



Things to Ponder

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3:59 (Based on John 1:35-42)

By Rev. Msgr. Kevin T. Hart

Today, for the first time since late November, the priest is vested in green, the color that symbolizes life and hope, the color of the season that the Church terms, Ordinary Time. This season lasts until Ash Wednesday, February 22, with the opening of the Lenten Season (purple vestments) and then the Easter Season (white vestments). Ordinary Time resumes again after the feast of Pentecost on May 21st and continues until the new Church year begins with the Advent Season on December 2nd.

In common parlance, ordinary is not a very exciting word. It connotes a sense of "hum-drum," where nothing extraordinary or outstanding is expected. But in ecclesiastical jargon, "ordinary" means "ordered" or "numbered," as in "first, second and third" Sunday of the year. "Ordinary Time" indicates that time when the Church is not celebrating Christmas or Easter. But extraordinary things can happen during this season of Ordinary Time.

When we recall some extraordinary event, one that changed our lives or our world (9/11 for example, or the assassination of President John F. Kennedy or the news of the death of someone close to us), it is not uncommon to remember exactly what we were doing at that moment, where we were and even the exact time of the day.

Such an event occurred in the lives of two of John the Baptist's disciples, as we hear in today's Gospel (John 1:35-42). John directs their attention to Jesus and proclaims, in the very words we hear just before Holy Communion, "Behold the Lamb of God!" He must have known very well that to speak of Jesus in those terms was to invite his own disciples to leave him and transfer their loyalty to this new and greater Jesus. John knew that the time had come for him to decrease, so that the Lord could increase. His task was to "prepare the way of the Lord," and not take the place of the Lord. And so he gives Jesus His first two disciples.

They were probably a little shy, and most likely followed Jesus at a respectful distance. But suddenly Jesus turns and faces them; He meets them half way. He makes things easier for them, and opens His door to them. Here we have a symbol of the divine initiative. It is always God who takes the first step and opens the door. It is always God who takes the first step. As St. Augustine put it, "We could not even begin to search for God unless He had already found us." When these disciples ask Jesus, "Where are you staying?" they are in effect asking to spend some time with

Him. And Jesus responds, "Come and see."

What did Jesus talk to them about? What had He said that immediately causes one of these disciples, who turns out to be Andrew, to be filled with a new fire of hope, so much so that he immediately goes to his brother, Peter, with the news, "We have found the Messiah."

The other disciple remains unnamed in the Gospel. But the event so struck him that he remembers the exact time of their meeting with Jesus: 4 pm. This leads us to believe that this other disciple could only have been John the Evangelist, a young man in his early or mid-teens and the author of this Gospel. He probably remembered the very stone on the road where he encountered Jesus. On what seemed to be an ordinary day, in an ordinary village, on a sleepy afternoon, something extraordinary and life-changing occurred for Andrew and John.

Ordinary Time affords us the opportunity to respond to the miraculous works of the Lord that we recall at Christmas and Easter. He constantly beckons us to "Come and see," to be changed in a dramatic way, too give ourselves more completely to Him. When will that moment arrive for us? Who can say? But we can be prepared to experience that conversion and total self-giving to the Lord if we imagine that every day, and whatever hour, it is really 3:59 pm.

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