

February 7, 2010

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Isaiah 6:1-2a, 3-8

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Gospel Reading: Luke 5:1-11

Homilist: Father Balaji Boyalla

God's Call – Our Response!

Reverend Billy Graham tells of a time early in his ministry when he arrived in a small town to preach a sermon. Wanting to mail a letter, he asked a young boy where the post office was. When the boy had told him, Dr. Graham thanked him and said, "If you'll come to the Baptist church this evening, you can hear me telling everyone how to get to heaven." "I don't think I'll be there," the boy said. "Why?" Billy Graham asked him. "Because you don't even know your way to the post office! How can you show me the way to heaven?" the boy replied. Today's readings tell us about the calls of the prophet Isaiah, Paul, and Peter to God's ministry.

The central theme of today's readings is divine call and human response. Today's readings teach us that Christian spirituality is discipleship, which means a positive response to God's call. It has three steps: 1) The revelation: The miraculous, catch of fish described in today's gospel was a revelation of Jesus' identity as the one sent from God 2) The recognition and confession of one's unworthiness and inadequacy: "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." 3) The word of reassurance from Jesus and a call to share in his life-giving mission. Today's readings are "epiphany-call stories" which tell us that God has His own criteria for selecting people to be prophets and ministers. Presenting the special calls, or vocations, of Isaiah, Paul and Peter as life-changing events, the readings challenge us to examine our own personal calls to conversion

and discipleship. When faced with the awesome power of God, Isaiah, Paul, and Peter are all struck dumb by their own unworthiness. Peter in today's gospel and Isaiah in the first reading express their unworthiness to be in the presence of God's great holiness, and Peter and Isaiah both immediately receive their divine calls. Today's second reading describes the call of another great apostle, Paul, who judges himself to be unworthy of the name or the call as he was a former persecutor of the Christians. It was by giving these three men a strong conviction of their unworthiness and of their need of total dependence on His grace that God prepared them for their missions. The calls of these various ministers of God are set before us so that we can reassess our own call from God and our response. The Second Vatican Council teaches that we are all called to ministry by virtue of our baptism into Jesus Christ.

The gospel reading today displays the three dimensions of discipleship: (1) the recognition of the power of Jesus, (2) the response of confession, and (3) the assurance of success when we follow God's word. Peter's commission is one which is repeated often in the New Testament: Lk.9: 20, 22:32, Jn.21: 1ff, Matt.16: 16ff. Peter and the other disciples were given the privilege of sharing in Christ's work of gathering people to God. As they shared in gathering the fish, so now they would share in gathering "lost" humanity. Simon's response was similar to the responses to the other encounters with God seen throughout the Old Testament. As he stood before the burning

bush, Moses confessed his disqualifications for leadership, especially his inability to speak well. (Ex 3:11-4:17, esp. 4:10). Later in the Bible, when God came to Solomon in a dream, Solomon declared that he was not wise enough to govern God's people and asked for an "understanding heart" (1 King 3:7-9). Likewise, when God called Jeremiah, the prophet recognized the inadequacy of his youth (Jer 1:6).

1) Let our encounter with the holiness of God lead us to recognize our sinfulness. The good news of today's gospel is that our sinfulness -- our pride and self-centeredness -- does not repel God. Our God is a God who gives sinners a new start. It is important that we acknowledge our sinfulness. Our response must be modeled on that of the tax collector in the parable: "Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner" (Luke 18:13). The recognition of our inadequacy and sin is necessary for us to be willing and able to receive transformation by God's grace. Isaiah, Paul, and Peter teach us that even the greatest ones among us stand in need of conversion. God, who calls us and commissions us for His service, wants us to realize His presence everywhere and in everyone, to repent of our sins and to remain in readiness to speak and act for Him in our life circumstances as He shall direct.

2) We need to teach and practice expressions of reverence for the Lord. Today's world desperately needs a "revival of reverence." We need both to recognize God as God and to express that reverence for God through appropriate bodily gestures. For example, when we come into church we enter the presence of Jesus dwelling in the tabernacle. We need to remember that this is his house, a part of heaven, and we need to express that remembrance by making a deep bow toward the tabernacle, or, if we are able to kneel, by genuflecting on the right knee, before we enter the pew. We should offer him the same reverent recognition as we

leave the church and his sacramental presence. We might also remember to give a slight bow of the head whenever we hear, or say, the name of Jesus. The new regulation of bowing one's head before receiving Communion is another beautiful act of reverence. This same sense of reverence can be expressed by keeping the Bible, God's living word to us, in a prominent place in our homes and by kissing it each time we read from it. True reverence for God naturally leads us to the reverent, respectful love of neighbor. Mother Teresa loved people because she saw Jesus in them. That was the same Jesus whom she revered and experienced in the Holy Eucharist. This means that we, too, will have many daily experiences of Christ. So the heart of our mission as Christians is really to find him hidden in our neighbors, and to accept his challenge to us -- to love him, to have compassion on him, to practice justice toward him, to be kind to him. Then it becomes easier for us to forgive injury as he did, and to be reconciled to those with whom we have difficulties. Thus, our mission as his disciples is to seek, to find, and to respond to Him in all people and events.

3) Each of us has a unique mission in the Church. This is why God has a different call for each of us. Each of us is unique, so each of us has a mission which no one else can fulfill. God will use all of us, and particularly what is unique in us, to bring this mission to fulfillment. Our response must be like that of Isaiah: "Here I am, Lord...send me. I'll do it. I'll play my part. I'll speak to that neighbor, that coworker, that friend, that relative. I'll talk to my daughter about the way she is rearing her children. I'll keep my mouth shut and refuse to gossip or criticize my co-workers or my bosses. I'll pray every day. I'll learn to listen patiently to those in need. I'll do it."