

# Archbishop Lori's Homily: Pre-Christmas Gathering for Seminarians and Their Families

*Wednesday, 3rd Week of Advent*

*Pre-Christmas Gathering for Seminarians and Their Families*

*Cathedral of Mary Our Queen*

*Dec. 19, 2018*

## **The Call of Samson and John the Baptist**

Dear friends, This evening's Scripture readings describe the birth announcements of the Old Testament Judge, Samson, and of the New Testament Prophet, John the Baptist. These announcements were astonishing events. First, the parents of Samson and John the Baptist were regarded as barren. Second, the parents of John the Baptist were elderly, beyond the age of childbearing. Third, it was a messenger of God, an angel, who made the announcement. Fourth, the recipients of this message, Manoah and Zechariah, were struck with fear. Fifth, the angel indicated that the children to be born would have a special vocation and thus should be consecrated to the Lord by special vows known as Nazarite vows: no strong drink, nothing unclean to eat, etcetera. Finally, with the eyes of faith, the amazed parents catch sight of the workings of God. They not only acquiesce to plans that clearly were not their own but they come to rejoice in God's providential love both for themselves and indeed for the whole of God's People.

I could well be wrong, dear parents, but I'm going to guess that when you discovered that you would indeed become parents, there were no miracles of nature, no angelic announcements, no special prescriptions regarding what your future child would eat or drink, and certainly no special instructions about shaving! No, none of those things happened.

But something *did* happen similar to birth announcement of Samson and John. You were no doubt awestruck to learn that you would be parents. Not entirely unlike

Zechariah you may have been lost for words, unable to speak. And rather like the parents of Samson and the parents of John the Baptist you wondered what God had in mind for the children you were bringing into the world. What would your child grow up to be? What would their mission in life be? And how should you raise your children to prepare for a future that, in truth, only God knew for sure?

### **Consecrating One's Children to the Lord**

As followers of Jesus and members of his Church, you knew that the key to these essential questions would not be addressed in any guidebook or on-line resource for child-bearing and child-rearing. The key to *these* answers would be found in Christ to whom you consecrated your children on the day of their Baptism. On that day no promises were made about food, drink, or grooming but you did promise to bring them up in the faith by word and example. By willing that they be immersed in the death and resurrection of Christ, you expressed your desire that they would become ardent followers of Christ and active members of his Body, the Church. You willed that, in finding forgiveness of their sins in Christ, they would become persons of integrity and compassion. In a word, you were partners with the Lord and the Church in imparting to your children a vocation to love.

Just what form that vocation would take was not immediately clear but sooner or later one's definitive vocation begins to emerge. Some know early on what their calling will be and respond while still quite young. Others come to realize their calling later in life and respond as the Spirit moves them. Every authentic calling comes, of course, from the Lord. In the case of Samson and John the Baptist the calling came through an angel. In the case of your loved ones, dear parents, the call comes through others, most often yourselves, in ways you may not realize.

Where were you, and what were you doing when you learned that your sons wanted to become priests? When you learned that they were serious enough in their discernment to undertake the arduous application process to enter the seminary? You weren't thunderstruck by the visit of the Archangel Gabriel but like Zechariah you may have experienced a whole bundle of emotions - ranging from delight and joy, to wonder and awe, to fear and doubt. Do not be surprised by your reaction, even in retrospect. It is something you share with holy men & women in both the Old

& New Testaments whose offspring were called to play a special role in God's plan for our salvation.

## **Letting Go**

And, as you know so well, accepting your sons' vocations is only the beginning. Scripture is most silent about what parents such as Zechariah & Elizabeth experienced as their son, John, came of age, left home, and made his way into the desert. Similarly, it does not describe in detail how Samson's mother, Manoah, prepared Israel's last judge for his eventful life. What we do know from the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary, is that there is a process, be it ever so gradual, of letting go, a process that unfolded as the child Jesus stayed behind in Temple to engage the teachers of the law, a process that accelerated as Jesus began his public life. It's not that you ever cease to care. My 98 year old mother receives a daily report from her son and she does not hesitate to give me advice when warranted. I should imagine you will do the same. Yet, in the end, you know that it is the Lord's work and mission that will absorb and engage the waking hours, the energy and talents of your sons.

This evening, I simply want to say, 'thank you' – from the bottom of my heart. I want to thank you, the parents, the grandparents, the siblings, lay friends & priests who support and sustain these seminarians of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, and this at a very challenging and difficult time in the life of the Church. And I want to say a word of profound thanks to you, our seminarians, for your openness to the vocation of priesthood, for your readiness to merely to endure formation but to engage it, and for your love for the Lord and the Church in these difficult times. I shall never forget the personal conversations I had with you early in the fall. Your courage and love made a deep imprint upon my heart and soul.

## **Conclusion: The Call Addressed to Mary**

The call addressed to the parents of Samson and John the Baptist prefigure the call of the angel Gabriel addressed to Mary, the Mother of the Savior. She too knew astonishment and had questions but all of them were overridden by her unblemished faith and love. Thus, she was able to say, "Let it be done to me accordingly to your Word."

As we gaze upon the image of the Infant Jesus at Christmas let us thank his Mother Mary and his foster-father Joseph – both of whom said “yes” to the inexplicable plan of the Triune God for their lives and in the strength of their “yes” let us offer God our “yes” – confident that he will multiply our love in ways we cannot begin to imagine. May God bless us at Christmas and in the year ahead; and may he keep us always in his love!