

Gideon was surprised and reluctant when an angel of Lord appeared to him. "Please, my Lord, how can I save Israel? My family is the poorest in Manasseh, and I am the most insignificant in my father's house" (Jgs 6:15). God often picks the lowly and lifts them up. In Sunday's Gospel, Mary expressed her amazement in prayer. "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant" (Lk 1:46-48).

Gideon knew the Lord had saved his people from slavery in Egypt, but he wondered aloud if the Lord had not abandoned his people and delivered them into the hands of the Midian's. It is an all too typical human reaction. "What have you done for me today?"

The Midianites were but one of three nomadic groups whose raids were a constant threat to the Israelites during this period in history. The larger issue from God's perspective was not a group of marauding nomads but faithfulness to the covenant. The Israelites often worshipped false gods and fell into sin. It was not that God had abandoned them, but they who had failed. "The central theme of Judges is the cycle of sin and punishment, repentance and deliverance" (Hahn 490).

In every age, the Lord looks for faithful followers who will listen and respond. God calls on Gideon to destroy an altar to the idol Baal built by his own father. Gideon feared reprisal so he and ten servants did as the Lord instructed at night. Gideon then builds a proper altar to the Lord and sacrifices the bull that his father had been fattening for seven years (Hahn 312). "Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build. Unless the Lord guard the city, in vain does the guard keep watch" (Ps 127:1-2).

Gideon's concern over reprisal was not unfounded. Sure enough the next day, the townspeople wanted to put Gideon to death. His father Joash intervened to prevent any bloodshed. Joash had learned an important lesson. If Baal were indeed powerful, he could defend himself. In fact, the false god had no power, so Gideon's reputation as a man of God grew within the community.

Gideon then went on to the larger task of protecting his tribe from the Midianites. Triumphant in battle, he was offered a crown but refused it. "So should it be with you. When you have done all you have been commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants; we have done what we were obliged to do'" (Lk 17:10).

Jesus teaches: "it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the Kingdom of God" (Mt 19:23). As the Israelites of old, we too must be weary of worshipping false gods. Anything that we place above God can become an idol for us. "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and decay destroy, and thieves break in and steal. But store up treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor decay destroys, nor thieves break in and steal" (Mt 6:19-20).

In the midst of the difficulties of our own lives, we should listen in prayer to how God is calling for us to respond. "He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things; the rich he has sent away empty" (Lk 1:52-53).