

FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME-C

February 10, 2019

First Reading – Isaiah 6: 1-2a, 3-8

Responsorial Psalm – Psalm 138

Second Reading – 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Gospel – Luke 5:1-11

My dear people of God:

In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. One called to another, and said, “Holy, holy, holy, is Yahweh of Armies! The whole earth is full of his glory!”

The foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke.

Please know that the expression *“In the year that King Uzziah died”* in verse 1, is a phrase heavy with meaning; it meant the end of the good man. The people remembered Uzziah’s reign as “the good old days.”

Why? Because Uzziah (also known as Azariah in 2 Kings 15) was one of the better kings of Judah - the best after Solomon. Thus Uzziah would be remembered fondly and his death would be remembered with great sadness.

My dear people of God: I want to emphasize this point: Isaiah saw the Lord and the glory surrounding Him. He witnessed the adoration rendered to Yahweh by the seraphim at a time when the great earthly king Uzziah died. Isaiah was privileged to see an even greater heavenly king sitting on a throne in the temple in the Holy of Holies. The throne was “high and lofty”: appropriate for God’s exalted nature. This detail conveys to us the sense of awe that Isaiah felt in the presence of Yahweh.

While it is true that in ages past, God told Moses, *“You cannot see my face; for no man may see me, and live”* (Exodus 33:20), yet there were occasions when people were allowed to see God and live. The accounts in Genesis 16:13 and in Exodus 24:10 are examples of those. Isaiah’s case is one of those.

The reaction of Isaiah upon seeing the face of God was: *“Woe is me! I am doomed, 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, Yahweh of Armies!”*

Isaiah spoke, confessing his guilt. In the presence of the Almighty, he was overwhelmed by his own guilt. In the presence of Yahweh’s holiness, he was struck by his own unholiness. He saw that, like the other citizens of Judah, he too was guilty.

Is it not true that in the presence of HOLINESS, most of us feel spiritually drab by comparison? GOD’S HOLINESS accentuates our UNHOLINESS.

Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar. He touched my mouth with it, and said, “Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away, and your sin forgiven.”

The seraph touched Isaiah’s mouth with the live coal, burning away the uncleanness of his lips and heart. He who was unholy was now made holy. He who was unfit to stand in God’s presence was, by the grace of God, now made fit.

Then I heard the Lord’s voice, saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here I am. Send me!” Isaiah has spoken, confessing his guilt. Now God spoke, addressing the heavenly council (the seraphim and other angelic hosts present).

Brothers and sisters: I am inclined to say that the “throne room of God is the policy room of world government. There is business to conduct. There are things to be acted upon”. And God asked, *“Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?”* Isaiah was only a bystander and not a part of God’s Council, but he heard God’s question. God did not indicate where the envoy must go nor what the envoy must do.

“Here am I. Send me!” Isaiah, grateful to be cleansed and even more grateful to be alive became God’s envoy, even though he did not know where Yahweh would ask him to go or what Yahweh would ask him to do.

At this point, let us look deep inside us. When making such a commitment, we cannot say, *“I will serve God as long as I can do it here”* or *“I will be happy to serve God in this way but not in that way.”* The commitment must be to serve God, and we making such a commitment can only trust God where He will lead us. Are we that person?

Let us go to the second reading:

Paul, being the founder of the young church of Corinth, spent eighteen months working among them (Acts 18:11). It was he who first made these people aware of Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension as SALVIFIC.

The New Testament uses the term good news for forgiveness of sin and the promise of eternal life through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul used this term nearly fifty times in his epistles. He is teaching the young church in Corinth that they are now in the process of being saved if they hold firmly the word which he preached to them (verse 2b).

Paul first deals with Jesus' own resurrection in verses 3-8. This is a matter of first importance. The Christian faith rests on the fact of Jesus' resurrection. If Jesus was not raised from the dead, "then Paul's preaching is in vain, and the Corinthians' faith also is in vain" (verse 14).

Paul's logical presentation went this way:

DEATH: In the mind of Paul, it was clear that "for Christ to have been raised from the dead, He must first have died (verse 3). That is the first point that Paul wished to establish. Jesus really died "for our sins" (verse 3c). Paul is teaching us now that Christ died for our sins because He had to atone for us.

DEATH TO ATONE FOR OUR SINS: Atonement has to do with making amends for sins or repairing the spiritual damage caused by sins. It also has to do with restoring relationships that were broken by our disobedience. God is holy (morally and spiritually perfect) and expects us to be holy as well (Leviticus 19:2; 1 Peter 1:15).

SIN CREATES A CONFLICT FOR

GOD:

* On the one hand, God is repulsed by our sin, but on the other hand, He loves us.

* On the one hand, He cannot bring Himself to invite us into full fellowship while we are tainted with sin, but on the other hand, He cannot bring Himself to dismiss us totally.

BURIAL: The burial of Jesus' body constitutes further confirmation of His death (verse 4).

RESURRECTION: Paul teaches that Jesus was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" in verse 4b.

BODILY APPEARANCES: Paul says that Jesus appeared to Cephas, which is Simon Peter's name in the Aramaic language (Peter is his Greek name).

The second resurrection appearance that Paul mentions was to "the twelve." With the death of Judas, the number of apostles had been reduced to eleven, but "the twelve" has become a standard way of referring to the Apostles; meaning to "all the apostles.

"Then He appeared to over five hundred brothers at once, most of whom remain until now, but some have also fallen asleep"(verse 6). The early church, however, would be familiar with this appearance. After all, five hundred people saw the risen Christ in this appearance, so they would spread the word far and wide.

Paul's comment about most of the five hundred being still alive tells these Corinthian Christians that they can verify this resurrection appearance if they have a mind to do so. Such declaration that there were still hundreds of witnesses would have been very compelling.

"Then he appeared to James" (verse 7a). James was the first bishop of Jerusalem.

"and last of all, as to the child born abnormally (or at the wrong time), he appeared to me also" (verse 8). Jesus' appearance to Saul (whose name was later changed to Paul) is recounted in Acts 9:1-8. Saul, a Pharisee, had been a zealous persecutor of the Christians. When he was travelling to Damascus, with the intent of arresting any followers of Jesus whom he might find there, a bright light from heaven blinded him and a voice asked, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Paul asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The voice responded, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise up, and enter into the city, and you will be told what you must do." The men who had been traveling with Saul led him by the hand to Damascus, where Saul became a Christian (Acts 9:10-19).

The Greeks used the word "*ektroma*" to refer to a miscarriage or an abortion - a baby born at the wrong time. Paul uses this word for himself here because he became an apostle late in time - after Jesus' ascension. Unlike the original twelve apostles, Paul did not have the opportunity to walk the pathways of Israel with Jesus - nor to hear His voice as He taught the crowds - nor to witness His miracles.

"For I am the least of the apostles, who is not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the assembly of God"(verse 9). His reason for this statement is not an inferiority complex or false humility. He says that he is

“least” and “not worthy” “because I persecuted the assembly of God,” which refers back to his activities as recounted in Acts 8.

“But by the grace of God I am what I am” (verse 10a). Grace (*karis*) is a significant word in the New Testament, especially in Paul’s epistles. The use of “*karis*” in the New Testament has its roots in the Hebrew word “*hesed*”, used in the Old Testament to speak of God’s loving kindness, mercy, and faithfulness.

Greeks often used the word “*karis*” to speak of patronage (the support of a patron, such as financial or political support). To Greeks, the word “*karis*” connoted generosity—generosity that demanded loyalty on the part of the recipient.

It is easy, therefore, to understand why Paul would adapt “*karis*” to the Gospel. Christian *karis* is the gift of salvation by God to all who accept the Lordship of Jesus Christ. God, therefore, is the patron - the benefactor. Just as we could never fully repay a person who left us an inheritance of unimaginable wealth, so also we can never repay God for the gift of salvation. However, if a patron were to grant us unimaginable wealth, we could be faithful to the patron by using the money in a way that would be consistent with the patron’s wishes or values. So also, we can be faithful to the God who gives us salvation by living in accord with God’s will.

Paul acknowledges that he deserves no credit for his apostleship. He is an Apostle by the grace of God.

“His grace which was bestowed on me was not futile, but I worked more than all of them”(verse 10b). Paul felt a sense of indebtedness at being granted an apostleship—the highest office in the Church—but that only fueled his determination not to squander God’s gift to him. Thus he worked harder than the other apostles.

“Whether then it is I or they, so we preach, and so you believed”(verse 11). Paul’s intention in this last verse is to proclaim the resurrection of Christ, so that those who believe in Christ’s death and resurrection would be saved.

Now, let us go to the Gospel.

We can liken the call of the first disciples to the call of Isaiah which we heard already from the first reading.

The story opens with Jesus teaching – standing by Lake Gennesaret (*another name for the Sea of Galilee*). Being pressed by the crowd, He borrows a boat on the lakeshore that belongs to a fisherman named Simon. From there He

teaches crowds of people. Here is an instant amphitheater: people were standing around the lake while Jesus was teaching from Simon's boat at a short distance from the shore.

As the story unfolds, after preaching, Jesus asks Simon to go out to the deep water and to put down the nets for a catch. Simon does so hesitatingly - just like the way Isaiah hesitated at first. There is so great a catch of fish that others had to help bring the nets ashore. The story ends with Jesus' recruiting Simon and the others as disciples.

Brothers and sisters: I want you to be mindful of the call of Simon Peter. Simon is mentioned by name five times over. On one of those occasions, he is called Simon Peter (verse 8). Other persons on the scene are James and John, sons of Zebedee, who are "partners with Simon."

Clearly the main figure on the scene, apart from Jesus Himself, is Simon Peter. It is his boat that Jesus uses. It is he to whom Jesus speaks first, asking him to go into the deep water. Conversely, Simon Peter is the only person who speaks to Jesus. He addresses Jesus as "Master" (the Greek term used for tutors and teachers) in verse 5. But after the miraculous catch, he addresses him as "Lord" in verse 8. At the end of the story, Jesus says: *"Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people"* in verse 10.

My dear people of God: Jesus has come into the world to reveal a loving Father who wants to redeem us. But Jesus was made known to us only through the witness of His apostles. The call of the first disciples marked the beginning of the group that grew into the CHURCH.

Obviously, the story of the Church (where you and I belong) is contained in today's gospel. When Jesus called him, Peter was hesitant (like Isaiah). Nevertheless, Peter responded, and he discovered that Jesus had a surprise in store for him.

We, too are called by God in many different ways to do many different things in His vineyard, whether known or unknown. Let us respond with great faith in the One Who Calls, not in our abilities. God calls us not because of our ability, but because of our availability. God does not call the able; rather He enables those whom He calls. Amen