

Reflection

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Today's readings seem so appropriate for us, as IHMs, as we enter a time of discernment, nominating sisters for leadership, and nominees, in turn, discerning the call to leadership. These are sensitive and challenging times.

Perhaps we can take a few leads from our readings today on the meaning of discernment. In the first reading Samuel, in his dreams hears a voice calling his name. Believing it to be Eli, the priest and his mentor, Samuel responds by going to Eli three times. As the voice continues to call Samuel, Eli in his wisdom as the elder, urges Samuel to respond to the voice calling out to him, saying, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." The rest is history. "Samuel grew up and the Lord was with him, not permitting any word of his to be without effect."

Think of your own call to religious life. How did you hear the call? How often did you hear that call before responding: "Yes Lord, your servant is listening," or as Mary said, "Be it done unto me according to your Word."

In the Gospel, we are immersed in the healing ministry of Jesus. His disciples are living the liberating mission of Jesus, freeing people from illness in its many forms. They also were called and responded to the call of Jesus, following him from fishing, or government service as tax collectors, or other means of providing a living for their families.

Jesus also had to discern his calling. Although fully divine, he was also fully human. He had to learn as we do and struggle with the challenges of life. We see him in the Gospel, rising early and going off alone to pray. Jesus was not fully aware of what his Father had in mind for him. He needed to listen and sometimes struggle with the call, as in the *Agony in the Garden*. His discernment led him to action on behalf of the poor, attending to those in need of healing and suffering whom he met along his way.

And what about us? The test of good discernment is in the response to the call. John Shea, in a poem, addressing Mary's call, writes, "The moment I said 'yes', I

swam in rivers not of my own making.” While we may respond initially to the call, we cannot know what it will mean for us in the long run.

I think of my own response to the call to go to Uganda which, while carefully discerned, soon meant being caught up in a civil war. Or the call to go to South Africa which led to ten years doing development work, something for which I was totally unprepared, but which was fundamental to my later work with *Solidarity*. The call to volunteer with *Solidarity*, discerned with newly elected leadership in 2012 meant, instead of remaining in South Sudan, returning to the US, at the request of the director, to establish a nonprofit organization to raise funds to support the work in that new country. In these ministries, I was graced by God with what I needed to do the work. I experienced both affirmation and challenge and felt the support of the congregation and colleagues with whom I worked. They demonstrated God’s care, protection and grace to see the ministry through.

Today, let’s reflect on the many calls within the call to religious life that we have experienced and how we were gifted and graced to respond to with “yes.” How did the call manifest itself? What were the struggles and challenges in the call? How did we experience the affirmation and energy to respond? We all have these stories and can share them to give others courage.

What is my/our call now? I am listening in a new way as I return to Monroe. I know and experience the energy of the God’ spirit here among you. I believe that the energy of the Spirit in intentional prayer knows no bounds. God knows, there is a need for our prayer for peace in our world, resettlement of refugees, an end to polarization in our church, nation and world, justice for all and so many more needs that come to our daily attention through the news.

The responsorial psalm articulates both the call and the promise. We wait, we trust/ and in confidence, we respond. /Behold I come. / To do your will is my delight/ your law is within my heart. I announce your justice in the assembly...I did not restrain my lips as you O Lord know.”

Today let us reflect on our call and response over many years and pray in gratitude for what has been and what will be. Let us also pray for all who are being nominated for leadership that they listen carefully to the call as it comes to them from the you, the members, who have also discerned their nomination. May God’s Spirit be abundantly present among us as we prepare for Change.