

Homily based on the readings from January 13, 2026 (1 Samuel 1.9-20;
Mark 1.21-28)

There is an aspect of today's first reading, from the First Book of Samuel, that comes across as being almost *comical*. Hannah, the wife of Elkanah, was fervently praying in the ancient sanctuary at Shiloh – begging the Lord to bless her with a child. The Lord, of course, granted her request – which resulted in the birth of the Prophet Samuel. What is *absurd* about this situation is that Eli, the priest in charge of the sanctuary, could not understand what Hannah was doing and mistakenly berated her for public drunkenness.

A similar situation occurs much later in the Bible, at the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles. On the day of Pentecost, when the Apostles started proclaiming the Gospel in a *multitude* of languages, many of the onlookers accused them of having “had too much new wine.” This type of reaction – although deeply disheartening – is completely predictable. When people are confronted with circumstances beyond their

comprehension, their natural reaction is to interpret what has taken place in terms they can understand. A related example, albeit in a different context, is the case of Saint Joan of Arc. Over the years, a host of so-called “medical experts” have asserted, with *absolute* confidence and without a *shred* of evidence, that the visions she experienced were not messages from heaven – but the result of some sort of neurological disorder, such as epilepsy or a brain tumor. When a person starts off by rejecting any form of spiritual reality, the only explanations that remain are mundane and material – and ultimately meaningless.

The most pernicious version of this error, of course, is the obstinate denial of the Church’s teachings about Jesus Christ. If you believe, without a shadow of a doubt, that it is impossible for a virgin to conceive a child, then you cannot accept the doctrine of the Virgin Birth. If you consider it settled science that a human being can never rise from the dead, then you must reject the reality of the Resurrection. If you convince yourself that it is ludicrous for ordinary bread and wine to become the Body and Blood of Our Lord, then you have cut yourself off

from the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The issue here is not what God has or has not done. The problem is that so many people are so blinded by their own preconceptions that they cannot recognize the truth that is woven into the fabric of the universe.

As you may recall, things turned out badly for Eli – the high priest at Shiloh. His sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were both killed in a battle with the Philistines, at which the Ark of the Covenant was also captured.

When he learned about these misfortunes, Eli literally fell out of his chair and died. Although the main reason for this defeat was the immoral activity of Eli's sons, there were also warning signs with respect to Eli himself. How could a priest of the Lord *not* recognize the tearful prayers of a woman who had sought refuge in his sanctuary?

Had Eli himself forgotten how to pray, or what authentic prayer actually looks like? It is impossible to say for certain. What we *do* know, however, is that each of us must be *unceasingly* vigilant – to ensure that our own faults and failures never obscure the *indescribable* wonders our Heavenly Father sets before us, every single moment of our lives.