

## *Invited Yet Again*

I often recall the words of Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel who said that “God made [us] because God loves stories.” I agree, and like God, we are addicted to stories. Theologian John Shea put it beautifully:

*We turn our pain into narrative so we can bear it;  
we turn our ecstasy into narrative so we can prolong it.  
...We tell our stories to live.”*

As people of faith, we come here to place our stories in a special context, the context of the Sacred Story. We gather each week to hear that Sacred Story so that we can connect it to our own personal and communal stories. This frame of reference might serve us well this Sunday, as we reflect on our call to discipleship with two beautiful Biblical stories and try to connect them to our own.

Isaiah’s story proclaimed today, for example, is as much our story as it is Israel’s. It’s all about the covenant God established with us: You and I were chosen from our mother’s womb to do God’s will, to be a light to the nations. I would never deny that this is a very scary idea. “Who are we” you would say, as would I, “to be the ones through whom God’s

glory would shine forth?” Sometimes connecting the stories gives us pause!

In the same way, like John the Baptist of the Gospel, we also search for the will of God. His story is our story. We, too, are intrigued by Jesus. The more Jesus is “pointed out” to us--the more we learn about him--the more we want to know. Is he for real? Just what is he all about? What is he asking of you and me? This curiosity actually nourishes our faith, for it draws us ever more deeply into the mystery which is Jesus. John the Baptist’s introduction, “Behold, the Lamb of God,” is an invitation to follow him, to become committed and focused disciples. Isaiah’s invitation may be considered vague. Not so the one that will come from Jesus; it will be crystal clear: “Come, Follow Me!”

And yet, still we are reluctant. We hold back. Is it fear? Do we feel we haven’t got what it takes? My experience has led me to conclude that what often holds us back is that phenomenon known as “Catholic guilt” – that cloud that follows us wherever we go and whatever we do. Somehow we reason that as screwed up as we are, we

simply cannot believe God could love us so much as to want us to witness the light of Christ to the world. It simply does not compute!

My best friend until his death a couple of years ago was Jewish. For years Howard and I would argue who had the edge on guilt: Jews or Catholics. In order to salvage the friendship, we came to an accommodation. We decided to agree that the Jews created it and the Catholics perfected it! He had to admit that we Catholics were really good at the guilt thing!

The problem is that such an attitude tends to short-circuit our relationship with God. And not only that. If we can't get a handle on God's unconditional love for each one of us, we ultimately short-circuit the potential for imitating that kind of love in our relationships with others. So we will never be able to let the light of Christ shine through us if we cannot accept God's unconditional love--the very incarnation of that love we receive in the Eucharist.

However, once we begin to connect our stories to God's covenant love for us through the Sacred Scriptures, we can come to understand

that God's love is a gift, and a gift that cannot be earned. The only way to respond to that kind of love is to love others in the same way. Of course, we will never love as perfectly as God loves. We are, after all, fairly weak creatures. But today's psalm reassures us that if we are up to accepting the challenge, God will *put a new song into our mouths*. So the response of the psalmist is ours: "*Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will.*"

If these biblical stories proclaimed today connect with our own stories, they become a model for our discipleship and for all our relationships. They also become an image of this Eucharistic celebration. What we do here each Sunday is a response to a call and at the same time an invitation to enter more deeply into our relationship with Jesus in the Word, in the Sacrament, and, as we celebrate Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birth, in "*announcing God's justice.*" It is through this celebration that we find the confidence to follow the Christ and accept the call yet again to be the light of his presence to the world.