

Serving the Lord without knowing Him



The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was. Then the Lord called Samuel, and he said, "Here I am!" and ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down.

And the Lord called again, "Samuel!" and Samuel arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. And the Lord called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant hears.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. And the Lord came and stood, calling as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant hears." And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. (1 Sam 3:3-10.19)

If there is any passage in the Bible that I would rather gloss over it is this one : "Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him" (3:7). I have been serving in the "Lord's temple" for years. I have read the Bible from cover to cover and delivered many inspiring and boring sermons. Yet, one cannot escape that nagging questions: 'Do I really know the One I am serving and talking about?'

How Long Has It Been?

"The Lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was sleeping in the temple of the Lord whe-

re the Ark of God was" (1 Sam 3:3). Three things are mentioned in this passage: the lamp of God, the temple of the Lord and the Ark of God. Young Samuel is serving and sleeping in the most holy place. How long was he serving there without knowing the Lord? His mother brought him to Eli, the priest of the Temple, when he was a child and left him there (1 Samuel 1:24-28). Samuel grew in the Temple "ministering before the Lord" and his mother yearly visited him (1 Samuel 2:10-21). It could take years of ministering before the Lord under Eli. And that is the worrying part of this story: one can serve in God's temple without knowing God.

Unfortunately, our churches are filled with people who never heard a word from God. They got their religion from others, who also got their religion from others, and so on. "Second-hand" Christians. Unfortunately, the pulpits of God, tabernacles of the Lord and altars of God are served by contemporary 'Samuels' who got their training from contemporary 'Elis' but are not familiar with the voice of the Lord. The same ritual Sunday by Sunday. Tradition binds us together. Yet, like in those days so is today "the word of the Lord is rare and the prophecy is not widespread" (1 Sam 3:1). Who among us can say with Job: "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eyes sees you" (Job 42:5)? For most of us that now is still a distant future.

God's Word Not Yet Revealed

Things are not better as regards to the knowledge of God's word. Biblical illiteracy among Catholics is already proverbial. However, neither those Christian denominations which profess their faith in *Sola Scriptura* fare better. I met a Catholic man who did not know the story of the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-9) and a protestant biblical expert who could not tell whether certain passage of the Bible came from the Gospels or Paul's letters.

When William Tyndale was giving life for his passion of making the Bible available in English language, he was convinced that the word of God was sufficient to enlighten and guide everyone. The Holy Writ neither needed commentaries nor experts. Four centuries after his martyrdom, the Bible is available in almost every language, but we do not hold anymore to his conviction. Most of the Bibles come with notes and commentaries. Ask your pastors or consult the Magisterium and never interpret the Book on your own - we are told. Yet, the same passage is interpreted differently by a Jehovah Witness, a Mormon, a Protestant, and a Catholic. So, we quarrel, we proselytize, and we claim to know the truth, but

the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob remains unknown. The trees are being cut, the publishing business is thriving, our libraries are being filled with biblical commentaries, but the Bible itself gets dusty on our bookshelves. "Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him."

Perhaps, I should not worry so much. Perhaps, it is better to serve God without knowing Him. After all, rituals cannot ask us to deliver a message to our friends that would shake the foundations of their lives. Poor Samuel could not sleep until morning and then tried to avoid Eli. The message that God spoke to him was frightening: "For I have told him that I am about to punish his [Eli's] house for ever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them" (1 Samuel 3:13). How are you going to tell this to someone with whom you live, work, and whom you respect? Eli had to force Samuel to tell him the truth (1 Samuel 3:15-18).

Perhaps it is better to go on performing our religious duties instead of hearing God speaking to us in the middle of the night. Perhaps. Then, why so many of us feel so bored? I long to hear Him speaking to me the way He spoke to Samuel, calling me by name and sharing with me His thoughts and His plans. "And all Israel knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the Lord" (1 Samuel 3:19).

Conclusion

Dear Lord,
there are many of us who still do not know You and to whom Your word has not been revealed. We beseech Thee, speak to us.

Call us by our names.

Share with us Your plans, the things You plan to do in the world and in our lives,

So the world will know that we are truly a prophetic people,

And that You are present in our midst. Amen.

May God bless all of you who remember us in prayer and support our ministry here.