

Superheroes (Jeremiah 1 v4-10)

A few weeks ago I went to the cinema to watch the new superheroes movie Aquaman. The film narrates the story of Arthur/Aquaman. Arthur is the son of a human and Atlanna, queen of Atlantis. He has been raised on the dry land and dislikes Atlantis. In the film the moment comes when the different realms of Atlantis, tired of all the pollution and the abuse of the dry land, decide to unify under one king and declare war to the dry land.

In the story, however several individuals think that a war will only cause death and devastation without a real victory for anyone. In order to prevent this imminent war, Mera, princess of Atlantis, meets Arthur, challenging and encouraging him to embrace his destiny as a superhero. Arthur is, in fact, the living proof that the two realms, water and dry land, can live together peacefully and in harmony.

It takes a while before Arthur overcomes his fear and resistance but eventually he embraces his identity and call. Arthur is gone and Aquaman is born. This change is highlighted by a new outfit, a bright costume, and superhero's pose and attitude.

As some of you already know, I do like superheroes. A superhuman strength, a detailed costume made by unknown alien's technology, a special and indestructible weapon, wow, those are the heroes I grew up with. One moment you are a normal human being and the other you put on a mask and become invincible. But the transformation is not only external. Most superheroes before embracing their mission, undergo a real identity crisis and even after they "wear the mask" there is always a struggle between the person and the superhero, which inevitably creates loneliness.

While watching Aquaman, I couldn't help but notice some parallels with Jesus: belonging to two realms, the destiny to be the one who can make a peaceful reunification possible; to be the one who can cast away war and destruction and establish peace, are only few examples. However, Jesus does not reject his vocation, he has doubts but is obedient and full of trust toward God.

I guess, in the struggle and the resistance to accept the call, Aquaman is more similar to the prophet Jeremiah and us. Jeremiah is in God's presence, hears God's call, but feels totally unsuitable for it. Apart from Ezekiel, all other prophets in the Old Testament object to the vocation at first. However, in all cases, it seems that the resistance is not linked so much to the person, but rather to the experience of being in God's presence and being called as God's servant. The feeling of unworthiness and inadequacy is more linked to the *office* than to the person.

Very little superhero but very much human, Jeremiah believes himself not

up to the task. And in this we are similar to him: when confronted with our call, we might think, like Jeremiah, that there must have been a mistake, that it couldn't possibly be us. And we might answer this call with fear, anxiety, and inadequacy. Why me God? Are you really sure God? Look around, there are others who have been doing that task much better than I possibly could do it. I am not a superhero.

Our resistance could also express resentment; we might think that we are already busy, and that what we can offer is only a very tiny service, nothing compared with what people are already offering in the community.

Does it sound familiar? Have you been there? I have, constantly.

And yet, the answer is there. In today's text to all what we answer God's call: might it be "I am only a boy"; "I am only a clerk, administrator, mum, dad, and so on, yet to all of that, God's answer brushes away both our excuses and our inadequacy. *"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you."*

What those words mean is that it is not a matter of achievement or confidence that qualifies us before God. It is God who prepares us to live out the vocation for which we were created. This point is very important because often it is assumed that God always calls us to be and do what does not come "naturally" to us. But this cannot be true for a God who knew us before we were formed.

There are several definitions of vocation; the Swiss theologian Karl Barth defined it as "the event in which persons are set and instituted in actual fellowship with Jesus...in the service of his prophecy and therefore in the service of God". Another definition is that God's vocation is the only way to live our life as the person that God wants us to be. Only if we embrace our vocation, will we be able to develop and blossom. Only if we embrace our vocation will we feel finally in our element, will we feel at home.

Ah, Lord God, Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy. To our inadequacy and fear, God answers by taking the lead and directing us, by touching our mouth and giving us words, God touches our heart and the enemy suddenly is a companion to journey with. It is God who prepares us to live out the vocation for which we were created.

What would we do, if we drop our fear and resistance and start believing that God, who knows us so well, will direct and equip us, letting us be the person we are meant to be? Let us think about that, again and seriously, no matter where we are in our life, for this is an ongoing process. What would we dare to do and dare to be, if we truly believe that God is leading us?

In the film *I feel pretty*, Renee Bennett is a young woman who struggles with low self-esteem and insecurities over her appearance. She works in a

basement office but she aspires to work in the Fifth Avenue headquarters of her company. When a vacancy for a receptionist comes up at HQ, she decides not to apply after reading the job description's emphasis on being the beautiful "face" of the company. One day, during an exercise class, she hits her head and loses consciousness. When she wakes, despite having not changed physically, she believes herself to be astonishingly beautiful. Because of this perceived change in her appearance, Renee approaches the world with newfound confidence. She applies for the receptionist position and obtains the job, impressing all by her attitude and idealistic admiration for the brand. She also asks a man out and eventually starts a meaningful relationship with him.

A lot of positive things happen to her, until the moment when she suffers a new head injury. When she awakens, she perceives her real physical appearance and is devastated at the belief that her transformation has been reversed and she is no longer beautiful. The resolution of the film happens when she realises, that she was never transformed and has always been beautiful.

What would we do, if we drop our fear and resistance and embrace ourselves through God's love, becoming the person we are meant to be?

Friends, we have no costume, no mask and perhaps we have hit our head but we still look at ourselves in the same way.

Our superhero has come into the world in poverty and he has died on the cross as a thief. However, Jesus, unlike every other superheroes, is the only one who has conquered death by rising again. Jesus, contrary to the identity crisis and loneliness of superheroes, has gathered a community around him. And in this community, we are all called by God, who knows us before we were formed.

We might not have a weapon or wear a mask, but we have a very powerful special power which is love. Through love we can become the person we are meant to be and we can work together for the common good..

So let us put aside our fear and resistance and let us embrace God's call and say yes to love and service.

Amen

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