

## Intermission

We are going to pivot right now. We are shifting from part one to part two: from the call to holiness to the call to ministry. Next week we will begin to look at the Temple and then its Levites who minister there. Ministry in the Temple may offer some thoughts about ministry in the Church. But first, how the Temple arose from a tent in the desert to a palace in Jerusalem. Yet, no matter how it was housed, it continued to represent the presence of God in the midst of God's chosen people.

Right now, we will take what I am calling an intermission to look back at what we have covered. We have concluded part one. Yes, more could be said, but we need to beware of becoming lost in a jungle of information. We began looking at the Vatican Council's clarification of the call to holiness: one not restricted to clergy and religious alone. Instead, a call that goes out to the whole Church. The journey toward holiness may be particularly important for people directly involved in holy things — Liturgical ministers.

The role of the laity in the Church received new importance from the Vatican Council. Two major documents highlighted new awareness of the laity. They too have a role to play in Church ministry. Shortly after the conclusion of the Council, Pope Paul VI introduced new Liturgical ministries for the laity in the form of Lectors and Eucharistic Ministers. Those two ministries direct the major focus of this series. The goal is deepening appreciation of what these roles mean.

The call to holiness requires something deeply personal and individual. The prophet Isaiah writes we are called by name. There is no prearranged model into which we must fit. The feast of All Saints witnesses to different personalities who have been declared saints. The notion of being called is more than mere generosity. A deeper commitment is involved, even if only temporary. Needed would be an understanding of what is being asked. These two liturgical roles involve a form of public service and the responsibilities attached to wearing our faith in public. A witness value occurs when laity appear in sanctuary worship. Expectations take on another level. The Church as a whole is called apart. Ministers are called apart a second time. That second call implies living more seriously Gospel values. Participation in worship contributes to reminding Christians of their identity — a reminder as well for both worshippers and ministers.

The prophet Samuel stands out as one model of call and response — a Biblical theme. Uniquely, his call comes as a boy. Offered to the Temple at Shiloh by his mother because of a vow fulfilled, God spoke to him there. The call came as an experience and a message. The experience was a feeling of otherness. God speaks to him. He suspects the priest Eli is calling. Eli guides the boy through the experience but the message given him is directed at the priest. The message confronts the priest concerning the corruption occurring at the Temple. His sons are carrying out badly their priestly functions. They die in a battle Israel has lost. The Ark of the Covenant, which

they take to the battle sight, is also lost. The shock of both losses causes Eli's death as well. Samuel now comes to prominence. He becomes recognized as both priest and prophet. He guides the shift in leadership models in Israel: from judges to kings. Samuel himself anoints men God has revealed to him as called to be king. Thus the personalities of Saul and David enter the picture.

The calling of St. Paul is of another flavor. Not a boy but a man, he appears with a background well-fed with strict Pharisee beliefs. The same Pharisees who appear in the Gospels. Paul/Saul is called not within Temple confines but on the road, traveling to the city of Damascus to arrest Christians. Struck down, blinded by a brilliant light, he hears a voice asking why he is persecuting him. Paul asks who the voice is. The voice responds he is Jesus. The visionary voice confronts Paul with what he is doing. In attacking the followers of Jesus, he is attacking Jesus himself. Now unable to see, Paul must be led into Damascus by his companions because of his blindness. The experience had concluded with instructions to seek out a man named Ananias. Ananias will come to him once he reaches the city. Here the story takes a unique twist. This Ananias also experiences a vision in which he is informed someone named Saul is coming. Reluctant because of the reputation of this man, he must be persuaded by the insistence Jesus expresses. Ananias must heal the persecutor, baptize him, and reveals to him a mission to the Gentile awaiting him.

Every year the Church celebrates the Conversion of St. Paul. Scripture scholars remind us this conversion is not one of belief. Christians at this time still considered themselves within the folds of Judaism. Which leads to the suspicion the real change was a moral one. A transformation that stands out among the most radical in Church history. What had provided spiritual meaning for Saul had proven to be not only wrong but immoral. He was arresting and arranging for the execution of people he now must defend and must proclaim with them the same God. Also he must spend the rest of his life aware he had persecuted the Church. He must suffer those thoughts while exercising leadership among the Christian community. The initial shock of what he had done must have been traumatic. His humanity must have cried out with emotional waves of guilt and shame. Which makes one wonder whether these feelings may have been the thorn in the flesh he writes about. How does one forget such a tragic mistake. Killing of whatever kind is heavy enough but then to discover one has killed the wrong people! We can only suspect he believed God had forgiven him. His writings seem to affirm that. We may also surmise he remained burdened with the weight of carrying shame while fighting to forgive himself. Self-forgiveness very often requires Divine help.