

Second Sunday of Lent (C)
March 4, 2007
By Father Charles Bowes

Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18
Psalm 27:1, 7-9, 13-14
Philippians 3:17-4:1
Luke 9:28-36

God calls us to follow his Son in a voice unique to each.

"Be imitators of me," says St. Paul in the third chapter of his letter to the Philippians.

"How conceited you are," I've long said to myself whenever I've heard these words. And Paul goes on, "observe those who thus conduct themselves according to the model you have in us." It reminds me of Professor Henry Higgins in the Broadway musical *My Fair Lady* when he sings "Why can't a woman be more like a man...why can't a woman be like me?" The height of arrogance and self-satisfaction and we audiences find it great fun to anticipate the Professor's eventual comeuppance when he falls in love with the very woman he can't understand.

But as I reflect on it, Saint Paul isn't being conceited as he, like any good teacher, is fishing for a way to encourage, to teach his beloved Philippians to be more like the Lord Jesus, the Christ. And the only visual aid, the most powerful tool in his teaching desk is his own life's witness and that of others of similar faith. Surrounded by a sea of culture and customs contrary to the cross of Christ, Saint Paul urges them to "stand firm in the Lord."

But standing firm in the Lord can take different forms and is unique to each believer. This came home to me in the recent book entitled *Everyday Greatness*. In it the author, Stephen Covey, relates the following experience of world-renowned cellist Yo Yo Ma. "When I was seven," said Ma, "we moved to New York and my parents signed me up to take lessons from the great cellist Leonard Rose. When I listened to Rose play, I

thought, "How can you make such a gorgeous sound? How can anyone do that?" But that's not what music is all about - which he knew. What Rose said was, "I've taught you many things, but now you have to go off and learn on your own. The worst thing you can do is to say to yourself, 'I want to be just like somebody else.' You have to absorb knowledge from someone else, but ultimately you have to find your own voice." I think this is precisely the point Saint Paul was trying to impress upon his friends in Philippi in chapter 3 of his letter. He invited them to imitate him as he imitated Christ. Saint Paul had a powerful way of following the Lord Jesus.

Saint Paul had found his voice. He exhorted them to remember the gospel as he had preached it among them. He wanted them to absorb from him, from Christ, from the gospel, as much knowledge as they could. But, ultimately, they would have to find their own voice and live their own lives as committed believers in a world that was generally committed to other interests and pursuits. God calls each of us the same way. This weekend we are celebrating the Rite of Continuing Conversion for those adult Catholics who will be confirmed this Easter. Each has had to discover, after the manner of St. Paul, his own voice, his own incarnation of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. We are blessed to share such a witness of faith that does indeed enrich our own.

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