

## “The Summons”: More than just a Hymn

A while back, my province held a “Come and See” weekend at St. Dominic’s Priory in St. Louis. Since I happened to be in town, I joined in on the festivities. I went into the chapel for Vespers, and watched as the room filled to the point of overflowing. In addition to the usual denizens of the Priory, there were twenty young men whose vocational discernment had let them to St. Louis to get an experience of Dominican life. When the singing began, the hearty masculine voices filled the chapel, giving concrete expression to an oft-repeated lesson from grade school: “Prayer is the lifting up of our minds and hearts to God.” Our minds and hearts and spirits were certainly uplifted, and we marveled at the way God was working in and through us that weekend.

I am among those who think that God chooses to speak to us even in such mundane matters as liturgical rubrics. Such seems to have been the case that Saturday evening. The house liturgist found a hymn titled “The Summons” whose words expressed perfectly what we were about that weekend – and indeed what we Christians should be about every day of our lives. In our song, we cried out to one another in the words of Christ which our lives are intended to make real:

Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?  
Will you go where you don’t know and never be the same?  
Will you let my love be shown, will you let my name be known,  
Will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?

What a wonderful expression of Byzantine theology! If we let ourselves be overwhelmed by God’s life-creating Spirit, we are drawn to the Christ who is “the Way, the Truth, and the Life”. As people could see in Jesus the fire of God’s love, so must we “catch the fire” of the Spirit so that people might be drawn to the warmth and light through us. Yet the warmth and light are not ours; rather, they belong to the God Who is their Source; in drawing others, we draw them not to ourselves but to God.

The hymn reminds us that we are “playing with fire”; the warning keeps coming back in every stanza, as we are reminded over and over that we must “never be the same”. I don’t know if those men who aspire to enter the Dominicans realize what that means in their lives, if they even suspect how much they will have to change. Religious life is about conversion of life, and that change includes more than putting on a religious habit. It certainly includes more than just a change of address or the taking of a religious name. Even a reordering of one’s day around common prayer is not enough. These are all mere externals. The change required of us goes much deeper: unless the fire of the Spirit burns to the core, then the visible “scorch marks” we display are no more than badges of honor worn for others to see. Jesus would tell us that we have already received our reward.

Lest you think that this only applies to professed religious, remember that religious are doing no more than living out their baptismal commitment to Christ – a commitment which they share with every other Christian. Conversion of life is not limited to religious, but is required of every one of us. Old ways of doing things are not the way of Christ, who promised to “make all things new.” Business as usual is not good enough when we are about the business of making God’s Kingdom a reality in a world full of people who pretend to need God only when they are in trouble – in other words, full of people like us.

Every time we come into church, we make a bow called a *metania*. Now the word *metania* comes from the Greek word *metanoia* which means conversion or change of heart. In a sense, every time we come into the church and bow, we are committing ourselves to conversion – that is, to change. May our *metania* be more than a reflex action which we perform without thinking. Rather, may it be for us a constant reminder of Christ’s call to follow Him wherever He wants to lead us – even to places whose newness makes them scary. As the Alka Seltzer commercial used to say, “Try it, you’ll like it!” How will we know unless we come and see?

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