

## **Preaching for the Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

February 7, 2010

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### **Readings:**

Isaiah 6:1-2A, 3-8

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Luke 5:1-11

Have you ever had a life-changing experience? Something happens to you and you know that you will never be the same. It could be a person you meet, an event, a realization that leaves you forever different. And when it is God you encounter, then the effect is all the more powerful! This is what happens to both Isaiah and Peter in this Sunday's readings.

Isaiah recounts that he had a vision of God that left him with a profound sense of unworthiness. But God does not leave him with that feeling. Rather he is freed of his fear, so much so that when he hears the Lord ask, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?" he responds "Here I am; send me!" No hesitation, no doubt—he is impelled to respond.

Peter's experience is very similar. He has been out fishing and is cleaning his nets when this man Jesus climbs into his boat to preach to the crowds. He tells Peter to put out into deep water and lower his nets for a catch, even though the fishermen have been out all night and caught nothing. Peter protests slightly but does what he is bidden and then has such a huge catch that it filled two boats to overflowing! He reacts to this astonishing phenomenon by falling to his knees and asking Jesus to leave him "for I am a sinful man." Jesus calms his fear and invites him to join him in his mission. Not only Peter but his companions as well leave everything and follow him! Just like that!

There is a definite pattern of how God acts in our lives that you also may have experienced in more or less dramatic ways.

- There is an experience of the divine or of God's power that is so clear that it is unmistakable.
- The natural reaction is to say, I am not worthy or leave me Lord!
- God persists, ridding me of my fear or of the impediment, responding to whatever obstacles I may place in the way of accepting this gracious sign of God's incredible individual love for me. (My unworthiness, my inability are but opportunities for God to act in me, through me.)
- God invites me to "more," to a deeper relationship, greater trust, love; to a special mission, a chance to change something in my life, etc.
- I come to accept that it is God's grace in me that can do this thing, not my natural ability, and I respond, I say Yes.
- The power of the experience carries me, propels me forward.
- My life is changed!

When thinking about my only life this morning a powerful experience of God that I had was when I entered the convent. It followed the pattern; however, what we don't hear in the Scripture

readings this week is all that *follows* the Yes—moments of doubt, second-guessing, possible regrets when I feel the cost of the choice, wishing I hadn't been so responsive to God! So why did I stay in the convent, why does anyone remain faithful to any commitment or better yet, *how* does one do this?

St. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians may help us answer this question. He humbly admits, "I am the least of the apostles...but by the *grace* of God I am what I am and his *grace* to me has not been ineffective." He tells us the key is to remember the Gospel "which you indeed received and in which you also stand. Through it you are also being saved, if you hold fast to the word." But what does it mean to "Hold fast to the word." Let the good news of God's love for you be the foundation on which you stand. Believe that this love can carry you through any trial, any invitation that may come in life! Then choose to trust that God will be with you every step along the way.

What is important is to be attentive and responsive to the invitation to "Put out into deep water" and not let our fears overwhelm us. I am sure that after saying Yes to God both Isaiah and Peter had their bad days of second-guessing or wishing they had been less impetuous! However, both remained faithful to their calls, perhaps in spite of themselves, and more because *God* was faithful to them. Once we say Yes to God, God continually provides us with what we need to fulfill the Yes. Count on it! It has been true in my life—God is the one who has made my fidelity possible, forgiving me when I fail, calling me to a daily Yes even if imperfectly lived.

As I thought about this at mass this morning a flood of memories and tears came to mind and heart because of how good God has been to me every day of my Yes, and how daily effort can turn into a lifetime commitment. Bad times are inevitable and we are all vulnerable to temptation to find an easier way or try shortcuts we later regret, but where would my life be without the Yes? How else would I experience the power of God's grace acting in and through me or the power of his saving love, forgiving me and lifting me up when I fall? Of course I am unworthy, a sinner, but God seems to like people who are—God keeps choosing us! Perhaps it's our knowing we are and being willing to respond anyway that God finds so alluring about us.

How is God calling you, inviting you to a greater Yes in your life? Put out into deep water and cast your nets. God will be with you!