

OT V [C] Is 6:1-2a, 3-8; I Cor 15:1-11; Lk 5:1-11

February 10, Sunday 7.30 AM Mass, Father Abraham

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?" 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 God's call and people's response. The Scripture readings present three of the greatest witnesses in the Bible—Isaiah, Paul and Peter—expressing their own worthlessness. A seraph cleanses Isaiah lips with a burning coal and Jesus has a cleansing word for Peter. When Isaiah had his vision and Peter had his epiphany, each experienced deep humility, fear, respect and reverence. Today's readings teach us that Christian spirituality is discipleship, which means a positive response to God's call. Discipleship 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. 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 to Him. The Second Vatican Council teaches that we are all called to ministry by virtue of our Baptism into Jesus Christ.

The Sea of Galilee is thirteen miles long and seven and a half miles wide. In Jesus' time, there were ten prosperous towns situated around the lake. Most of the people residing in them made their living from the waters in front of them. Thus, one gets the idea of how rich the lake was in fish. The Sea of Galilee was the site of many manifestations of Jesus' Divine power. In the incident in today's Gospel, Jesus preached from Peter's boat to a large crowd jammed together at the edge of the water. When the teaching had ended, Jesus told Peter to pull out into deeper water for a catch of fish. In matters of fishing, Peter was an expert, while Jesus was only a carpenter. Hence Peter, perhaps not wanting Jesus to look foolish, explained, "Master, we have worked hard all night long, caught nothing." Peter might have added that fish come to the surface in the Sea of Galilee only at night, or that the presence and noise of people would frighten the remaining fish away. Instead he said, "Nevertheless, if you wish, I will lower the nets."

So, Peter obeyed. This time, however, instead of pulling up an empty net, Peter and Andrew found the net was filled to bursting point, and they had to ask the help of their partners, Zebedee's sons, James and John, to help them bring in the catch. Simon Peter understood the message very quickly. Confronted by the size of the catch, he recognized the presence of God before him and became convinced of his own pride and self-centeredness, that is, of his sinfulness. We find the same response in all three readings today. Isaiah, seeing the glory of God in his vision, says, "What a wretched state I am in! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips... and my eyes have looked at the King, the Lord of hosts." Paul, not particularly known for his modesty, says, "I am the least of the apostles... I hardly deserve the name apostle." Peter begs Jesus to go away. His simple confession — "Leave me Lord. I am a sinful man." — marks a turning point in his life and becomes the model for our response to Jesus.

The miraculous catch of fish is a miracle of abundance and resembles other "abundance" miracles such as the sending of manna to Israel in the wilderness (Ex 16), the widow's never-empty meal jar and oil jug (1 Kgs 17:8-16), the necessary supply of oil for the lamps for the rededication ceremony of the Temple (2 Kgs 4:1-7), and Elisha's feeding of a hundred men with twenty loaves of bread (2 Kgs 4:42-44). Later in this same Gospel, we will see Jesus feeding five thousand people with five loaves of bread and two fish (9:12-17). The Gospel of John reports another abundance miracle, the wine Jesus supplied at the wedding in Cana (John 2:1-11). All these "abundance" miracles have two common characteristics: (1) they meet human needs and (2) they demonstrate God's power. The spiritual outcome of this particular miracle was that the disciples, "left everything and followed him."

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. The recognition of our inadequacy and sin is necessary for us, if we are to be willing and able to receive transformation through God's grace. Isaiah, Paul, and Peter teach us that even the greatest person among us stands in need of conversion. God, Who calls us and commissions us for His service, wants us to realize His presence everywhere and in everyone and he will provide in all our needs. We are with a mission on this earth. We all are missionaries. The sufferings and joys in the life are only reminders of it. Let us leave our boats and fish (the comfort zone) so that the New Evangelization may happen through us.