

Fifth Sunday of the Year February 07, 2016

Isaiah 6:1-2a, 3-8; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Luke 5:1-11

Our human existence is a gift of God to us and its origin and end belongs to God. God constantly comes into our lives and invites us to partake in his life. Christian faith is the recognition of God's definitive affirmation of humanity in Jesus Christ. Faith in Christ is an explicit affirmation within human life that illuminates God's taking control of our life. Through faith in Christ, human persons are oriented toward God, the source of their true affirmation and away from the ever-present potential to negate their own existence. Our faith is a simple human response to the revealed divine word. God reveals himself to us continuously through persons, word and situations. He comes to us in various ways and we ought to recognize him. He invites each person individually but with a mission. Holy Scriptures tell us about the call of Abraham, Moses, Gideon, Samuel and others who had to fulfil a mission of God. God calls each one to fulfil a purpose. Thus the entire Church is said to be in a state of vocation and of mission and therefore each member of the Church, each for his or her own part has their own vocation and mission and every one of us is called to play our unique and individual role in building up the life of the Church. Some 2000 years ago, when Jesus first founded his Church, he willed to create in it various ministers to serve the community. He called some of the people at that time to be apostles, he called others to be prophets, he called others to be evangelists, others were called to be pastors and teachers but despite their different ministries, what united all of them was that they were all entrusted with the same mission or the same type of service in building up the body of Christ.

Today's readings tell us of the experience of divine presence and the human response of the individual. We have here three important persons mentioned in the Bible: Isaiah, Paul and Peter. All the three persons were most grateful to God for having chosen them and they did make a great effort to answer the calling to the best of their capabilities. This is not to say that they were all perfect persons. Prophet Isaiah wished at times that God would have chosen someone else because the people would not listen to him. He viewed himself as a great sinner among sinners, not worthy of being in the presence of Yahweh. St. Paul started on the wrong track by persecuting the Christians. He having persecuted the Holy Catholic Church instituted by Jesus viewed himself as being unfit of being called an apostle. Peter the first Pope, begged Jesus to get away from him because he was a sinful man. He ran away from his master and denied him during the last twenty- four hours of His life. All of them were weak. All of them made mistakes. But what was most important, all of them

had sincere hearts and overcame their weaknesses by placing their complete trust in the Lord. Each person responded in a unique way to the divine presence. There was a desire to cling to the Lord and not leave his presence, having experienced his grace functioning in their life. When they found themselves unworthy to be before him the Lord turned to them and filled them with his grace to be sent out as his messengers.

The calling of God is always connected with the mission where the individual concerned is called upon to do a particular task. The first reading of today we see Isaiah as privileged person to see the holiness of God. The passage begins with the death of King Uzziah and at the same time Isaiah sees God of Israel seated on a high and lofty throne in the Kingdom of Heaven. God is surrounded by loyal servants identified as the Seraphim. Their titles is said to be associated with those creatures expressing the divine presence of fire, burning and smoke. This is the only time these servants make an appearance in the Bible. The Seraphim presence indicates the immeasurable majesty of God. They proclaim God's glory on earth. The people of Israel as God's chosen people are supposed to reflect the holiness of God. But they had been disloyal and did not manifest that holiness. The Prophets were to be the messengers and they had the calling or vocation to be his messengers to proclaim that holiness. Prophet Isaiah who is called has to be purified of any sin. After this he is more than ready to step forward as the faithful servant of God. His message will provide the people with yet another chance to repent and escape from the consequences of disloyalty to the God of Israel.

Further the readings invite us to consider three interlocking elements of our Christian living namely, faith, experience and discipleship or mission. In the Second Reading St. Paul gives us a brief summary of our Christian faith and announces as of first importance the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. These events fulfil the scriptures and bring salvation to the world. This is our faith in the Gospel of Jesus. To build up this faith in Jesus, Paul recounts the appearances of the risen Jesus to several people. Paul adds his own experience of the risen Lord as a clinching argument. Since he was the persecutor the appearance of the resurrected Jesus shows the power of God's grace. Faith is man's response to the revealed word of God. God reveals himself to us continuously through word, persons and situations. Our Christian faith implies a deep level of trust in the Lord and depends totally on him. A real faith not only accepts the content of God's message but involves a total surrender of one's self to God allowing God to act in his life. The Christians of today are tempted from all sides to forget their Christian calling and to live in the present. Paul reminds them that the true home of the Christian is heaven

and true happiness consists of loving God and his neighbour. The life death and resurrection of our Lord is the absolute guarantee that he wants us in heaven.

The subject matter of the Gospel of today is Jesus calling his first disciples. Jesus is in Galilee, on the shore of the lake of Gennesaret, that is, the Sea of Galilee. He teaches the people who are gathered there and who are captivated by the discourse they heard. They pressed upon him to hear the word of God. For what Jesus says inflames spirits and hearts, it fills the mind with many thoughts and with ever more numerous unanswered questions. Jesus proclaims eternal Life, that Life which belongs to the heavenly Father; the Holy Spirit, as his mission, is to bring that Life to germination and make it bear fruit in the souls of the men and women of all time. His teaching attracted people to him. Later they would say that no one spoke like him. Peter himself proclaims that Jesus alone has the words of eternal life.

The call comes in the context of Jesus proclaiming the Word of God to the crowd of people while sitting in the boat of Simon Peter. Simon and his companions had finished their work for the day and were in the process of washing their nets. When Jesus finished speaking he made a strange request of Simon Peter. He wanted him to move his boat into the deep water and begin fishing again. Peter's response was exactly what we would expect from a common-sense fisherman. Peter and his companions were experts when it came to fishing in that lake. They knew their work well. But even so, after a whole night's work they had nothing to show for their efforts. Their entire work was in vain. They had caught nothing. When Jesus suggests that they go out into the deep water and let down their nets, there is an element of hesitation and scepticism and to some extent condescension in Peter's reply. "We know about fishing and we have spent the entire night in vain, but if you a lay person and preacher of Good news say so, I will let out the nets." However, Peter does not follow the path of common sense. Instead he does what Jesus requested him to do and the result was overwhelming and totally beyond their expectations. They have such a great shoal of fish that their nets could hardly hold the catch and they had to get help from outside. It was their first test of faith in Jesus. They responded to the words of Jesus and saw the results.

The symbolism here is very powerful. The abundant catch of fish is what the future ministry of Peter and other disciples will be like. The waters might look barren but they are filled with large amount of fish. Simon Peter immediately recognises Jesus as the Lord and like many of the descriptions of the call of a Prophet, Simon proclaims his unworthiness in the presence of the Lord. James and John also share in the awareness of Peter and they too leave everything to follow Jesus. It is important to notice the image painted by Luke about Peter.

We visualise Peter here responding positively to Jesus at every step along the way. The abundant catch of fish will be paralleled by a highly successful ministry of following Jesus. This success will never be attributed to Peter or other disciples. It will always be attributed to the power of the Lord. The same words we will hear some times in our life: "Go out into the deep water, the place where you seem to have failed. Trust me completely and let go everything and you will be in for a pleasant surprise." Jesus surely will do marvellous things in our life. What the church has done down the centuries is the response to such an invitation of Jesus by trusting in him and letting go of everything. It is clear that the huge catch of fish is just a symbol of what Peter and his successors would do later in the Church. For the early disciples it was not merely believing Jesus but more importantly, believing in Jesus. It is an element of total trust in him.

In this passage we see that there is the call to the discipleship or the mission. To be a disciple is basically to be a follower of the master, understand his life and teaching and make it personal. The disciple learns from the master all he can teach and his very life expresses this by putting all the knowledge into practice. In this sense, we too are called to be disciples of Jesus. We transmit to others what Jesus is to us. That is the mission of the disciple. Prophet Isaiah once he is cleansed by the divine presence has the mission. He responds to God and says here am I ready to do your will. We have Paul, not particularly known for his modesty, says: "I am the least of the apostles... I hardly deserve the name apostle." Yet he knows his mission. He immediately starts proclaiming that Jesus is Lord. Peter and his companions too are chosen now to be the disciples and apostles and given the mission: from now on you will be fishers of me. We are not certain whether they understood their mission; but they leave everything and prefer to be the disciples of Jesus. It is a natural outcome of the faith that we have in Jesus which leads us to the unique experience and joy of knowing him and putting him unconditionally at the centre of our life. That is an experience that we must share, not because we are told to but because we cannot help doing so. True discipleship of itself overflows into apostleship. On that day when the master called them, Peter, James and John left everything and went after Jesus.

God reacts immediately to the sincere state of mind and heart of his children. Peter was called by Jesus to assist Him in His ministry and to provide leadership to the Church after the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus never left us alone. Over and above His physical Divine Presence in the Holy Eucharist, He has given us many visible gifts that can be seen with our eyes. These gifts are the strength of our living faith in the blessed hope that awaits us all. Above all

he has given our vocation and mission to be loyal to him and fulfil his will in this world of today. The Lord who sends us does not require that we be perfect, but he does expect us to leave other things behind and make commitment to discipleship. Here is obedience being rewarded. It is commonly said that obedience produces miracles. It is clear that Simon Peter collaborated in the Work of the Lord. This is truly the role and the mission of Peter. Jesus wanted to perform this miracle - the miraculous catch of fish - in order for Simon Peter to finally understand what he, the Master, expected from his disciple. It was necessary for Simon to be carrying out his own trade, his human work, in order that, through it, based on this foundation he understood perfectly, he might truly grasp all that the Lord Jesus expected from him. The proof of this is Simon Peter's reaction to this miracle.

Simon Peter is truly dismayed by the request of Jesus. But he has already understood something: Jesus is the Master, and Simon is the pupil, the disciple, he who must obey the commands of the Lord. For Simon is not to do his own work, but rather to collaborate in the Work of God: he must help the Master and do the Master's Will and not his own. This is something he is always ready to do, no matter what the cost. Soon after the miraculous catch of fish, Simon Peter becomes a follower of Jesus. He calls Jesus "Lord"—the title given to Jesus after his Resurrection—and protests his worthiness to be in Jesus' presence. Today's Gospel, therefore, marks a turning point in the relationship between Jesus and Peter. Jesus gives Simon a new job, telling him that he will become a different kind of fisherman. No longer will he catch fish; instead he will catch people. In these words, we hear the beginning of the leadership role that Peter will have within the community of disciples. Peter was chosen for this role. His task will be to bring others to Jesus. Jesus today invites us to play the same role of leadership to bring many to Jesus.

The story was about a farmer who lived in Africa and through a visitor became tremendously excited about looking for diamonds. Diamonds were already discovered in abundance on the African continent and this farmer got so excited about the idea of millions of dollars worth of diamonds that he sold his farm to head out to the diamond line. He wandered all over the continent, as the years slipped by, constantly searching for diamonds, wealth, which he never found. Eventually he went completely broke and threw himself into a river and drowned. Meanwhile, the new owner of his farm picked up an unusual looking rock about the size of a country egg and put it on his mantle as a sort of curiosity. A visitor stopped by and in viewing the rock practically went into terminal convulsions. He told the new owner of the farm that the funny looking rock on his mantle was about the biggest diamond that had ever been

found. The new owner of the farm said, "Heck, the whole farm is covered with them" - and sure enough it was. The farm turned out to be the Kimberly Diamond Mine...the richest the world has ever known. The original farmer was literally standing on "Acres of Diamonds" until he sold his farm.

Fr. Eugene Lobo S.J. Bangalore, India