

SERMON FOR 5th SUNDAY IN
ORDINARY TIME YEAR C

Isaiah 6:1-8, 9-13
1 Corinthians 15:1-11
Luke 5:1-11

Father Jordan

Have you ever been surprised by a gift? Perhaps you have done something for someone and were surprised to receive a gift in return.

Do you, like many in Western Culture often respond to the giver of the gift by saying 'Oh no you shouldn't have, I just can't receive this, this is too much!' And so on. What is it that makes us not want to accept such acts of kindness? Perhaps it is because we feel unworthy to receive it.

We protest because somehow the gift or the words seem out of proportion, and we may feel that to receive them is going to put us in a difficult position. Maybe there are some strings attached. We do know that sometimes gifts have ulterior motives. But despite some of these pit falls, if we hold on to this

sort of attitude in a rigid way, we can in fact lose the opportunity to build friendship, love and trust. Sometimes in our sense of unworthiness we miss an opportunity.

2

When I meet God I often feel like saying "Oh I can't accept that". The meeting feels a bit one sided. I don't have equal resources and so have a sense of powerlessness. The generosity offered is so great that I can also feel I don't deserve what I am offered.

Peter, Paul and Isaiah each had similar experiences. The readings we heard have told us about their encounter with God. I know the story surrounding the encounter of each seems a bit remote from our own experience.

I have experienced moments in my life when I have sensed in a dramatic way the presence of God. In a way this lead me to the ordained life. And though I did not have a blinding light, I certainly can look back upon my life and see the 'God moments'. A word, a vision someone has had, a person I met.

These have been real experiences for me. But they may not be experiences shared by others. Just as Peter, Paul and Isaiah had different experiences, so we, all experience the work of God in different ways. It is however always the same God at work

3

Isaiah the prophet had the task of speaking God's word to the people of Israel. He was a mystic, a man of contemplation who needed time to be alone in order to hear what God was saying. In his time of contemplation he was given a striking vision of God's heavenly glory.

Paul was a theologian and lawyer for whom argument and discussion, right and wrong, were the familiar way of working. By the support of many arguments Paul could prove the Jewish faith was right and the Christian faith was wrong. As far as he was concerned Jesus could not have risen from the dead, and he could argue that strongly. When Paul met God he was made brutally aware of a serious error in his convictions.

Peter was a fisherman who knew his job so well that if he had fished all night and caught nothing, then

there was no use exhausting himself anymore. Peter experienced the presence of God in his work.

4

The practical Peter, the logical thinker Paul, and the mystic Isaiah; each in their own way experienced the presence of God. While these experiences were different, the result for each was the same. Each one felt unworthy and ashamed and would have liked the whole experience to go away.

Isaiah said "What a wretched state I am in! I am lost for I am a man of unclean lips".

Paul said "It was as though I was born when no one expected it. I am the least of the apostles".

Peter said "Leave me Lord, for I am a sinful man".

When they realised they were in the presence of God, they each felt unworthy to be there. They were aware of God's greatness and their own littleness, and they knew they could do nothing about it.

5

The more we are aware of God's presence, the more aware we become of our sense of awe, our sense of being small, our sense of otherness. That's probably why we often prefer to avoid God's presence, why we often try to ignore God. Sometimes God is too much to cope with. Perhaps that is why we often relegate our worship to the familiar, because we want to ignore the fact that God is beyond our normal experiences, he is other, and so experiences of God often take us out of our comfort zones, be that in worship, service or in our learning.

We don't want these painful and sometimes humiliating experiences of seeing our own inadequacies or misunderstandings. Is it any wonder we try and avoid God.

What we too easily forget is

- that Isaiah, who felt his lips were impure, was purified by a coal from the altar of God,
- that Paul, overwhelmed by the perversity of his soul was filled with God's grace to become an apostle,

- that Peter, the unlucky fisherman, was reassured, comforted, and directed towards his real work of "catching people".

6

At the very point where Isaiah, Paul and Peter felt most discouraged, so each found acceptance. The shame which prompted them to reject God was transformed into a confidence to obey him.

Isaiah replied "here I am...send me".

Paul declared "I have worked harder than any of the others".

Peter "Left everything and followed Jesus".

God encounters human beings not to terrify or condemn, but rather to transform and to call.

Those called by congregations to positions of leadership can often have this same sense of unworthiness. I certainly experienced it myself when I felt called by God to be a priest. Where was I going to get what was required for such an intense and

demanding task. What I discovered was that it wasn't about me at all.

7

It's more to do with God and what God supplies. It's about me being open to God's leading, God's directing, God's generosity, and learning how to receive the greatest gift we can be offered.

God still calls people to various ministries in the church. God still calls people to be priests and deacons. Maybe someone here has already felt God's call, and it seems too much to ask. It may be we feel we haven't the resources to cope. But it's important to remember that God does not call the finished product. God calls people who will be open to whatever God will ask of them. God calls people who are willing to let God change them. God calls people who can receive what God has to offer. So it's not just what an individual has to offer, but how open a person is to the calling of God. God will supply what is needed.

8

But even though people are called by God to positions of leadership, we are also invited to remember we are all called by God. We are all given that opportunity to accept the infinite and unconditional love that is offered. It is like the Holy Sacrament we are about to receive, It is a love which will transform and change us, but in a way that gives us more than we ever imagined. If we are willing to open our hearts, and receive, God is here, his Spirit is with us.