

2nd SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Year B

At 12.30 p.m. on November 22nd, 1963, shots rang out in Dallas, Texas, and the world was stunned to learn of the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the thirty-fifth President of the United States. Whatever historians subsequently unearthed about the man's alleged shortcomings, there was a palpable sense of tragedy, of a promising bright future being brought abruptly and cruelly to an end. People who were alive at the time will almost invariably be able to tell you where they were, what they were doing and whom they were with, when they learned the shocking news of Kennedy's death. It was a decisive moment of history, an event which literally changed the course of world events. Things would never be the same again.

There is the same sense of a momentous event in today's Gospel. We are told the exact time when those two disciples of John the Baptist first met Jesus: the tenth hour, about four o'clock in the afternoon. An unimportant, trivial detail, perhaps, but an indication of just how important, how life-changing that first encounter was for Andrew and the other disciple who was possibly St. John, the evangelist, himself. Their lives changed so much that they can tell exactly when and where it happened.

As if to tantalize us, the Gospel writer doesn't tell us the content of the encounter. He doesn't tell us what Jesus said to him and Andrew, nor what questions they asked. He doesn't describe Jesus or where he was living. John simply says that they accepted his invitation to come and see, and that they stayed with him for the rest of the day. Perhaps the conversation was too personal to be recorded, or perhaps a written account would not be able to convey its effect or the power of the presence of Jesus. Certainly the Lord had a profound effect: the two disciples left John the Baptist to become followers of Jesus, and Andrew wasted no time in telling his brother Peter: "We have found the Messiah."

Perhaps, too, the Gospel writer realizes that an encounter with the Lord must be a unique event, something which each potential follower has to experience personally. It's not something which can happen second-hand. The Lord issues an invitation but it is up to us to respond. We have to be in a state of readiness, open to hear the Lord's call. Samuel was already living in the Lord's sanctuary – in the right place to hear the call. And the two disciples were already followers of John the Baptist – predisposed to

the coming of the Messiah. When the call came, they responded without hesitation.

As Christians, we believe that we have been called, and that we are following the Lord, however falteringly or hesitantly. But we must have a real personal meeting with the Lord, and not simply go by what others have told us about him. Whether or not we can pinpoint an exact moment when we first encountered him, we need to follow our relationship with Christ to change our lives irrevocably. By spending time in his presence, we learn to see as he sees, judge as he judges, act and speak as he does.

The call to follow, the invitation to spend time with the Lord, is never a once and for all experience. It is a daily happening. As we grow in discipleship, as we learn to recognise his voice and walk in his ways, we learn that he speaks in many ways, not just through the authentic teaching of the Pope and Bishops, who, like Eli and John the Baptist, are able to point us in the right direction. Christ is also able to speak to us through everyday events and people. Peter, remember, was brought to the Lord by his brother Andrew.

As Samuel shows us, recognizing the Lord's voice and presence can be a gradual affair, just as discipleship is a life-long commitment, not a one-off decision. Perhaps today the Lord is calling to us most persistently in the faces of those in need: in the faces of the poor, the homeless, the victims of wars, violence or oppression, the sick and the dying, the lonely and the unloved. Whenever we can see and serve the Lord in these people, we know that we really have become his disciples.