

Reflection

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As I sit in the car in South Africa with my mask and sanitizer for the 10th straight month, trying to get internet and to stay protected from the new Covid variant, I am encouraged by the news that my first pastor at our parish in Howick has been cleared of lymphoma cancer. The priest is Redemptorist Fr. Andrew Burns. He is a friend to many IHMs.

Today's Gospel involves, of all people, the apostle, Andrew! My first thought is that Andrew was in today's terms "a first responder." It was Andrew who first brought news of the Messiah to his brother, Simon.

The Gospel reminds us that God works in so many different ways with so many different people. In this instance, a passing remark by John the Baptist identifying Jesus as "the Lamb of God" was not missed by Andrew. He heard what was said; he was caught by its meaning for him; and he hurried to confide this news to his brother. It appears that both men had open hearts and were hungry for a depth not always recognized in hard-working fishermen of humble origin.

The cryptic invitation of Jesus: "What are you looking for?" is addressed not only to John's disciples, but to each of us hearing these words today. What is it that *we* are looking for? Is it a cure for Covid or cancer? Is it money for relatives and friends without income? Is it for social cohesion? Is it for a balanced world order and the healing of our planet?

The apostles-to-be were unsure what *they* were actually looking for. Perhaps it was for a Messiah-King ..., emphasis on King! In some confusion, they ask Jesus: "Where do you stay?"

Jesus' answer, "Come and see," shows respect for the inquirer who is invited to be with Jesus and to take time to live into Jesus' reality. Jesus does not give a theological explanation about his identity nor does he outline the scope of his mission. He simply offers an invitation to *experience* what one may see with one's own eyes and heart. He offers the ultimate invitation to "*be with*," to spend quality time with. And more than that, "*to stay*." The disciples never forgot the very moment when Jesus invited them to a deeper relationship. Scripture records the time: 4 o'clock!

Each of us hearing the Gospel this morning has accepted the invitation to stay with Jesus. We hope that the way we are living in his presence – and with God's seed in us, as the first reading suggests – is worthy of the gift of Jesus' invitation.

Despite all that we have been through in our personal joys and sufferings, especially during the past year; despite the many sad deaths of our sisters, family and friends; despite the political tension and division in our country and our world; despite our uncertainty about the future; staying with Jesus, living in him and with him – the

suffering and loving Christ, the Lamb of God who was slain for us – is what the invitation is all about. If we have been privileged to live and minister among good people, we can't help continuing to absorb the mystery of this God who loves us and wants to be with us on good days and bad. It is an awesome reality.

The psalm for today leads us into the deep stuff, celebrating our salvation no matter what other crises confront us. "Sing to the Lord a new song," (if only in our hearts, not with our voices!) There is *nothing* that can separate us from the love of Jesus Christ who invites *us* to *stay* with him. There is always more to understand by being with him. Will we stay?