

## 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany

Isa 6:1-2a; 3-8

1 Cor 15:3-8;11

Lk 5:1-11

The Latin word 'vocare,' from which we get our word, 'vocation,' means, 'to call.' Some non-clerical professions used to be described as vocations, implying that a person had been 'called' to undertake this particular work. Nowadays, even among the clergy, we talk about contracts defining the expectations and functional limits of the job being offered.

Today's readings are about vocations with no contracts, no time limits, only commitment. King Uzziah ascended the throne when he was 16 years old and reigned for 52 years. He was a good king but towards the end of his life he broke God's law and was struck with leprosy. His death created uncertainty among the people of Judah, but in this unease, God appeared to Isaiah in a vision, revealing to him His majesty and glory.

Yet God cared about His people and He asked who would go to the people and call them to turn back to God and His ways. This would be a thankless task because the people wouldn't listen, and when Isaiah asked how long the contract would be, he was told it was as long as it takes. God's call could either be accepted or rejected, but Isaiah replied, "Here am I, send me." God is all powerful, but He does need a little help from His human friends.

Today's gospel reading is often described as the miraculous haul of fish, but it is about the miraculous haul of Peter. The story describes Peter's call and commissioning to the twin vocations of discipleship and evangelism. On the day this occurred, Peter did three things he would never have expected to do. He accepted advice on how to fish from a carpenter from Nazareth. He admitted his unworthiness and sinfulness and knelt down in worship, among newly caught fish. Thirdly, he left his job, his home and family in response to God's call. It was Peter's obedience that led to a deeper faith and this is a lesson for us all.

St Paul was a persecutor of Jesus' disciples, but became the apostle to the Gentiles when he responded to Jesus' call on the road to Damascus.

God calls, we respond. A positive response marks the beginning of a risky journey, but as St Paul tells us, 'God's grace is sufficient for us.' This does not simply apply to those being called to the ordained priesthood or religious life. All disciples belong to the priesthood of all believers, and lay disciples are invited to ministry both within the organisation of the Church, but also in the world. Disciples are students of the Faith but also evangelists.

All disciples are called to be channels of God's love and light in the world, and for lay disciples this means seeing one's employment, family life, encounters with friends, acquaintances and practical concern for the poor, needy and the created order, as a ministry to which you are called, not a job. How we live, how we treat others, how we handle the ups and down of life should reflect our understanding of being called to

ministry as a disciple of Jesus. It isn't so much what we say, it is who we are, that causes people to begin their own journey to God. Seeing how we live as a ministry may not make our life any easier, but it will change how we live it, and our retirement age from this ministry is the day of our death.

So how can we bring about this change from a functioning life to a vocational life? One way could be to follow Jesus' command to Peter, "Push out from the shore." Don't be earthbound, focussing entirely on ourselves and what the world considers to be acceptable and secure. Spend more time in the still silence of God's presence. Then, "Launch out into the deep." Listen to what the psalmist says, "Be still and know that I am God." (Ps 46:10). Enter into God's depths and experience His love, forgiveness and joy. Be alone with Him in the silent depths. Then, "Let down your nets," and receive His love, power and strength, knowing that He has promised to be with you at all times. If you are courageous enough to say, "Here am I, send me," you will begin to tread the path of Isaiah, Peter, Paul and the saints both living and departed.

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