his brother, Simon, that Jesus is the Messiah. Not all will be as willing as Andrew and Simon to hear the proclamation of the Gospel. Following Jesus will take Andrew and Simon to places they never expected. And it will for us, too.

The same thing is true of Samuel in the first reading. God calls and, at first, Samuel is unsure of whose voice it is. He awakens, recognizes it, finds his own voice, and responds: "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening." All too often the world turns that around: "Listen, Lord, your servant is speaking." The world distorts the call in a self-centered fashion.

The call of Jesus resonates in Andrew's very being; in his very identity. It speaks to all Andrew is and is called to become. The same is true of Samuel. Samuel was called from the womb to be dedicated to God. God's call is so powerful it addresses the human person even in the womb: "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you" (Jer. 1:5). Psalm 71 recounts: "From my mother's womb you have been my help."

When did you become *you*? That is, when did you become *human*, such that you could be regarded as a person with rights and duties ... things you had to do, things expected of you? When did you "get into the club" known as humanity?

When did you become *you*? Was it when you became an adult? When you had a mortgage? Some people don't have mortgages, and they are still persons. Was it when you left home and went off on your own? When you passed the driver's test and received your license? Maybe it was when you had to pay the first bill for auto insurance! No. Clearly you became *you* long before that. Some people never learn to drive, and they are still persons.

When did you become considered a real person? Was it when you turned sixteen, had your first kiss, your first date? No, it was long before that. Was it when you could finally

do algebra, graduated high school, ... could go to school in the first place? No, it was before that. Some people never go to school, and they are still persons.

Was it when you learned to walk as a child? When you could feed yourself? When you had a mind that was conscious? No. Some people cannot walk or feed themselves. Some people are unconscious at various times for various reasons. They are still persons. So where is the cut-off line? When was it that you became *you*. We can't let this be arbitrary. There must be an intrinsic moment, a threshold that is not arbitrary.

Was it when you were born? Well, we know that the child before birth can be operated on, can be tested, can cry, suck his or her thumb. The only difference between the child before birth and after birth is essentially spatial. Did you become a person just because you left the womb? No. You were a person in the womb. Geographical location does not make a person.

When is the critical moment before which I was not. Is it when I have arms, hands, or legs? We know that some persons do not have these, but they are still persons.

We know from science that the child in the womb goes through several stages: from a one-celled embryo (zygote) to a blastocyst, to a more developed embryo and then, at just 8 weeks' gestation when all adult organs are present, to a fetus. But these names and stages are all the same living physical entity with the same DNA. You and I sitting here today have the same, self-directing DNA that we did when we were an embryo consisting of just one-cell.

At the moment of conception, when the egg and sperm unite, an amazing thing happens. The genetic donation of the father and that of the mother meet. In that meeting, the father donates 23 chromosomes and the mother donates 23 chromosomes, and their union results in an absolutely new, never before seen, human being. The new embryo has a unique DNA structure. He or she is neither part of the father nor of the mother. The egg was previously a part of the mother's body; the sperm was previously a part of the father's body. But no more. A new human being has emerged, a vulnerable and unique self-directing self that never before was. It needs nothing but nutrition and a safe place to grow.

A separate individual has come into being. He or she will go through many stages and phases, none of which is as monumental as his or her conception. All subsequent stages are ones this new human being *goes through*.

The science speaks for itself. You became a person at the moment of conception, the point of no return.

The child in the womb is not a potential person, but a person with potential.

Those on both sides of the pro-life battle know that the child in the womb is human life. The science is in and the word is out. Especially through 4-D Ultrasound, we can clearly see that the child in the womb is a member of our human family. He or she has moral claim on each of us. As Catholics, or as any person of good will, we have a moral obligation to protect the lives of these little boys and little girls. Like Samuel, Andrew and Simon, we are called to action, even when it seems like the rest of the world is simply not listening.

As we approach January 22nd, the 36th anniversary of the infamous *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion in our country, let us be mindful that the Lord is calling us to action, even when the rest of the world may not be listening. Not only is abortion-on-demand legal, but pro-abortion activists and their allies in Congress are now promoting an agenda that would deprive Americans of their freedom to enact almost any restraint on abortion at any stage of pregnancy. They want to overturn hundreds of current laws on conscience rights, informed consent, limits on taxpayer-funded abortion, and parental involvement in minors' abortion decisions.

And right now, Congress is working on extending the appropriations bills that fund all federal programs, and new funding bills covering the next fiscal year will be written in early spring. Many current laws on taxpayer funding, conscience rights, and other issues exist only as provisions in these bills, and could be eliminated with the stroke of a committee chairman's pen — paving the way for the more wholesale assault, if pro-life Americans do not voice their opposition early and clearly.

In the coming weeks, our parish will have the opportunity to participate in a nationwide postcard campaign to protect the modest laws that have reduced abortions, and prevented outright government subsidies and mandates for abortion, for 35 years. These laws must not be swept away all at once, or one at a time. We will urge Congress not to start down this destructive path, but to serve the life, health and wellbeing of all Americans, beginning with the most vulnerable, the child in the womb. And we must augment our actions with our prayers.

Let us re-commit ourselves to pray for and defend the lives of unborn girls and boys. And let each of us respond to God's call with that same spirit as Samuel: "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening."

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