

“Being Called”

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One day, I was seated in my quiet and beautiful church in Cambridge MA, early in the morning, during Christmas Royal Hours. The church was filled with incense and chanting, candles, and the presence of God. There is nothing like being in church during Orthros, and I found myself praying inwardly, and my being was taking in all the beautiful mystery that was in front and around me. All of a sudden, one of the lead chanters came to me and asked if I would want to read one of the Old Testament readings. Surprised by it, I accepted, came to the chanter stand, and waited my turn. After my reading was done, the lead chanter asked me if I would like to join them for the remaining of the service and chant with them. And my response was *“But I don’t know how to sing!”* In order to appreciate my surprise, one has to know that my entire life I had the belief that I have no voice and that I do not know how to sing. I knew I had a good ear and can pick up songs with ease, but me, singing, no way! Still in disbelief I expressed softly my concern to the chanter, but he was unshakable *“I noticed in church that you chant along. You can just stay with us now, and just follow along ”*. In amazement I agreed *“Me? I was asking inside. How can it be?”* And I stayed during the Royal Hours with the chanters, spending there some of the most beautiful moments of my life. I was in the middle of beloved chants, next to the icons of Christ and my saint St. John the Baptist, and I was filled with wonder and mystery. I felt home as my feeble breath was joining others in chanting. After prayers and blessings from my priest, I decided to give it a try. Since then, I felt the desire to be at the chanter stand and chanted week after week. I later started taking singing lessons, and slowly improved my ability to use my voice and my breath in chanting.

I had many worries along the way. My first one was *“what if I can’t pray deeply within my soul during the services, being too busy chanting?”* But that was not the case. As I chanted I felt I could pray even better. There was something special about my entire body being fully engaged in prayer, and I was aware even

more of the presence of God. Not surprisingly, I messed up royally during various services, occasionally sang in tone 9, although only 8 exists. And again and again my priest was reassuring me “We are just praying. Have no worries. Just keep praying.” And that is exactly what I did, I kept praying, as my voice was slowly getting stronger and stronger throughout the years.

The amazing thing is that we are all called to do extraordinary things during ordinary moments in our lives. As we heard in today’s Old Testament reading, Isaiah was called to do extraordinary things, while he felt totally incapable. *“Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. 7 And he touched my mouth with it, and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged.”*

There is a deep call in each of us to seek the mystery of God in day-to-day moments, as life unfolds. Almost as if imbedded in our DNA there is this deep thirst for God and for Christ. Sometimes we mistake that for food, work, comfort, relationships, or drugs, but nonetheless we can all identify with a call for the infinite, for something bigger than us, something mysterious, something that would complete us fully and joyfully. As God called Isaiah, in a similar way we realize our limitations, but God always completes us when we invite Him in. *“There is a crack in everything. That’s how the light gets in”* says the song writer Leonard Cohen. God works through us and through everything around us through our limitations and imperfections. *“And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” 2 Corinthians 12:9*

Many times we have our own ideas on what we need to do, but if we just allow ourselves to be fully present in the reality, and be aware of God’s quiet invitation to be fully participant, we can hear His call to do extraordinary things with Him. And as we allow us to follow this invitation, we can then discern the works of the Holy Spirit in us and around us.

As women and men of faith, as we try to discern God's call for our ministry in the world and the church today, let us thrust our confidence on God, as He can clean our lips and purify our motives and actions, and let us do that with no fear. Just like Isaiah, the grace we receive in the Eucharist not only touches our lips and takes away our iniquities, but awakens in us to greater possibilities and expands our horizons. Engaging in a new ministry however is not always easy. Sometimes I felt judged when I made mistakes chanting, or because I am a woman. It could have been real, or just in my imagination, but in either case though, the feeling was intense. And I kept remembering that I am doing this for God, and slowly I will get better. It is so comforting to hear the words in today's gospel: *"Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake."*

If we follow Christ beatitudes, we then get out of stressful events, real or imagined, in the same way I finally was able to not worry about others perceptions of me as I was chanting. : "Just keep praying!" those words keep guiding me. As beloved St Porphyrios, celebrated on Dec 2th suggested, we should keep our eyes on Christ and on his divine Eros. *"Have Christ's joy. It is the joy that lasts forever, that brings eternal happiness. It is the joy of our Lord that gives assured serenity, serene delight and full happiness... I pray that your joy may be full."* I now pray for all of us that we all will be joyful in all that we do today and forever. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.