

Eleventh Sunday of Ordinary Time/ Father's Day 2008
Church of Saint Ann, Lawrenceville, NJ
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Shortly after Barrack Obama became the definite Democratic candidate, Sen. John McCain challenged him to a series of Town Hall Meetings that would be held weekly up until the Democratic Convention.

Now I don't know what your reaction was to this, but I found myself shouting at the TV- "Say no, Obama. Please give us a break during the summer months. We know we are in for more of this in the fall. But give us a break."

In fact, I would hope that the candidates would want a little time just to stop talking and do some thinking and reflecting. After all, they are vying for a pretty important job - A job that deserves a lot of long, hard, and smart thinking; enough with all the words.

Today's readings speak of the theme of "election" - a very important concept in theology, and I could not help but think of how different the Biblical concept of election is from the one that we have come to take for granted.

Today's readings speak of God's election

1. Of Israel to be a special people
2. Of the Apostles for a special relationship
3. Of the baptized for a special mission.

A few words on each:

Our way of doing elections is that we listen to the candidates and then we elect the one we feel is best qualified. They win the election and then are showered with all sorts of praise and honors.

God's "election" is so different.

The God of the Bible is an electing God - God chooses who God wants. It doesn't depend on merit or accomplishments, or talent. God chooses people for his own purpose. This runs so contrary to our equalitarian sensibility here in the United States. We think everyone should be given the same opportunity, and then chosen on their talents and abilities. We don't like teacher's pets - the one who gets special treatment for no apparent reason.

Throughout the scriptures, God chooses people who are not worthy:

1. Abraham and Sarah - an old and ready to retire couple - to begin a new nation;
2. God chose Jacob, and not Esau - Why?
3. Joseph, and not one of his brothers - Why?
4. Moses, who was insecure;

5. David, the murderer and adulterer, and Solomon, who worshipped false gods, to be Kings

6. Jeremiah, who was a stutterer and just a kid, to be his prophet.

God doesn't elect or chose people because of their moral or intellectual abilities or because they earned it. In fact, it is just the contrary. The bible seems to always accentuate their weakness, but God chooses them anyway.

Biblical election is always for service and never for glory.

Israel is chosen, not to honor her, but so that she might serve the other nations. Israel was not a strong and mighty nation; just the opposite - a small and weak rather motley group of people. Only twelve rather scattered tribes.

Our society tends to elevate those who are chosen. God puts them to work. Gives them a mission and that mission is usually very difficult.

God leads Israel out of slavery and through the desert and declares, "You Israel will be my special possession. You will be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation." Israel is chosen, not to be glorified, but for a mission.

The priest is the one who makes the sacrifice, who performs the service of reconciling God and humanity. Biblical Priesthood is always a service, never an honor.

The Kingdom of Israel is to be the servant, the mediator, to restore right relationship of all nations of the world with God. The world would be moved through them to repentance and reconciliation.

Israel would be God's great rescue operation to save the world from sin and selfishness.

Israel was not elected because it was great, but it became great because it was chosen.

God has this great and glorious dream for creation, people don't respond, they move away from God.

God chooses, "elects", Israel to restore his relationships with all the nations of the world. This is no easy task! Actually, it doesn't work out too well.

God's great and final plan is to send Jesus, his own son, the Incarnate God, to save humanity.

God sees a world lost in sin; God's heart is moved with pity. He sends his Son.

God forms a new people in Jesus; creates a people, not bound by nationality or geography into a new Israel. How does God do his? - through Jesus.

What does Jesus do? He chooses 12 apostles (not by accident -remember the 12 tribes of Israel) to be the foundation of the new Israel, the church.

Again they are chosen, not because of their merits, in fact it is their vices that seem t be emphasized

This is quite a rogue gallery:

1. Simon Peter, consistently misunderstood Jesus and, finally, denies him;
2. James and John, sons Zebedee- consumed with ambition;
3. Philip, didn't grasp who Jesus was;
4. Thomas, who doubted Jesus' resurrection;
5. Matthew, who was morally bankrupt;
6. Simon of Cana, a violent revolutionary – zealot;
7. Judas, who betrays Jesus.

They would have never gotten through any political party primary.

God chooses not because they were great, but they become great (eventually) because they were chosen.

Don't expect God to choose perfect people.

Jesus forms the twelve and gives them a mission:

proclaim the Kingdom of God, cure the sick, restore the blind, cleanse the lepers, drive out demons, and raise the dead.

The mission of the apostles is the mission of the Church and the mission of the baptized: to make present in our own person the reign of God; allow the Divine Life to flow through us;

bring God to humankind and humankind to God. That's our mission. That is how we participate in and complete God's dream.

All who have been baptized have been grafted on to the new *Israel*.

We have been elected – chosen by God, not because of any merit on our own, but by the grace of God.

We were chosen, not because we are great or holy, but we can become great, we can become holy, because we have been chosen.

Through your own holiness you bring others to holiness; through your own friendship with God, to bring others to friendship with God. We are called to save others by being a conduit of God's grace. God's grace, God's love, must flow through us to the entire world. That's our mission. The mission of the baptized is a glorious mission, but far from easy.

That's why we must gather here each week, strengthened to-do God's work in our world.

May you and I, and all who join us for worship each week, go from here into the world strengthened and excited to God's work.