

Homily for December 19, 2017

Our readings for today invite us to discover the way of detachment . We read in Judges the story of the call of Samson, who even before his birth had a certain vocation – to be a Nazarite. This word Nazarite comes from the verb “to separate” or “to consecrate”. Nazarites were therefore men or women who had taken a special vow of consecration to the Lord according to the terms prescribed in Numbers 6:1–21. Nazirites did not consume anything produced by the grapevine, including juice, wine, or grape skins, and they avoided all contact with corpses. The vow could be temporary or lifelong; after a temporary consecration expired, the person who made it was obligated to perform certain rituals and offer prescribed sacrifices. Nazirites who appear in the Bible include **Samson** (Judg 13:4–5) and **John the Baptist** (Luke 1:15), both of whom we read about today.

Of Samson we hear:

*Behold, you are barren and have no children; but you shall conceive and bear a son.
⁴ Therefore beware, and drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean, ⁵ for behold,
 you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor shall come upon his head, for the boy shall be a
 Nazirite to God from birth; and he shall begin to deliver Israel from the hand of the
 Philistines.”*

Of John the Baptist we read:

*for he will be great before the Lord,
 and he shall drink no wine nor strong drink,
 and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit,
 even from his mother’s womb.
¹⁶ And he will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God,*

With both of these men we learn something about the importance of detachment that is to motivate all of us who are called to follow Jesus. While it is true that these men had a particular way they were to be detached from material things, that not all of us are called to emulate explicitly, there is a principle at play here that is important for us too,

Remember I said that the word “Nazarite” means one who is separated? Well so to for those of us who are part of the Church. The word for church in Greek is *ecclesia*. This word means pretty much the same thing as “Nazarite”. An English translation would best be stated this way: “Those called out from the world”. Those who separate themselves.

We learn the way of detachment when material things do not control and govern our lives. Paul put this so well when in 1 Timothy 6 he wrote:

*for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world; ⁸ but if
 we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content. ⁹ But those who desire to be rich fall
 into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and hurtful desires that plunge men into
 ruin and destruction.*

‘If we feed the consumerist devil, he is never satisfied and as Paul states, plunge people into ruin and destruction. But when we learn the way of detachment we can resist the temptation of a kind of consumerism that seduces us into thinking life will be fulfilled when I acquire this or that item. Samson and St. John the Baptist invite us in this season of preparation for Christmas to cultivate an exterior attitude of detachment in a season when it is all too easily to consume too much.

This hymn: *“Tis the Gift to be Simple”* beautifully captures the freedom gained by those who learn the way of detachment:

*Tis a gift to be simple, 'tis a gift to be free
'Tis a gift to come down where I ought to be
And when I am in the place just right
I will be in the valley of love and delight
When true simplicity is gained
To bow and to bend I will not be ashamed
To turn, to turn will be my delight
'Til by turning, turning, I come 'round right.*