
Session 2

The Call

Focus

We are called to be disciples. We must, therefore, first be good stewards of our own vocations—discerning, accepting, and fulfilling the roles and responsibilities to which the Lord has called us.

Sharing Experience

BACKGROUND

The Second Vatican Council had this advice about our Christian vocation: "Every person should walk unhesitatingly according to his own personal gifts and duties in the path of a living faith which arouses hope and works through charity" (*Lumen Gentium*, 41). In the stewardship pastoral, the American bishops took up this same theme of personal vocation, saying, "The Christian vocation is essentially a call to be a disciple of Jesus . . . Jesus' call is urgent. He does not tell people to follow him at some time in the future but here and now—at this moment, in these circumstances. There can be no delay.

"Becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ leads naturally to the practice of stewardship. These linked realities, discipleship and stewardship, then make up the fabric of a Christian life in which each day is lived in an intimate, personal relationship with the Lord . . . Refracted through the prisms of countless individual vocations, this way of life embodies and expresses the one mission of Christ: to do God's will, to proclaim the good news of salvation, to heal the afflicted, to care for one's sisters and brothers, to give life—life to the full—as Jesus did.

"Following Jesus is the work of a lifetime. At every step one is challenged to go further in accepting and loving God's will" (*Stewardship*, 12-14).

QUESTION

Do you believe that you are "called"? What experiences in your life have reinforced or validated your faith in that call?

Listening to the Word

INVOCATION

Begin the reading of the Scriptures with this short prayer (or another of your own choosing) followed by a few moments of silence: **Lord, help us to hear Your voice and know Your will for us as we read these holy Scriptures. Amen.** Then read the passages aloud.

Jeremiah 1:4-8

The word of the LORD came to me
thus:
Before I formed you in the womb
I knew you,
before you were born I dedicated you,
a prophet to the nations I appointed you.
"Ah, Lord God!" I said,
"I know not how to speak; I am too young."
But the LORD answered me,
Say not, "I am too young."
To whomever I send you, you shall go;
whatever I command you, you shall speak.
Have no fear before them,
because I am with you to deliver you,
says the LORD.

John 1:35-50

The next day John was there again with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he said, "Behold, the Lamb of God." The two disciples heard what he said and followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following him and said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means

Teacher), "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come, and you will see." So they went and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day. It was about four in the afternoon. Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, was one of the two who heard John and followed Jesus.

He first found his own brother Simon and told him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed). Then he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John; You will be called Kephas" (which is translated Peter).

The next day he decided to go to Galilee and he found Philip. And Jesus said to him, "Follow me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the town of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one about whom Moses wrote in the law and also the prophets, Jesus, son of Joseph, from Nazareth." But Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Here is a true Israelite. There is no duplicity in him." Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, I saw you under the fig tree." Nathanael said to him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel." Jesus answered and said to him, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than this."

BACKGROUND

The call of Jesus is always unique and personal. Indeed, God says to Jeremiah that he had appointed him a prophet before he was even conceived! And God will not accept Jeremiah's protestations that he is too young to accept the call—there are people to whom Jeremiah must go, words that Jeremiah alone must speak for God's will to be accomplished. The prophets of the Old Testament, the disciples of the New Testament, and even we ourselves are not summoned as a faceless crowd, but as unique and unrepeatable individuals. "How did you know me?" Nathaniel asks Jesus. "Before Philip called

you, I saw you under the fig tree," comes the answer! Jesus knows our personal histories, our strengths, and our weaknesses; He has a particular purpose in mind for each one of us. "Only in the unfolding of the history of our lives and its events is the eternal plan of God revealed to each of us" (*Christifideles Laici*, 58).

Yet this unique call is not heard in isolation. John the Baptist showed his two disciples, one of whom was Andrew, the way to Jesus, the Lamb of God. Andrew followed Jesus and brought Simon Peter and Philip. Philip, in turn, brought Nathanael. In our time, too, others within the community of the faith help us discern, accept, and live out our vocations. We then, like those first disciples, help others to hear the voice of the Lord in their lives and respond.

Sharing the Word

QUESTIONS

(Read the Scriptures again silently; then share your responses to these questions:)

- Jeremiah protested that he was too young to answer God's call. What are some reasons why I might hesitate to respond to the Lord's call?
- Who in my life has been an outstanding example of one who has heard the call of God and answered it? How has he or she exemplified good stewardship?
- Who has helped me—in my family, on the job, in the Church—to understand and to live out the call of God in my life? How?

Prayer

God calls us, each one individually, and loves us unconditionally. He calls us first to love Him, healing and strengthening us to hear and answer His call in ever-widening circles—in our families, in our Church, in our neighborhoods, in our world . . .

"Lord, we have gathered to hear Your Son's voice in the Gospel. He has endowed us with the power of His Spirit and given us the opportunity to answer 'yes' or 'no.'

Help us to accept Jesus' invitation to follow Him, to take His Gospel as a guide and share with other believers. Fill us with the Holy Spirit which is the sign of His presence. Open our hearts to share the gifts You have first shared with us.

(Opportunity for shared prayer.)

"Father, help us to go forth in the peace that comes from Jesus, from the Word that tells us we are in His hands, we are loved, we are special, and we are blessed. Help us to go forth bearing the gift of eternal life like a flame that will never die, a flame that lights the way for our journey. Strengthen us to go forth filled with the joy of the Holy Spirit for You have invited us and share with us the life and peace of Jesus. For all the abundance of His goodness, we give You thanks and praise. Amen"

(Excerpted from Small Group Sharing Option A for Season 5 [Evangelization] of the RENEW process, Copyright ©1981, 1984, 1988 by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Newark, New Jersey, and used by permission of Paulist Press.)

Follow Through

Together, we have read and reflected on parts of the bishops' pastoral letter on stewardship, we have heard and meditated on portions of Scripture in order to better understand the life of discipleship and stewardship to which our faith calls us, and we have shared our insights, our experiences, and our prayers. But Jesus not only calls us to Himself, He also sends us out in service—"He summoned the Twelve and began to send them out two by two . . ." (Mk 6:7). Ideally, our sharing should lead each of us to constructive, concrete actions to reinforce what we have learned and encourage our growth in faith.

The following are some examples to spur your thinking:

- If, in the sharing, you recalled a person who was influential in the development of your faith, write a note to thank him or her.
- Pray daily for discernment. To what is the Lord calling you? To whom is He sending you? What would He have you say to them?
- Is there someone within your sphere of influence who might be helped by a timely word or a gentle suggestion? Make an effort to speak to that person this week.
- Sign up to help the parish RCIA team in a way which best fits your talents and personality—to help welcome inquirers, to be a sponsor, to provide refreshments for the meetings . . .

Because those intentions we have defined most clearly are the ones we are most likely to act upon, write your "follow through" intention here, and share it with the group if you are comfortable doing so.

Date: _____

Session 3

Jesus' Way

Focus

The life of Jesus is the model for Christian stewardship. In His self-emptying, we see not self-denial for its own sake, but rather a setting aside of self in order to be filled with the will of God.

Sharing Experience

BACKGROUND

"Jesus is the supreme teacher of Christian stewardship, as he is of every other aspect of human life; and in Jesus' teaching and life self-emptying is fundamental. Now it might seem that self-emptying has little to do with stewardship, but in Jesus' case that is not so. His self-emptying is not sterile self-denial for its own sake; rather, in setting aside self, he is filled with the Father's will and he is fulfilled in just this way: 'My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to do his work' (Jn 4:34).

"Jesus' mission is to restore to good order the created household of God which sin has disrupted. He not only perfectly accomplishes this task, but also, in calling disciples, empowers them to collaborate with him in the work of redemption for themselves and on behalf of others" (*Stewardship*, 19).

QUESTION

What qualities in the life of Jesus provide a standard by which we can measure our own lives and stewardship?

Listening to the Word

INVOCATION

Begin the reading of the Scriptures with this short prayer (or another of your own choosing) followed by a few moments of silence: **Open our ears, Lord, that we may hear clearly the message of Your Word. Then open our hearts, that we may generously share with one another and better understand what You are calling us to today. Amen.** Then read the passages aloud.

Matthew 25:14-30

"It will be as when a man who was going on a journey called in his servants and entrusted his possessions to them. To one he gave five talents; to another, two; to a third, one—each according to his ability. Then he went away. Immediately the one who received five talents went and traded with them, and made another five. Likewise the one who received two made another two. But the man who had received one went off and dug a hole in the ground and buried his master's money. After a long time the master of those servants came back and settled accounts with them. The one who had received five talents came forward bringing the additional five. He said, 'Master, you gave me five talents. See, I have made five more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come, share your master's joy.' [Then] the one who had received two talents also came forward and said, 'Master, you gave me two talents. See, I have made two more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come, share your master's joy.' The one

who had received the one talent came forward and said, 'Master, I knew you were a demanding person, harvesting where you did not plant and gathering where you did not scatter; so out of fear I went and buried your talent in the ground. Here it is back.' His master said to him in reply, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I did not plant and gather where I did not scatter? Should you not then have put my money in the bank so that I could have got it back with interest on my return? Now then! Take the talent from him and give it to the one with ten. For to everyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich; but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And throw this useless servant into the darkness outside, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.'"

Mark 10:17-30

As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up, knelt down before him, and asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus answered him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: 'You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; you shall not defraud; honor your father and your mother.'" He replied and said to him, "Teacher, all of these I have observed from my youth." Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him, "You are lacking in one thing. Go, sell what you have, and give to [the] poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." At that statement, his face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions.

Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" The disciples were amazed at his words. So Jesus again said to them in reply, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to pass through [the] eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

They were exceedingly astonished and said among themselves, "Then who can be

saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "For human beings it is impossible, but not for God. All things are possible for God." Peter began to say to him, "We have given up everything and followed you." Jesus said, "Amen, I say to you, there is no one who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children for my sake and for the sake of the gospel who will not receive a hundred times more now in this present age: houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and eternal life in the age to come.

BACKGROUND

"The silver pieces of [the first] story stand for a great deal besides money. All temporal and spiritual goods are created by and come from God. That is true of everything human beings have: spiritual gifts like faith, hope and love, talents of body and brain, cherished relationships with family and friends, material goods, the achievements of human genius and skill, the world itself. One day God will require an accounting of the use each person has made of the particular portion of these goods entrusted to him or her.

"Each will be measured by the standard of his or her individual vocation. Each has received a different 'sum'—a unique mix of talents, opportunities, challenges, weakness and strengths, potential modes of service and response—on which the Master expects a return. He will judge individuals according to what they have done with what they were given" (*Stewardship*, 20).

In the second story, a rich young man approaches Jesus to ask what it will cost him to inherit eternal life. Then, unwilling to pay the price, he goes sorrowfully away; and Jesus muses that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God. Although unfamiliar to our ears, Jesus' reference would have made sense to his hearers. The "needle" was a narrow gateway in a city wall through which a camel could be led, but only unloaded and on its knees; Jesus' answer means really that although it is possible for a rich man to enter heaven, it is difficult and not without cost. Peter then further explores the cost of discipleship and asks about

the rewards of such sacrifice, saying to Jesus, 'We have given up everything and followed you' (Mk 10:28). "Christ's response is more than Peter or any other disciple could reasonably hope or bargain for . . . Giving up means receiving more, including more responsibility as a steward; among the consequences of living this way will be persecution; and even though discipleship and stewardship set the necessary terms of Christian life in this world, they have their ultimate reward in another life" (*Stewardship*, 21).

Sharing the Word

QUESTIONS

(Read the Scriptures again silently; then share your responses to these questions:)

- What talents have been entrusted to me? Which have I multiplied? Which have I "buried"?
- Jesus asked the rich young man to sell what he had and give to the poor in order to have treasure in heaven. What answer might Jesus have for me if I were to ask the same question?
- Who in my life seems to have given up much for the sake of the Gospel? What visible reward, if any, has there been for that sacrifice? What keeps me from doing the same?

Prayer

The readings for this session call us to count our blessings and give thanks for them *and* to consider how responsibly we have used those gifts for our good and the good of others. They also ask us to reflect prayerfully on what stands in the way of our whole-hearted commitment to the coming of the Kingdom of God.

One possible format is to begin with expressions of thanksgiving with the group responding, "We give you thanks and praise, oh Lord." (Example: "For bringing us together tonight . . . We give you thanks and praise, oh Lord.")

When all who wish to have offered their prayers of thanksgiving and the group falls sil-

ent, invite them to consider, silently, the times they have failed to share or misused these gifts, saying, "Let us remember in silence the gifts we have not used wisely and the times we have failed to share our gifts with others."

After a period of quiet reflection, sum up by saying, "Hear the prayers of our hearts, oh Lord . . ." with the group responding, "Forgive us, Lord, and teach us to share Your gifts."

Continue with this prayer attributed to St. Catherine of Sienna: "O tender Father, You gave us much more than we ever thought to ask for. Thank You, and again thank You, O Father, for having granted our requests, and for having granted those things that we never realized we needed or sought."

Then conclude with Jesus' perfect prayer for the coming of the Kingdom: "Our Father . . ."

Follow Through

Together, we have read and reflected on parts of the bishops' pastoral letter on stewardship, we have heard and meditated on portions of Scripture in order to better understand the costs and rewards of the life of discipleship and stewardship to which our faith calls us, and we have shared our insights, our experiences, and our prayers. But we will be like the rich young man who went away sad and unchanged unless our sharing here leads us to constructive, concrete actions to reinforce what we have learned and encourage our growth in faith.

The following are some examples to spur your thinking:

- If, during the sharing, you identified some "buried" talent, resolve this week to determine how you could use it and take the first step toward doing so.
- Give a gift of time or money to help the poor in your community—to a shelter for the homeless, a soup kitchen or food pantry, "Habitat for Humanity," or some other agency which serves the less fortunate.
- Reflect on how very rich you really are. Make a list of the material and spiritual blessings you enjoy and give thanks! Then

find a way to share those blessings with others.

Because those intentions we have defined most clearly are the ones we are most likely to act upon, write your "follow through" intention here, and share it with the group if you are comfortable doing so.

Date: _____