Voices of Sisters

Ministry



Plaque, "The Calling of Sts. Peter and Andrew," circa 1160–80 (Metropolitan Museum of Art/ The Cloisters Collection, 2013)



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We live in a world of arrivals and departures in all areas of life. Recently, the story of replacement of Judas by Matthias spoke to me in a new way. At a reference to someone assuming office, our minds often quickly think of leadership. I do, and I want to add that while a designated leader stands at a very visible point, the rest of us are filling in offices that go with our own talents and expertise — and we are similarly expected to deliver.

For any responsibility, there are criteria in selecting the occupant of the office. We are familiar with recruitment procedures for different jobs, ranging from the perceived highest to the lowest responsibility.

As I look at the criteria used by the apostles to choose the person to replace Judas, I notice that they did not pick just anyone to take over Judas' office. There were considerations like: It should be someone who had been with them "the whole time that Jesus was living with them, from the time John was baptizing until when he was taken up from them" (Acts 1:22).

Otherwise, how would the person understand about beatitudes, the cures and the concept of the servant as the greatest of all — and demonstrate that to their brothers and sisters? Likewise, the person had a mission ahead which was "to serve with the rest of the apostles as a witness to the Christ's resurrection" (Acts 1:21-26).

This Scripture story reminds me of two important moments in my own life: the moment I enter in to a ministry and the moment I leave. Judas had started as a potentially faithful apostle but left as a betrayer of our Lord.

Today, we continue to replace the apostles. Upon baptism, each Christian becomes eligible to replace the apostles. Many dedicated Christians have gone before us, and we are standing on their shoulders. I imagine that they faithfully stood with their congregations from beginning to end. They served as witnesses and we remember them long after they are dead; think of the saints and all the people we consider to have lived their lives to the full.

The fact that we are constantly replacing the apostles teaches me that there are three key things to consider when taking up any responsibility, whether it be designated leadership or any other role in the church: whom to choose and their qualities, their purpose in coming to the position, and how they come in.

Whom do we choose? In the Acts of the Apostles, it was necessary that the person had been there all the time. This may apply to us in another context: Though we did not live with Jesus in his earthly life, we have his life in the Gospels. Additionally, we have the history of our congregations and its charisms. For us in religious life, the words said to us at our reception "receive this constitution, it is the second book after the Gospel" hold true.

Therefore, to be entrusted with the work of the apostles, our lives have to be embedded in the Gospel and the constitutions of our congregations that guide us. Once we understand the values of Jesus and those of our charism, and live by them, we can be said "to have been there since the time Jesus was with us."

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For what purpose? According to the Acts of the Apostles, the one chosen was to serve as witness to Christ's resurrection. To be a witness is not an easy calling — it is a matter of faith. I have to evaluate my faith in Jesus and weigh whether I believe in his resurrection.

In this case, the way I live needs to speak for itself so that people meeting me can come to believe in Christ. When the disciples learned of the resurrection of Christ, they were filled with joy, peace and purpose for their lives. As a witness, I am invited to live in a manner that convinces others of what I am teaching. This does not take away the daily struggles, but how we endure them witnesses to Christ's resurrection.

Witnessing is enveloped in our gifts, skills and talents — I do not need to take time off to witness to Christ's resurrection. It is what I live every day, in and out of season, in the ordinariness of life.

Why do we need to replace people? This is a question for each one of us: What would make me leave my current ministry? Reasons are many: retirement, ailment, taking up a different and more demanding responsibility (promotion), death, or even gross misconduct that fails to witness. None of us would like to be replaced due to scandal. Judas was being replaced for having betrayed Jesus and consequently committed suicide. God forbid this should happen to any of us. The call here is to do our best wherever we are. We have the secret of living — the Gospel values and the legacies of our founders and foundresses. We are to emulate them. These two pillars

will help us to witness happily and draw people to Christ.

How do we recruit the person to take over? Some ways to get people to take up the responsibilities include appointment, election and self-initiative in the use of our talents. In the case of Mathias, they did a secret ballot. In any case, prayer before getting into this process is important. In the Acts of the Apostles, the apostles prayed to God to show them whom to pick between the two who had been nominated. As diverse as we are, each one of us fits into a specific role. Mathias had a precise role that he was suited for and was chosen to undertake.

Sometimes in appointments to fill an office, it is helpful to consider the common good. This invites us to match the gifts with the need at hand. Sometimes there is the temptation to appoint people according to our own preferences and the popularity of the person, rather than for their suitability.

This demands that the appointing authority engage in prayer as they continue to choose people for different offices. Our responsibility is to live our lives to the full, so that our abilities will become manifest and we will be eligible as witnesses to the resurrection of our Lord. Let us actively participate in all aspects of our lives, so we will be ready to assume the mantle when others are gone. If we are actively present to our situation, we will understand the mind of the church or the congregation and will be able to move the mission higher and farther than where we found it.