

Bishop's Reflection – 2nd Sunday

Good teachers know their place; they can never be the Master. Listen to Eli as he speaks to Samuel, “I did not call you, my son...”, but “Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, ‘Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.’” Then listen to John the Baptist: “I am not the Messiah,” and later points to Jesus, saying, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” Good teachers point their students in the right direction, they do not usurp the role that is given to them.

Good teachers also know how to ask the right question. Take Jesus as an example. On seeing the two disciples following him, he asks them, “What are you looking for?” In starting with this question, Jesus goes far beyond the usual: “Hello, how are you?” or “How are you doing today?” In fact, if I were able to ask every person on this planet one question, this might well be the one.

“What are you looking for?” The question is as pertinent for those who are in the highest offices of our land or in the limelight of our media, as if it is asked to a blue-collar worker or a person living on the street. It is as relevant to the young and the old, the West, East, South and North, and endures well beyond any one historical period. It is the central question in John's Gospel. From the Wedding of Cana to the Samaritan Woman at the Well, from the story of Nicodemus' visit with Jesus by night to the Blind Man's cure, everyone is looking for something – or “Someone”. What about you?

Throughout the Gospel Jesus plays his part in pointing attention to the true end of our quest. “I am the Light of the World”, “I am the Resurrection”, “I am the Good Shepherd”, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life”, “I am He.” These are not empty claims, but clear direction for those who are searching for something more. As the Gospel unfolds, “What are you looking for?” slowly transforms into, “Who are you looking for?” By the end, Jesus asks the question three times, twice to the guards in the Garden of Gethsemane, where they come to arrest him, and once to Mary Magdalen in the Garden of the Resurrection.

But, let's not get too far ahead of ourselves; as in life, the Gospel, and each story, progresses from stage to stage. It is sufficient that the two disciples provide an opening response: “Teacher, where are you staying?” For now, they are students looking to be taught. They come as students willing to sit at the feet of the Master.

“What are you looking for?” The question extends itself to us as well. Do we have the wherewithal to answer, the self-awareness to look deep within? At times, our answer may seem scattered, reflecting the cacophony of things that preoccupy our lives. At other times, the answer may seem uncertain, as we reassess past failures and the things that didn't pan out

“Teacher,” the answer is well-chosen; “teach us,” because we need your help. Teach us not for just this moment, and then forever be adrift, but teach us from this point onwards, and remain with us along the way.